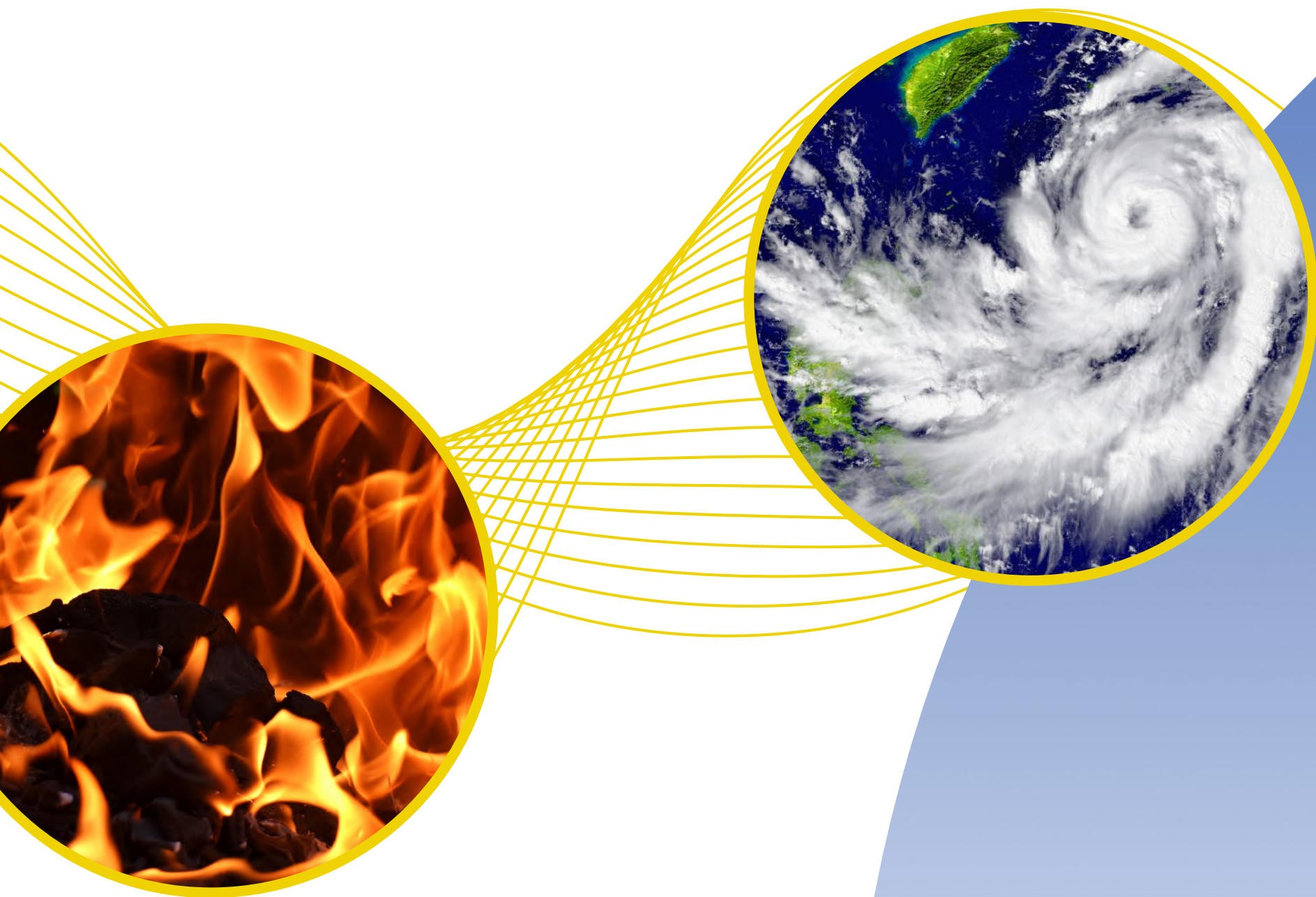


7 Disaster
PLANNING
ESSENTIALS
FOR YOUR SMALL BUSINESS



7 *Critical* STEPS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR HOUSTON SMALL BUSINESS FROM DISASTER

