WORLDWIDE EXPRESS®

Be Prepared With a Disaster Recovery Plan for Shipping

Disruptions from disasters and emergencies put businesses through the ultimate test. It's those with a plan who push forward while others scramble.

A disaster recovery plan aims to keep critical branches of the business moving, minimize downtime and recuperate losses. Shipping is always important, but continuing to bring revenue and materials into the business is critical to overcoming disruptive circumstances.

In this guide, we cover key aspects of a shipping recovery plan — helping you build resiliency into your shipping operations.

▶▶▶ Make a Plan

Everyone at this point should be prepared for a pandemic. But it's impossible to anticipate every scenario. **When an emergency hits the business, the last thing you want is panic.** To keep everything moving in a positive direction and reduce your losses, you should build a plan that covers:

- » Safety
- » Power outages
- » System downtime
- » Worker shortages
- » Carrier availability
- » Road closures and traffic
- » Office closures

To avoid confusion or doubt, document your shipping plan, detailing protocols for internal and external teams, processes and systems.

Processes

Emergencies have a way of finding flaws in our processes. Strive for a plan that includes critical details and has the flexibility to account for the unpredictability that comes with many emergencies. Establish workflows to move (or postpone) shipments whether you're working with a full team, skeleton crew or remotely. Get into good habits now, such as checking the weather for shipment destinations, to ensure you're ready to adjust by rerouting shipments or postponing deliveries.

Document picking, packing and shipping instructions — especially if you have fragile, oversize, temperature-sensitive or other products requiring special handling. Include detailed carrier instructions in case pickups or deliveries require special considerations. This goes double for time-sensitive and expedited shipments.

People

Document key team members who can keep shipments moving. Establish backups and cross-train team members to cover your bases. Who will pick and pack orders? How many people do you need to load shipments? Who will manage the forklift? Can someone fill the bill of lading (BOL) and print packing slips if your shipping manager is unavailable? Who's the go-to contact in the IT department if you have issues with data or system access? Consider these variables beforehand so your team can execute when things get rough.

▶▶▶ Make a Plan

Systems

Waiting for a disaster to test system resilience is a disaster waiting to happen. Protect customer records and private information at all costs — losing customer data can lead to a lost contract or even a lawsuit. Know where and how to access shipping records remotely. Cell phones are practically as powerful as laptops these days, making out-of-pocket accessibility a real possibility. We suggest using a shipping platform such as a transportation management system (TMS) regardless of your business size or shipping operations to protect shipments and customer records. (We'll cover this more later in the technology section.) If you work with manual systems such as spreadsheets, make sure they're backed up and available offsite.

Communications

This is perhaps the most important part of your plan. When things move fast, staying in touch as the situation unfolds is critical. Communication requires coordination with internal and external teams, including IT, warehouse operations, customers, carriers and your shipping team. Work closely with customers and transportation partners to learn how they prefer to receive communications in emergencies. Consider where you keep contact information and make sure it's accessible to the office and remote teams. Internally, establish key stakeholders and make sure everyone has access to your communication tools (be it email, an internal messaging system, phone, SMS, etc.).

