

Recover from a Natural Disaster

John Mathews: I want to walk you through the likely process needed after a natural disaster and show you the timeline. The first step after your immediate response is to evaluate the condition and damage to your facility and playgrounds, and if you have any options, to relocate your program if necessary. Determine what your current funding level is, reaching out to your regional Office of Head Start, and start submitting your insurance claims.

In the second step, you should inspect for mold and contamination, take a look at your utility infrastructure, and hire an architect to start to develop plans and estimates for any rebuilding or repairing that you have to do to your facility. In the third step ... By the way, steps one and two will take you between one and two years if your facility is significantly damaged.

The third step involves creating a recovery plan; getting your Policy Council, your governing body, your Tribal Council to approve your recovery plan; then preparing detailed plans and cost estimates and getting your 1303 application into the Office of Head Start. The Office of Head Start could take between six and nine months to approve your notice of award based on the completeness of your application.

Step four is recovering and rebuilding your center. This is where you enter into final contracts with your designers, with your contractors. You purchase equipment. You go through your design and construction process. This could take anywhere from one to two years, again if you're just repairing and renovating a facility or if you're rebuilding a facility or building a brand new facility.

The fifth and final step includes communicating your reopening plan, obtaining building inspector approval, and submitting your required reports to Head Start. Overall, this process can take three to five years, and it puts the emphasis on the need for an interim facility in your community to shorten the timeframe to relocate your program after it's been destroyed by a natural disaster.

Some recommended foundational goals from us. The first one is to understand what a comprehensive plan is, to form a disaster management team that assesses the risks to your facility, and evaluate mitigation measures that you can make to your facility to make it more resilient. But the first step is forming that disaster management team from your community, from consultants, from your staff.

Having your director steer the planning response recovery process ... Make your director the responsible incident supervisor or a lead staff member. The incident supervisor should be delegated with authority and given the support needed to declare a disaster and to ensure the center staff acts quickly and effectively during the incident, then assigning key tasks and duties to your staff. These key positions affect how well you manage during an incident, how well you can protect the facility occupants, and how well you can communicate the status of your center and the need for aid to local, state, and federal officials.

Engaging your community. Building collaborative relationships with a diverse range of individuals, including your staff, your families, volunteers, local and regional emergency management professionals, responders, consultants, your Regional Office of Head Start, building a community, a collaborative community to help you develop your plan.

Effective response and recovery. This is how well you've prepared your facilities to survive a natural disaster and how efficiently you can restore the program and its services and rebuilding with clarity and confidence. Hazard-resilient construction is usually not more costly than traditional construction methods. Experience in disaster-prone areas has shown us that a payback period for resilient construction could be between two and three years.

There is a professor, Iris Tien, at Georgia tech who writes that, "We need to transform our thinking from reacting to events to becoming anticipatory and forward-looking." We don't want to build just to need to rebuild again when the next hurricane occurs. In creating resilient facilities, we anticipate what our facility is going to need to withstand and build to those levels.

Well, we're coming to the end of this presentation. I thank you for your patience and interest. Your key takeaways should be today: Have your staff familiarize themselves with our new facility guide for "Natural Disasters for Head Start Facilities" and other national center disaster preparedness guides that are available on ECLKC. In the short term, prepare your facilities to meet the imminent seasonal threats in front of you. Download the checklist available in the guide and quickly review whether your facility is up to the job of surviving a natural disaster.

There are many things you can do now to prepare your facility and your program before disaster strikes. In the long term, form the disaster management team. Charge it with assessing the risks to your facility, identify the necessary steps to ensure its resiliency, and advise you on management of disaster response and recovery operations.

The third key takeaway is that your disaster management team can evaluate the building's design and conduct an onsite assessment of its ability to survive a disaster and remain habitable. Whether you evacuate or remain in the building during a natural disaster, you want it to remain structurally intact with its systems functioning and contents, especially staff and children, safe.

The plan incorporates actions, operational systems, resources targeted by the facility disaster management team to make your facility more resilient. This is the part, developing your plan, it's where you gather up all the checklist, the evaluations, the studies, the analysis guided by the priorities you've established, and assemble them into a coherent facility management plan for natural disasters.