



How A Wildfire Response Plan Protects Your Business from Devastating Loss

Is your business prepared to withstand a cataclysm
like a raging wildfire?





Twenty-five percent of businesses never recover after a major disaster.¹ Is your business prepared to withstand a cataclysm like a raging wildfire?

Historically wildfires were most common in the wilderness, but in recent years they have ravaged urban areas, too. 2020 was the largest wildfire season recorded in California's history with nearly 10,000 fires burning more than 4 million acres.²

Even though wildfires break out most often in the western U.S., they pose threats to all 50 states and countries all over the world — as well as to the survival of businesses everywhere.

Business continuity requires action before, during and after a wildfire

A plan to minimize wildfire damage may seem like a stretch when discussing your business continuity strategy. But the quality of your plan and its execution can mean the difference between a business that successfully weathers a wildfire emergency or fails to regain its footing in the aftermath.

The main emergency response activities in each stage are:

- **Before:** Monitoring for wildfire critical events, assessing risk, and building and testing response plans
- **During:** Executing the plan and documenting outcomes
- **After:** Recovering from the disruption and updating plans based on lessons learned

In addition to protecting your business and ensuring it reopens, a wildfire response plan can deliver benefits such as:

- Building customer confidence
- Protecting your business's reputation
- Shoring up your supply chain
- Mitigating financial risk⁴

In the following sections, we take a closer look at each stage's activities, best practices and stakeholders.

Before a wildfire: assess risks and develop a plan

Your pre-disaster activities center on identifying risks and potential impacts, creating response plans and testing those plans. For expert recommendations, guidelines and best practices, start with the resources section at the end of this article.

Next, read through for your community, county and state's wildfire plans, public documents that are usually accessible online. Don't worry about building your response plans from scratch. These sources provide the benefit of their experience in assessing risks and developing and testing plans.

The main emergency response activities in each stage are:

- **Proactive:** Monitor data sources across the globe to pinpoint critical events that impact you.
- **Comprehensive:** Consider all the scenarios in which a wildfire may disrupt your business.
- **Realistic:** Develop plans that aren't so complex that your team struggles to execute them.
- **Efficient:** Streamline processes so you can respond quickly.
- **Adaptable:** Be able to pivot in real time to respond to inevitable, unforeseen problems.

Getting ahead of the disaster

To prepare for and protect against potential risks, it's vital to have eyes on every situation that can impact your people, places and property. Leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to continuously scour global data sources, without human intervention, to filter out irrelevant incidents and provide validated intelligence on the full spectrum of critical events.

This will arm your team with the right information about critical events so they can make proactive, informed decisions and quickly execute on your response plan.

People, property and processes in the pre-disaster stage

When developing response plans, begin with the most important goal of your mission: protecting lives. Next, prioritize each response based on the probability of its occurrence and the severity of its impact to property and business operations.

No organization has unlimited resources for emergency programs. Budget your costs wisely and expect that wildfire insurance may be expensive, depending on your risk profile. Additionally, your risk assessment will help you decide how much time and how many people are needed to conduct research and develop and test your plans.



Critical response communications

How well you communicate with your workforce and other stakeholders is crucial to your plan's success. When a wildfire threatens your business, critical communications will include:

- Notifying your entire workforce about the wildfire
- Providing employees with evacuation or shelter-in-place instructions
- Verifying that your workforce carried out your emergency instructions
- Checking on the health of your employees

When planning your wildfire response, make a list of all critical communications you can refer to quickly during the emergency.

Categorize each communication as incoming or outgoing and external or internal, as seen below.

	External	Internal
Incoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wildfire alerts• Media reports• Government instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Situation reports• Employee polling• Workforce questions• Surveillance notifications
Outgoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social media posts• Press releases• Supplier and customer updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employee notifications• Executive team updates

Even the most well-designed plan won't keep your business safe if you're unaware of a rapidly spreading wildfire. Proactively monitor for wildfire events using AI-enabled risk intelligence, register for notifications from federal and state agencies and integrate them into your critical communications system. Additionally, build message templates, load them into your critical communications system and use the system to send targeted emergency messages to various groups across your business.

