

Flood defences

The floods in Boscastle left an indelible impression not only on the village's inhabitants and buildings, but on the television viewers watching from the comfort of their sitting rooms. **Georgine Thorburn** looks at how facilities managers can prepare for and clean up after a flood

No amount of business continuity planning prepares you for the onslaught of water. People have watched helplessly as water raced towards buildings, unable to do anything except get out of the way.

The recent downpours affect not only buildings near rivers, flood plains and the coast, but also those in areas where drainage systems are inadequate. According to the Environment Agency, the number of people at risk from flooding could rise from 1.5 to 3.5 million.

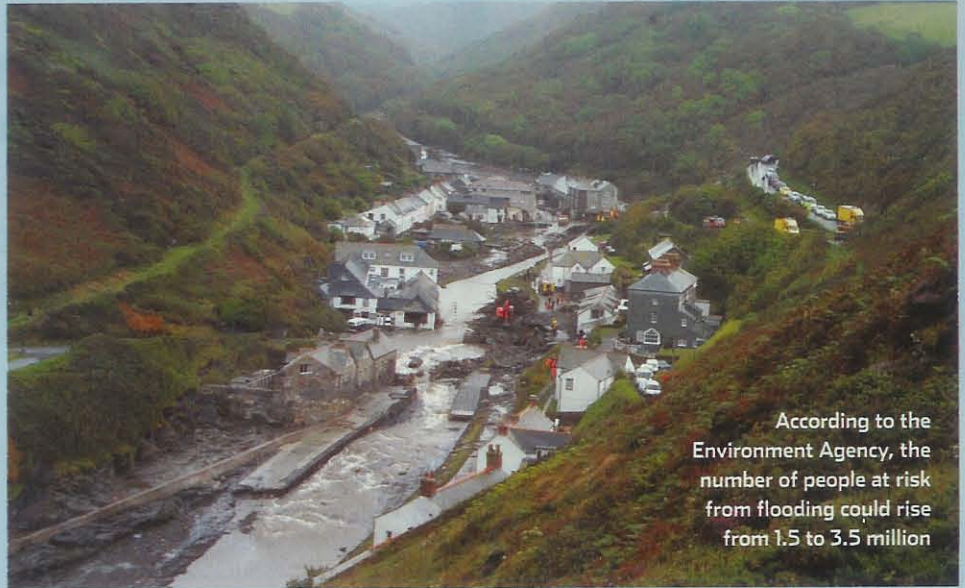
When water is pouring through a building, either from internal piping or external exposure, it is the facilities manager who is expected to get the business back to normal. Knowing how to deal with a flood should be a key part of any risk management plan.

Much of the building's contents can be salvaged after a flood. For example, hard copy documents can be restored within 24 hours of a disaster. The key thing is to know which information you need at any one time. The FM should work alongside the records manager to compile a list of documents needed. For example, in a finance department some records are important leading up to a financial audit but lose their importance the moment it is over.

Shirley de Roche, an FM for a global law firm, received a call to say that hot water was pouring through the building. When she got to the office, she used the floor plans to highlight the affected areas. The disaster recovery experts were in by 1am and the document restoration specialists were there by 3am. The operation commenced with the installation of blowers and de-humidifiers throughout the damaged areas, and the documents were prioritised, logged and removed for drying. An electronic fast-track system was introduced so that any briefs that were required for immediate use could be plucked, dried and sent back within 12 hours.

Flash and river flooding bring with them the contents of sewers, silt and sand from buildings and roads and mud from grassy areas. Health and safety precautions are paramount.

The moment the water has subsided, a water sample should be sent for analysis to establish



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the amount of E.coli and other organisms that have contaminated the building. A good laboratory will give a rough indication of the contamination levels within 24 hours and a full reading after a week's cultivation. The samples must be taken with sterile swabs, which can be arranged in advance with a laboratory, but a business continuity firm will take these anyway to provide the correct protective equipment for their staff and to make sure the policy holder's environment is treated accordingly.

Other waterborne diseases such as Weil's disease from rat urine is often found in river water, cellars and sewer effluent. This disease mimics flu symptoms and is absorbed through the skin through cuts and grazes. Other health and safety issues to be aware of are live electrical currents and shards of glass and nails.

Once a flood is discovered, a call should be made to the appointed disaster recovery company. If there is no pre-appointed firm, the insurance company will send a loss adjuster to assess the extent of the damage and analyse the policy to see what is and what is not covered.

As an alternative it is possible to bring in a loss assessor. They will fight on behalf of the policyholder to ensure that the full amount

due is paid by the insurance company.

The objective of the disaster recovery company is to clean up the environment, dry out the building and restore as much of the contents as possible. Specialists must be brought in where there are valuable historical contents such as pictures and books.

IT recovery is another area of specialisation and whereas hardware is so cheap it can be easily replaced, software and hard drive components have to be restored where backup off site has failed.

But the worst delays to resumption of business usually occur when builders arrive to redecorate. While the initial restoration is often prompt, the remaining components can go on for months.

A good rapport with the local fire brigade is useful. They will visit to acquaint themselves with the premises so that during a fire they can avoid mass water suppression or use foam, which can greatly reduce damage. But during a flood the fire brigade is not likely to help with removing even the most historically valuable items, as their priority lies with saving life.

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