Documentation is key

Many companies won't forge new partnerships without seeing a business continuity or disaster recovery plan first. Give your internal and external partners the peace of mind knowing you're on top of things by making yours available to all. **And don't forget to check for these plans when choosing your carriers and suppliers.**
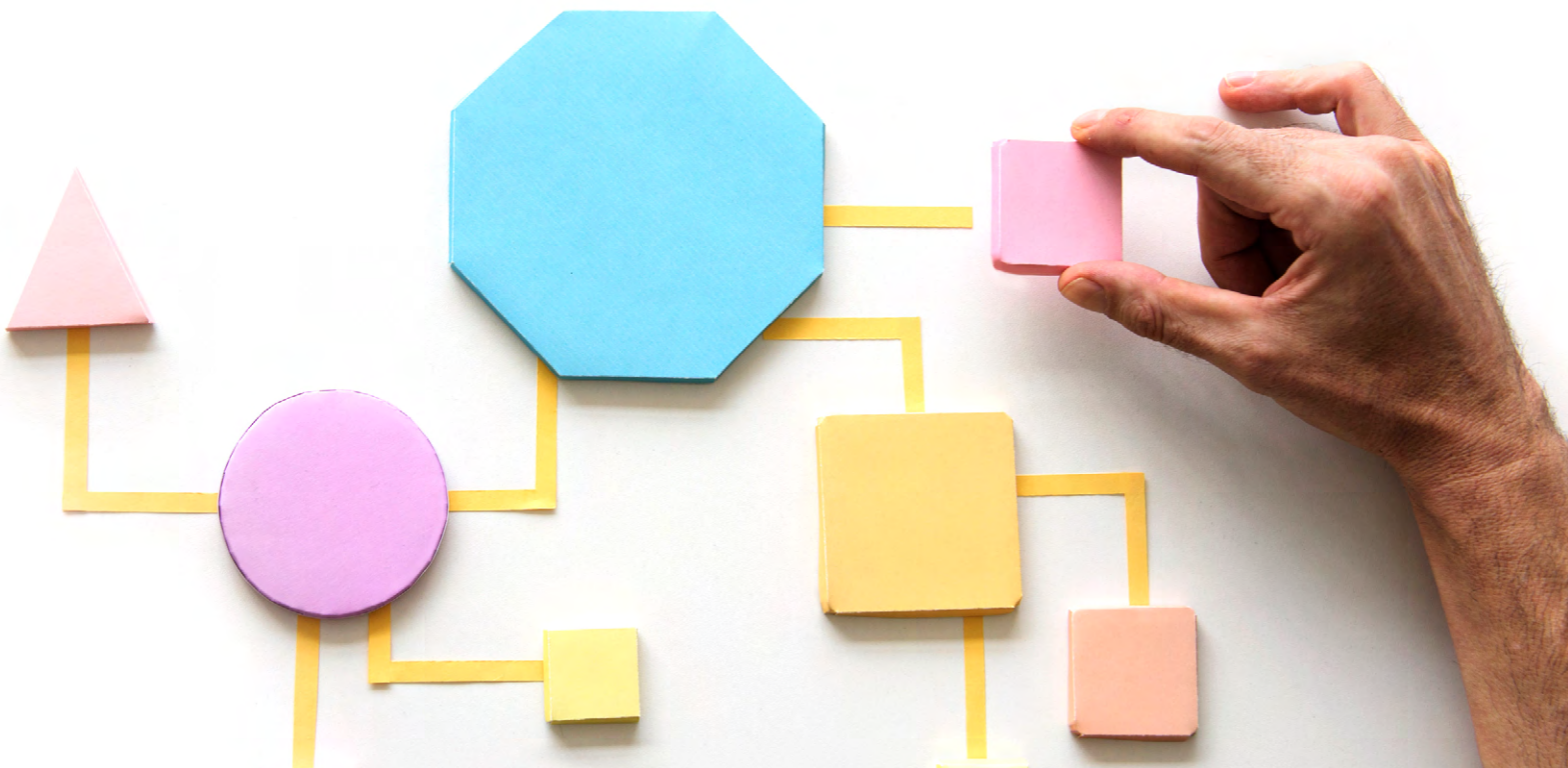
▶▶▶ Double-Up

Can you keep up with your current volume if there's a natural disaster, disruption to carrier availability or another emergency? **Eliminating any single point of failure plays a major role in achieving operational resiliency.** For shipping, this means building redundancy and backup plans for your fulfillment networks, data and systems.
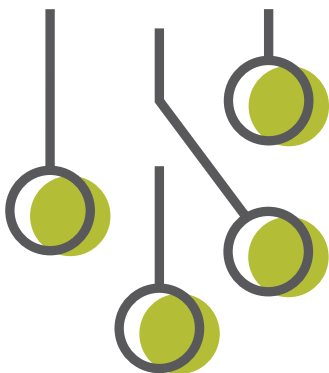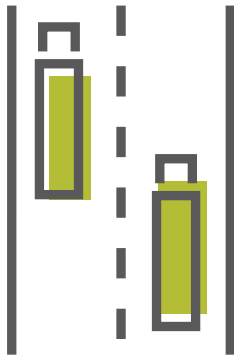
Carrier network

In the event of a crunch on carrier capacity, you may need to find alternate ways to move packages. This could be consolidating parcel orders into a less-than-truckload (LTL) shipment or breaking freight into small packages. It may also require you to expand your horizons and seek new carriers. Getting outside your comfort zone and working with different transportation companies might feel like a hassle, but it's better to stress-test a backup plan before Plan B becomes Plan A.