In Houston's dynamic business landscape, your company's data is one of its most valuable assets, but are you prepared for the unexpected? Houston's unique geography makes it vulnerable to hurricanes, floods, and severe storms, while every business faces risks from fire, theft, and cyber threats. If your business can't afford to lose critical data or endure prolonged downtime, it's crucial to have a robust disaster recovery plan. This report outlines 7 essential steps to help your Houston-based business quickly recover and keep running smoothly when disaster strikes.

1. Develop a Comprehensive Plan

Preparing in advance for a potential disaster—whether it's a server crash or a natural calamity—can significantly speed up recovery time. Your disaster recovery plan should detail possible scenarios, including those specific to Houston (e.g., hurricanes, flooding, etc.) and provide a clear, step-by-step response, including assigned roles, well-defined responsibilities, and necessary resources. Be sure to include contact information and credentials for critical platforms. By creating this plan, you'll also identify essential investments in backup, maintenance, and disaster recovery solutions. If rapid recovery is crucial, consider including strategies that can be quickly implemented to maintain operations while repairs are underway (e.g., virtualization). Store printed copies of this plan in multiple secure locations, such as a fireproof safe, offsite (e.g., at home), and with your IT consultant.

Also consider storing network documentation with your plan. This serves as a blueprint of your IT infrastructure, detailing the software, data, systems, and hardware in your network. Having this documentation on hand streamlines the recovery process, speeds up routine maintenance, and provides crucial information for insurance claims in case of a disaster.

2. Implement Robust Backup Solutions

Protect your data with a multi-layered backup strategy. Relying on manual processes for data backup is risky; automate daily backups to eliminate human error and maintain offsite backups, either on a separate server or secure cloud storage. (While onsite backups are useful, they are vulnerable to theft, natural disasters, and other threats that could compromise your primary location.)

Your data needs to be restored on a system with the necessary software and licenses to be functional. Create a full server image – a replica of your server's configuration and data – for quick system restoration in case of a complete failure.

Worst case scenario, this will allow you to quickly deploy the backup on another server, or virtualize your server in the cloud, without losing any configurations or preferences. Regularly test your backups to ensure they're functioning correctly and can be relied upon when needed most.

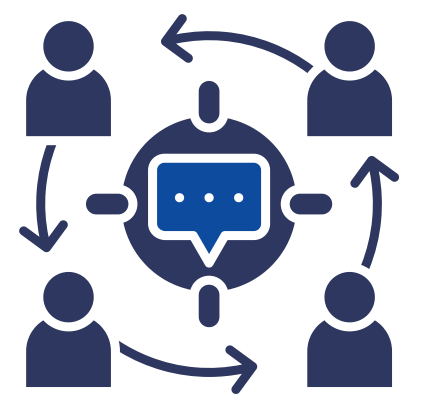


3. Partner with an Experienced, Local IT Professional

Work with Houston-based IT experts who understand the unique challenges of our region. These professionals can help design and implement your disaster recovery and business continuity plan, provide rapid on-site support when needed, and offer insights into local threats and best practices. Their local knowledge and quick response times can be invaluable during a crisis. Attempting data recovery without expert guidance, for example, can be detrimental to your business. A single mistake during a recovery process can lead to irreversible data loss or extended downtime.

4. Create a Multi-Channel Communication Strategy

If your office becomes inaccessible or your email and phone systems go down, what will your team do? Ensure your team stays connected during a crisis by implementing cloud-based communication tools, like Microsoft Teams. Set up an emergency text message system and create a phone tree for critical updates. Establish clear protocols for remote work and communication to keep your business running smoothly, even when physical access to your office is impossible. Your disaster recovery plan should include multiple communication methods to ensure seamless coordination during a crisis.



