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No. 58,949

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How restoration can rescue businesses when disaster strikes

Insurers are relying on document restorers to prevent businesses being left in tatters, explains

Georgine Thorburn, right



WHAT do the following have in common? Piper Alpha, 9/11, IRA terrorist bombings and Cumbria flash flooding. Well, all of these disasters involved the recovery and restoration of paper-based information required for legal, financial or business purposes.

A good example is the tragic oil rig explosion at Piper Alpha in the North Sea in 1988. Armand Hammer whose Occidental Oil company ran the doomed platform that claimed 167 lives, wanted to show that he had taken adequate health and safety precautions on the rig as well as identifying the subcontractor who was ultimately responsible for the accident.

Although the paperwork had been lying on the bottom of the North Sea for three months, the administration documents, log books, files and work permits were all restored to good-as-new condition. They were used for the inquiry and are still in storage to this day.

Even in today's business environment, almost 45% of companies that suffer significant loss of key data go out of business within six months. Despite the information technology revolution, a significant percentage of that lost critical information is still in paper format.

For example, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, a global bank's key paper documents covered in airline fuel water and rat poison were valued at \$3bn.

If a business survives, the consequences of flood, fire or bomb damage to documentation can be serious: loss of short-term profit, consequential loss, failure to meet statutory regulations and even bankruptcy.

Loss adjusters, insurers and claims managers are increasingly looking to document restorers to reduce the cost of claims.

More frequently they are looking to specialists who can restore and return business-critical documents on demand to a crucial service deadline—a critical service in the face of claims for consequential loss or business interruption.

The costs of commercial claims for fire, damage and consequential loss have risen sharply over the last decade. Over the same period of time, specialist document restoration has become cost-effective, faster and more efficient, yet many loss adjusters and insurers are still unaware of the advances that have been made in the document restoration field and the benefits of using a document restoration specialist.

In 1987, I started Document SOS to meet the demand for a service dedicated to the quick, efficient restoration of hardcopy information. Since then, the prime development in document restoration has been in efficient project management. It is not unheard of for bogus operators to unceremoniously dump restored documents and books, unlabelled and in disarray.

A good restorer should log documents to enable any file to be easily identified, treated, restored and returned on demand.

If the restorer does not take the business continuity needs of the organisation into consideration, the restoration could be potentially worthless.

Carlisle police station was heavily damaged during the January floods in the north-west city, and as a result the police files were completely saturated and contaminated with sewage. The files were salvaged, logged, decontaminated and restored for full use.

Logging of the documents meant that as files were

required by the police, Document SOS restored them and they were returned to the police within 24 hours, allowing many criminals to be prosecuted without delay. Had the files not been logged properly or restored, there might have been no case.

Moreover, the statistics of document restoration are now impressive.

Water-damaged paper files can be 100% restored, with two main methods. Select air drying can dry 100 big filing cabinets a week, so business interruption is negligible. It can be dried directly from wet and involves no deep freezing, allowing access to files at all times.

Freeze vacuum drying is recommended for antiquarian and irreplaceable books because it is slow and requires items to be deep frozen for up to a week before drying, which takes one to two weeks.

During this time, items are not accessible for business purposes, and the costs associated make it impractical for commercial restoration.

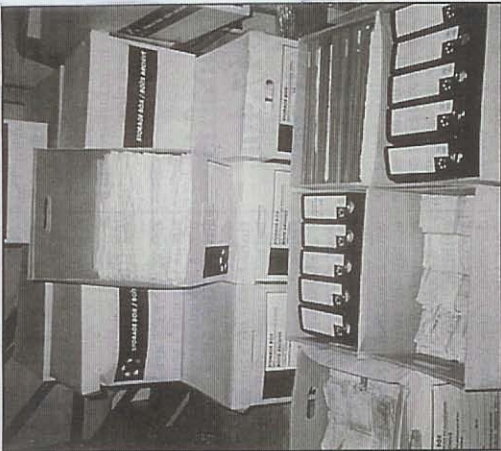
Flood damage usually contains sewage and deadly e-coli bacteria and coliforms, which, if not decontaminated first, will lie dormant when dried. For 100% success, papers will need to be immersed in the decontamination solution to make them safe, before being dried and returned.

The newly acclaimed Gamma Irradiation, however, does not guarantee decontamination and will destroy paper documents.



Fire damage is usually treated on site at a cost of 3% of recreation or photocopying. Contrary to popular imagination, tightly packed files and books do not burn like the proverbial bonfire, as there is no air between the pages to keep the fire burning. The high levels of PVC found in most offices, however, result in sticky soot, an acid smell of smoke that permeates all paperwork.

Where the building is still fire-damaged files were collected from the building which had been razed to the ground—and were successfully restored.



Over £1.5m was saved following the St. Mary Axe bomb as a result of timely document salvage and restoration. Some 2500,000 worth of books from a public library were restored, mitigating the loss by over 90%.

An insurance company in the City of London had a basement flood involving asbestos claims. Loss of such information could result in crippling financial awards in litigation. Although these examples are impressive, the losses could well have been further mitigated had document recovery experts been at the scene immediately to implement triage and halt the damage.

Today's natural emphasis on IT should not cloud the issues relating to hard copy information, especially for law firms and paper-heavy companies. Desk paperwork, computer manuals, personnel files, financial audit information and original deeds or construction plans, are all at risk.

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