Warehouse network

What happens if your warehouse suddenly becomes inaccessible? Many small and mid-size businesses (SMBs) use multiple warehouses to store and ship orders. This may seem like too great an expense or logistics challenge for some, but there are distinct advantages and cost-saving opportunities. You gain resiliency if one warehouse can't fulfill orders and can also better meet today's expectations for faster delivery. For example, if you're headquartered on the east coast, a second warehouse in Nevada offers greater access to the west coast. This lowers transportation expenses and decreases delivery times.

Data and systems networks

It might not be the best part of the job, but back up everything. The Internal Revenue Service recommends keeping business records for up to seven years. Keep a similar rule for shipping invoices and customer records. All files kept locally on computers should be backed up on servers. If the server is on-site, consider a remote backup service for redundancy, just in case. The same goes for your information systems — can you access your critical platforms if there's a power outage or if you're offsite? (We'll cover some best practices in the technology section.)

▶▶▶ Keep Truckin'

There's a lot you can do to plan for emergencies, but what happens to shipments already in transit? Typically, the best thing to do is contact carriers directly to learn about your shipment's location, status and deliverability given the conditions. **Your carrier will have a plan, but it's up to you to make sure it's the right plan for your package's unique needs and to help the shipment in any way possible.**

Of course, it's best to try to finish a delivery (unless the circumstances are truly dangerous). If the truck returns the shipment, you'll pay for the mileage and your shipment will still need to be delivered later. If a truck needs to wait out a situation, ask if the driver can be rerouted to one of your warehouses or even a willing neighbor's facility. The reconsignment fee for rerouting is usually less expensive than temporary storage at a carrier-owned facility.

If the time comes to postpone shipments, know who to contact internally and externally to ensure everyone's safety and protect your materials as much as possible. This includes warehouse workers, customers, carriers, shipping managers and even upper management so they're aware of the business impact.

If your supply can't meet demand during an emergency, align internally on which customers receive shipments until the hard times blow over. This prepares your company for the financial impact while keeping customers in the loop. When things return to normal, establish a process for assessing losses and damages so you can recuperate.

▶▶▶ Tough Tech

During an emergency, technology will either be a lifesaver or a liability. **As you build your disaster plan, consider if your tech stack will keep you afloat or drag you down.** Fortunately, there are plenty of tools to help get shippers through hard times.
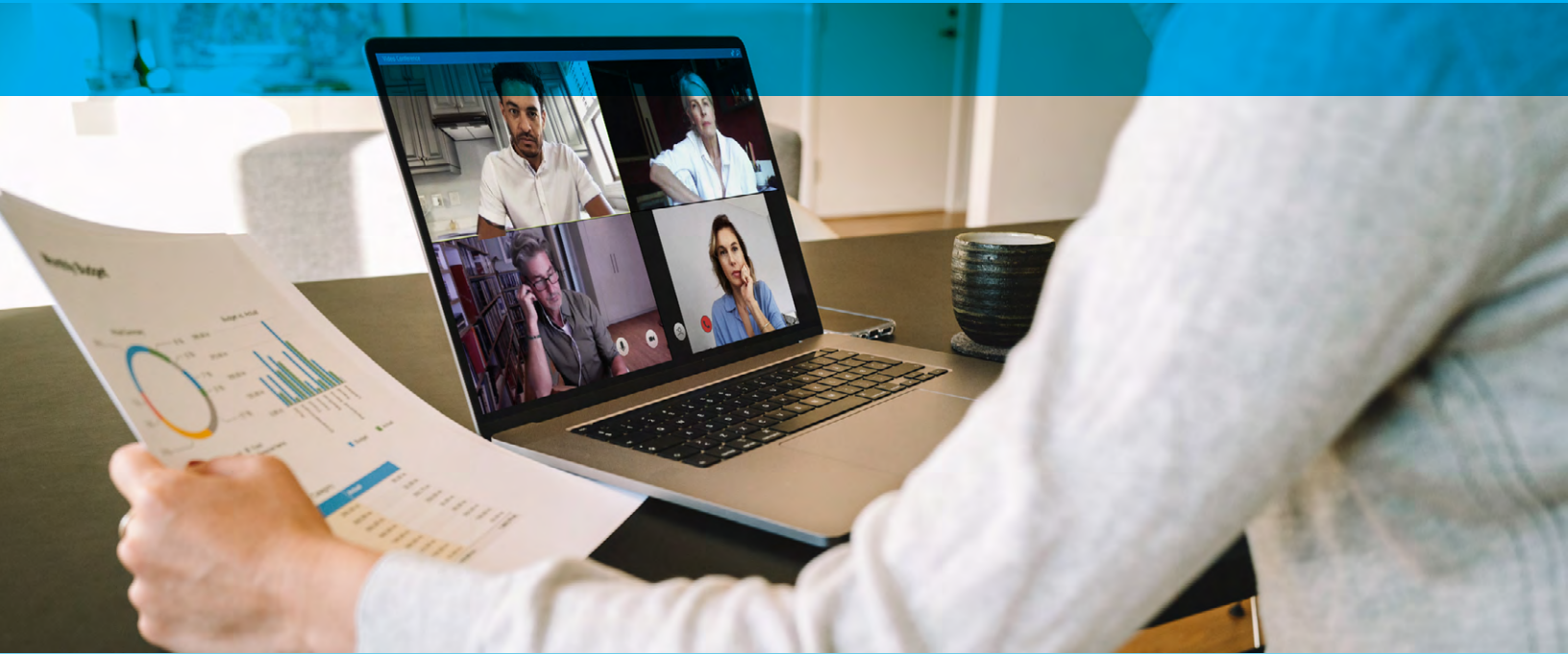
Cloud