5. Enable Secure Remote Access

Utilize cloud-based productivity tools, such as MS365 or Google workspace, to ensure work can continue from any location. Maintain business continuity from anywhere, even if your office is inaccessible, by setting up VPN access for employees and implementing multi-factor authentication. Make sure your IT team can remotely manage and monitor your systems, allowing for quick responses to any issues that arise.

6. Fortify Your Physical Infrastructure

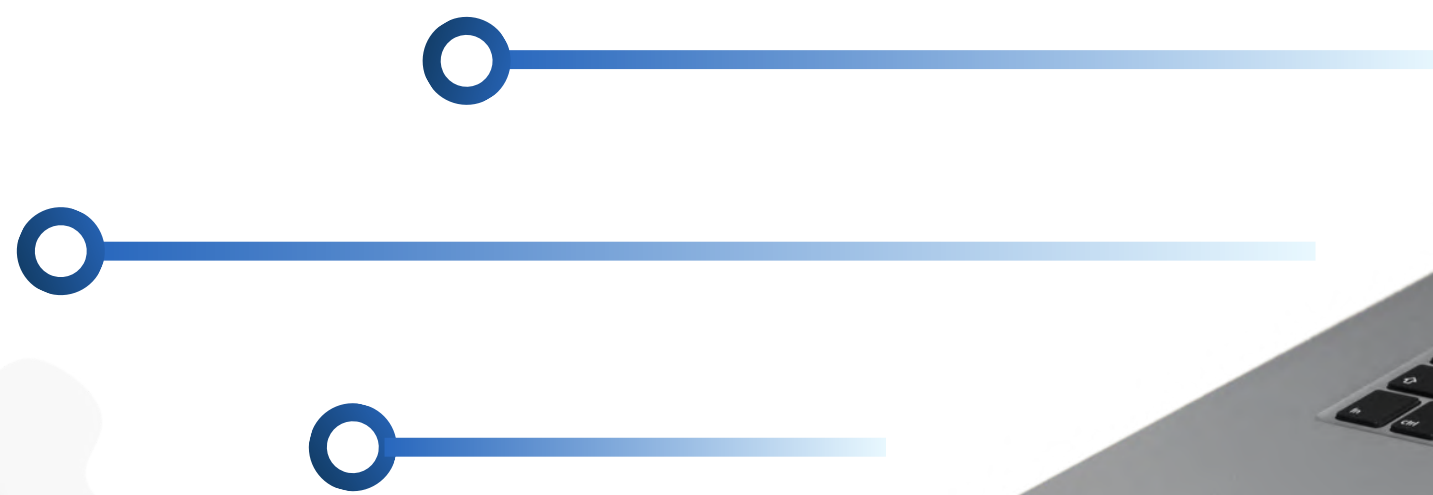


Protect your on-premises equipment by installing quality surge protectors and uninterruptible power supplies (UPS). Elevate servers and critical equipment to protect from potential flooding, a real concern in the Houston area. Consider moving critical systems to the cloud for added protection against physical threats. Implement robust physical security measures to prevent theft and unauthorized access to your hardware.

7. Conduct Regular Maintenance and Testing

The best defense against disaster is proactive maintenance. While natural disasters are a concern, just as likely are cyber threats, such as viruses, worms, or hackers, and hardware or software failures. Keeping all software and systems secure, patched, and up-to-date is essential. Regularly monitor and replace aging hardware or corrupted software before it can fail at a critical moment. Conduct quarterly disaster recovery drills to ensure your team is prepared and identify any gaps in your plan. Perform annual comprehensive tests to your disaster recovery plan to verify its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. Studies show that many businesses neglect this critical step, testing their plans infrequently or not at all. To safeguard your operations, hire an IT professional to perform regular disaster recovery tests.

Need Assistance **IMPLEMENTING THESE STEPS?**



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