



Brad  
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# Dealing With Mother Nature

## How to Fine-Tune Your Weather Preparedness Skills Before Disaster Strikes

**P**rior to moving to Chicago, I lived in Kansas for several years, where we didn't experience many hurricanes but we did have our fair share of weather events — tornadoes, dust storms, wild storms thundering across the prairie. I remember emergency tornado drill exercises, which can be exciting, unless of course your home or your neighbor's home is damaged.

When our company sends travel directors out on the road or to an event, the unpredictable weather holds no excitement or anticipation, only cause for extra precaution or preparation. Because the weather events and hurricanes we've experienced around the country to date have been so numerous, meeting planners are fine-tuning their disaster preparedness skills (or should be if they've been lucky enough to escape a weather-related mishap so far).

As travel and meeting professionals, we always have to set up a back-up plan in case an event is canceled or impacted due to the weather.

Although most of this type of planning involves common sense, it is worth the extra investment of time before a conference kicks off, to ensure that you and your organization are ready, should a weather delay or disaster strike.

### Do Your Homework

Weather patterns are easy to track online. Indeed, most of us do check before planning an event in a location during questionable weather such as hurricane season or winter in the snowbelt. A fairly

easy and automatic reminder is to set up a weather alert for your destination on your PC or smart phone and monitor any emerging systems.

Avoiding planning events in specific cities and regions during times of year that can be especially prone to storms, and keep in mind the hurricane season and others when selecting locations for events. If your event is already set in a location where severe weather is predicted, it's important to take precautions before it strikes.

### Download in Advance

Both literally and electronically, develop a spreadsheet of critical information so it is available at your fingertips. Remember that often with a power outage, the online access will likely be unavailable, and texting via smart phones may be the only way to reach your attendees, employees or emergency personnel.

Create a workbook or online database (on smart phone) of key contacts, including cell phone numbers. Prior to the event or conference, remember to include a weather disaster plan review with key personnel who are staffing the event, so they are aware of procedures and know where to find the information.

### Plan for the Worst

While this is a basic tenet of event management, it bears repeating: Develop a crisis plan should your attendees need to be evacuated quickly (such as in the event of a tornado). Develop a chain of response in assisting them in rebooking flights back

home. And review, review, review — if your staff has heard the disaster plan frequently, there won't be as much confusion when and if it needs to be activated.

Decide in advance a plan for handling power loss, specifically regarding how to provide food and water in an emergency. Investigate options when planning an event, before the crisis occurs. Meet with the venue's industrial engineers to review the quickest evacuation route from each location and also a holding room, should that be necessary.

### **Keep Good Company**

Know how many attendees you have on-

ents and organizations in the past, I know how easy it is to include too much information, making the plan virtually unusable. While it is a healthy exercise to consider all possible disaster scenarios and appropriate responses from your organization, remember the entire manual doesn't need to travel to each event. Today's executive who is traveling to an event has access to online resources and texting capability.

Communication with attendees should be simple and straightforward. Try to combine messages to attendees whenever possible, to avoid inundating them. However, bear in mind the urgen-

## *The golden rule of crisis management is to stay calm and focused, and activate the advance plan while remaining flexible.*

site at a program and where they are staying (room numbers/specific hotels). Keep accurate, updated information such as cell phone numbers at the ready to call or text in case of last-minute plans or evacuations.

Establish a chain of command onsite: If the planner isn't available to make decisions, who is in charge? Consider appointing an executive attending the conference or a lead travel director onsite to serve in this role.

### **Keep It Simple**

Having developed crisis plans for cli-

cy of releasing critical information in a timely manner.

The golden rule of crisis management is to stay calm and focused, and activate the advance plan while remaining flexible.

Unfortunately, the weather is out of our control, and as we've all experienced, a weather-related event can be very costly and cause great inconvenience. Being prepared and taking the time to review with personnel (both onsite and back at the home office) beforehand will go a long way when dealing with the unpredictability and force of Mother Nature. **C&IT**

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