Not too long ago, most businesses wouldn't trust the cloud as a reliable place to store data —let alone using it to run an entire company. Today, you can find proven, reliable cloud systems for just about every aspect of your business — productivity tools, IT systems, supply chain systems — you name it. Running from redundant server farms spread out across continents, the cloud preserves business data even if your office, or coast, is in trouble. Many cloud tools are accessible remotely via an app or browser — helping you stay online even if a branch goes offline.

TMS

A TMS is a one-stop-shop for shipping, helping shippers browse carrier quotes, print shipping labels, track shipments, manage invoices and more. It's a great way to keep shipment data in one place. A TMS that integrates with your ERP and other business systems offers cross-functional visibility and helps other teams facilitate orders and order changes when necessary. A cloud-based TMS, like SpeedShip® from Worldwide Express, provides you access anywhere, anytime. Also, the data backup service from your system provider will keep you from worrying about it.

Communication tools

Email and phones are staples of everyday shipping operations. But, are your communication systems ready for disruption? Can you access email remotely? Do you have a call-forwarding system in case you're working remotely? Work with IT to have these contingencies ready in case things go south.

▶▶▶ Lean on Partners

When something disrupts the business, everything becomes a frenzy. But you don't have to go at it alone. In these times, it's good to have a partner and resources available to carry you. A third-party logistics (3PL) company offers additional hands and tools that make a big difference when the machine breaks down.

Want to learn more about creating a business continuity plan for your entire business? **Check out Ready.gov** for more preparedness resources.

Instant capacity

Most SMBs can't match the carrier network a 3PL builds over years or even decades. While you may prefer one or two companies, when carrier capacity gets tight, you can't be picky. A 3PL's network of transportation companies helps you book shipments in the stickiest of situations while staying within your budget. Also, a partner with multiple modes and networks, including parcel, LTL and full truckload, gives you additional flexibility to consolidate or break down shipments if needed.

Help on-demand

As we mentioned earlier, it's important to remove any single point of failure to shipping operations. Sometimes during emergencies, there aren't enough hands to go around, and to be honest, shipping isn't always a top priority when offices are closing and managers need to keep people safe. A 3PL like Worldwide Express that offers live customer support and managed services can step in and work directly with carriers to keep shipments moving.

Trusty tech

We covered how a TMS helps shippers earlier. When a 3PL brings a TMS to the table, you get an instant boost to your toolset and operational resiliency. No two systems are the same, but they beat spreadsheets.

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In times when there are disruptions to the business, the last thing you need is interrupted shipments. **Contact Worldwide Express to get started on more resilient, reliable shipping operations — no matter the weather.**