

10 Ways to Protect your Computers from Hurricane Damage

By Tim Shoemaker
Synectics, Inc.

Every year here in Florida we have to deal with the potential of Hurricanes. Usually we are lucky and they are no more than an inconvenience. But to count on never having your business disrupted or devastated by losing your hardware and data to the ravages of a hurricane is just being naïve. Hurricanes and the storms that follow can severely damage your system in several ways. Water, wind, lightning, fire and power surges can all wreak havoc with your system. Here are some tips to protect your computing assets when storm season is imminent.

1. Develop a disaster plan and implement it.

First, start right now to devise and implement your Disaster Avoidance and Recovery plan. You can get good advice on this topic by searching the web if you want to roll your own plan. Or you can hire experienced consultants (like Synectics) to audit your business computing system and write your plan for you. Either way, having a plan is much better than not having one. But only if you put it into practice and maintain it.

2. Get to know your computer consultant.

Do some research and select a reputable computer consultant and have them review your system. They will document how your system is currently configured and recommend how to keep it safe. Do this before the storm season, so that they understand your system during normal operations. Remember that any business will support their valued existing clients before helping someone that just called up with a crisis. Invest in getting to know your IT support partner and forming a relationship with them.

3. Back up your data.

If you do nothing else to protect your system from disaster, get in the habit of making a backup of your data and testing it periodically. This one act could save your business. Do it the right way and make a backup every week and take a copy offsite. That way it won't be destroyed by fire, flood, wind or theft. Most people don't realize that the most expensive and critical component of their computer system is NOT the hardware or the software. It's your *data*. You can easily replace equipment. But if you lose your data, your business could grind to a halt. **Data is often worth more than 10 to 50 times the cost of the equipment.**

4. Consider a removable drive bay.

Some of our clients have their critical workstation data on removable hard drives. That way they can just grab the drive and take it with them. There are positive and negative points to a removable drive, learn about them and decide if they are right for you.

5. Take them to a safe place.

If you are located in a place that has a high risk, such as beachside, consider removing your critical workstations and server and moving them to a more secure building prior to evacuating. You might even be able to set up a temporary office long before you would be able to get back into your beachside building.

6. Wrap them up.

If you can't take your systems with you, unplug them and wrap them up securely in heavy plastic. Put them up off the floor at least two feet on a sturdy desk. That will help keep them from getting flooded. Put them in plastic tote boxes if you can, it will protect them further. This also applies to your other gear such as keyboards, mice, printers, UPS power supplies, routers, switches, and anything else that it takes to make your system function. Plan what you are going to do and secure the materials while they are easily available.

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7. Form an alliance with another business.

If you have a friend or associate in a non-competing business that is located in a more secure location, form an alliance with them to support your business if your facility should become damaged. Of course, you will want a contract outlining how this would work and expect to pay them for this service. You may be able to work out a reciprocal agreement with them or barter some services for the right to collocate if your business office is in ruins.

8. Invest in a generator.

Having your own source of power will put you back online even if FPL can't get you connected to the grid. Just be sure to get a unit that has the capacity to run your critical systems and has clean power. Have the generator installed by an electrician, so it is safe and reliable. Test the unit periodically and make sure that you keep a supply of fuel and spare parts. You won't be getting those things for a while after a major weather event.

9. Secure your business from theft and looting.

I heard from an associate that works in the New Orleans area about a business that did all the right things to protect their computers from the ravages of the storm, only to have all their hardware and software stolen afterwards. They were in the process of setting up the system again and left the facility, only to come back and find that everything was gone. Take steps to secure your facility and don't assume that the police will be able to protect your property. That is not their first priority right after a hurricane.

10. Think and act now, so that you don't have to worry later.

All these tips are of little value if you don't act on them. Those businesses that survive a severe weather event such as a hurricane will be those that have planned ahead, developed a disaster avoidance and recovery plan, taken action on the plan and continued to review and fine tune their plan. No binder of forms will protect you from the disaster of severe weather unless you are proactive about putting the plan into operation. Designate the individuals in your organization that will be responsible for the various parts of the plan and make sure that they understand their responsibilities. When the wind and rain start blowing, it's too late to pull out the manual and try to figure it out.

A message from Tim Shoemaker, President of Synectics, Inc.

I hope these tips have given you some food for thought on developing your disaster avoidance plan. To motivate you even further, I have decided to make our Disaster Plan audit and report available to our friends at a reduced cost. We typically charge a minimum of \$500 to audit your small business, provide a report on the risks to you from hurricanes and storms, and get you started with your Disaster Avoidance Plan. For a limited time, we will perform the audit and develop the plan for a flat fee of only \$250. Just fill out the Fax Back form on the other side of this page and write in that you are interested in the Disaster Avoidance Plan deal. Fax it back to us and we can get started. This is a great deal and now is a great time to get started.