Prioritizing the safety of your people

In addition to alerting employees and providing safety instructions, use your critical communications to provide them with valuable information on road closures, detours and alternate travel routes. Another best practice that can reduce anxiety is to update employees about events in their home communities, such as school closures, transportation shutdowns and energy outages.

If you can't evacuate safely, turn to your plan for sheltering in place. Ideally you can direct employees to an interior location, sealed off from outside atmosphere and as far away as possible from exterior walls. Nearby ponds, lakes and swimming pools may serve as temporary safe havens when it's not feasible to leave your campus.

Every business has plans for responding to fires. Make a checklist to manage:

- Aiding people with asthma or other serious underlying health conditions
- Responding when smoke infiltrates your buildings
- Operating HVAC safely if outdoor smoke surrounds your buildings
- Distributing protective gear, such as face masks and respirators

Preparing to protect property

Start by inspecting your property by identifying and removing combustible materials close to your buildings, like dry brush, branches or other vegetation. Create a schedule to regularly check the roofs and the campus for flammable debris.

For assets on your campus grounds, like vehicles, heavy equipment and fuel sources, either protect them in place or move them to a remote location. If you decide to keep your assets on campus, consider covering them in non-combustible

shielding material. Add your property and assets to an AI-powered risk intelligence product that continuously monitors for threats and automatically flags critical events impacting them upon detection.

Decades removed from elementary school, fire drills still matter. Train your entire workforce to use fire extinguishers, and show your emergency response team how, in a pinch, it can use nearby water sources like ponds, rivers and pools to help control fires.

Finally, devise a plan for properly securing your buildings in case of an evacuation.

Reviewing your processes

Building a wildfire emergency response plan is an excellent opportunity to reexamine your supply chain and identify any gaps or dependencies. Account for disruptions caused by wildfires such as:

- Transportation issues
- Overwhelmed repair and maintenance contractors
- Workforce reductions
- Power outages
- Energy shortages

To please your customers and keep your reputation intact, look to work with diverse suppliers, partner with neighboring businesses and strike agreements with competitors to fulfill orders. As a stakeholder in the supply chain, prepare for the worst-case scenario with backup generators and alternate power sources.

Testing your plans

Testing your plan is just as important as developing it. Develop checklist tests, tabletop exercises and evacuation exercises and run regular limited and

full-simulation tests of your response plans. Ask employees to work from home once per month to test the operations and resiliency of your network, IT applications and workflows.

Educate your employees about your testing processes, so they understand their roles in responding to the emergency and can adjust quickly to working from home.

When you test your plans and engage your employees, you will reveal process gaps, identify areas for improvement and increase the probability that your well-crafted plans will deliver results during an emergency.





During a wildfire: execute plans and engage your workforce

Once you're alerted to a wildfire threat, it's time to put your plans into action. Quickly review your plans, activate your team and alert your workforce to the danger via your critical communications system, the first test of your emergency communications.

Stay on top of the latest developments by leveraging AI-enabled risk intelligence to automatically monitor media reports and government announcements. By remaining hyper-vigilant, you can pivot quickly to respond to sudden changes such as strengthening winds or dramatic temperature changes.

Even though it may not seem like a priority while an emergency unfolds, analyze and document the strengths and weaknesses of your plan by analyzing the outcome of each response activity you complete. Should the wildfire continue to burn for weeks or even months, adapt your plans to make working remotely a smooth transition for

your workforce. Identify and close any gaps in your plan when the emergency is over.

People Needs

During a wildfire, employees at every level of your business may struggle if they are unfamiliar with working from home. Keep remote employees engaged and show how much you appreciate their role in your business by communicating with them regularly.

If smoke lingers in the area, employees with or without respiratory conditions may have trouble breathing. When it's safe to reopen your buildings, encourage your workforce to bring important personal documents and items to the office, a benefit workers will appreciate if evacuation orders prevent them from returning to their homes.

Your employees will also be grateful if you update them on road closures, evacuation orders and other events in the community, as well as changes large and small to the business.

