

Nowadays, the trendy term for disaster planning is a *business continuity plan* (BCP). I suppose the term *disaster planning* sounded too negative, like we were planning for disasters to happen. The new term refocuses attention on the more positive aspect of preparing a plan that will enable a business to carry on with as little interruption as possible in the event of a disaster.

For more in-depth information about this topic, please refer to *IT Disaster Recovery Planning For Dummies*, by Peter Gregory (Wiley).

Assessing Different Types of Disasters

Disasters come in many shapes and sizes. Some types of disasters are more likely than others. For example, your building is more likely to be struck by lightning than to be hit by a comet. In some cases, the likelihood of a particular type of disaster depends on where you're located. For example, crippling snowstorms are more likely in New York than in Florida.

In addition, the impact of each type of disaster varies from company to company. What may be a disaster for one company may only be a mere inconvenience for another. For example, a law firm may tolerate a disruption in telephone service for a day or two — loss of communication via phone would be a major inconvenience but not a disaster. To a telemarketing firm, however, a day or two with the phones down is a more severe problem because the company's revenue depends on the phones.

One of the first steps in developing a business continuity plan is to assess the risk of the various types of disasters that may affect your organization. Weigh the likelihood of a disaster happening with the severity of the impact that the disaster would have. For example, a meteor crashing into your building would probably be pretty severe, but the odds of that happening are miniscule. On the other hand, the odds of your building being destroyed by fire are much higher, and the consequences of a devastating fire would be about the same as those from a meteor impact.

The following sections describe the most common types of risks that most companies face. Notice throughout this discussion that although many of these risks are related to computers and network technology, some are not. The scope of business continuity planning is much larger than just computer technology.