Business Needs

During the emergency, you'll have your hands full. But when it's safe to do so:

- Identify the types of critical events you want to monitor and how close they must be to your assets to receive a notification
- Test your site's fire protection equipment
- Walk through your property and identify any new combustible material
- Secure assets like vehicles on your grounds or move them to a remote location
- Discuss impacts to the business with your supply chain partners
- Monitor shipping and transportation issues
- Ensure all data is backed up securely
- Review response activities and unresolved issues



Be flexible and creative when responding to a major disaster. Some businesses have protected their vehicles during an emergency by letting employees take them home.

After the wildfire: recover, assess and update your plans

After the wildfire has cleared, authorities may need permission that it is safe to reenter your location. When building access is too risky, response teams often use drones to gather visual information. The response team likely will require special clothing or protective gear before being allowed to reenter a damaged building.

Once authorities have determined the property is safe to access, inspect every building and your campus's infrastructure and IT systems. Use camera applications to test for infrared hotspots.

Document all damage to include in your insurance claims. You'll likely have to hire a service restoration company to remediate smoke or fire damage. Even after the fire clears, mudflow may pose a major threat until area vegetation regrows, so make sure to discuss this immediately with your licensed insurance agent.

Finally, review your wildfire contingency plan. Gather feedback from your employees and team members.

Revisit what you had planned for and what actually happened. What lessons did you learn? How effective was your emergency communication plan? Use the answers to these questions to update your wildfire plans and be well-prepared for future disasters.



Ongoing disaster planning protects your business for the long term

Western U.S. states and rural areas often bear the brunt of wildfires. But every state is at some risk of facing a wildfire emergency, which have in recent years devastated urban areas with a high density of businesses.

At a minimum, assess your business's risk for surviving the destruction of a wildfire. Then craft response plans with attention to detail in proportion to the severity of your risk.

Safeguarding your people is always your highest priority. After that, focus on the most critical impacts to your business, carefully budgeting your time, costs and other resources for your wildfire response. During and after a wildfire, monitor the unfolding event with various data sources using AI, communicate continuously with your workforce, document lessons learned and update your plans and improve performance.

A well-developed response plan is too critical to your business's survival to sit idly on a corporate server. Educate your employees about your plans and engage them as partners in your response to mitigate the damage to your business caused by a wildfire.

Emergency communications are always indispensable to your disaster response. When you partner with OnSolve, you'll work with a company that has decades of experience in managing and delivering mass alerts and information to businesses of every size.

To learn how we can protect your people, property and business with our battle-tested technology, [contact OnSolve](#) today.

Resources

Ready.gov wildfire preparation —
<https://www.ready.gov/wildfires>

National Fire Protection Association —
Reducing Wildfire Risks — [https://www.nfpa.org/
Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/
Firewise-USA/Firewise-USA-Resources](https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA/Firewise-USA-Resources)

Nevada Wildfire Preparations — Living with Fire —
<https://www.livingwithfire.com/>

California Department of Forestry and Fire
Protection — <https://www.fire.ca.gov/>

Small Business Administration Wildfire
Preparedness — [https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/
files/WildfirePreparednessSBA.pdf](https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/WildfirePreparednessSBA.pdf)

Washington Small Business Development Center —
Business Resiliency Tool Kit — [https://wsbdc.org/
protect-your-business/business-resiliency/](https://wsbdc.org/protect-your-business/business-resiliency/)

Federal Emergency Management Agency —
Wildfire Hazard Mitigation for Public Facilities —
[https://www.fema.gov/media-library-
data/20130726-1715-25045-2934/fema_p_754.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1715-25045-2934/fema_p_754.pdf)

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california-exceeds-4-million-acres-burned-wildfires-2020-n1242078](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/california-exceeds-4-million-acres-burned-wildfires-2020-n1242078)
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business-continuity-plan/#what-is-a-business-continuity-plan](https://www.bigcommerce.com/blog/business-continuity-plan/#what-is-a-business-continuity-plan)



**Accelerate and strengthen
your wildfire response with
the OnSolve Platform for
Critical Event Management**

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About OnSolve

OnSolve delivers critical event management solutions designed to help enterprises, organizations and agencies of all sizes create the most successful outcomes when critical events occur. The OnSolve Platform for Critical Event Management combines leading risk intelligence, critical communications and incident management into one SaaS-based global portfolio. Our AI-powered platform is purpose-built to deliver fast, relevant and actionable intelligence, enable vital communications and allow response teams to react calmly and confidently.

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