Business Continuity Management for Ebola Risk

Protecting your organization against the threat of Ebola

Companies strive to create a catastrophe-resilient organization. It is an underlying premise in business continuity planning to assume a worst-case event. Ever-evolving threats like Ebola require businesses to continually evaluate the impact these new threats have to their existing business continuity plans. Previous government planning efforts recognized that responding to these threats cannot be viewed as a purely governmental responsibility and have provided the following guiding principles:

- The government will use all instruments of national power to address the threat,
- States and communities should have credible preparedness plans to respond to an outbreak within their jurisdictions,
- The private sector should play an integral role in preparedness, and should be part of the national response,
- Individual citizens should be prepared for, and be educated about individual responsibility to limit the spread of infection if they or their family members become ill,
- Global partnerships may be leveraged to address the threat.

As part of the private sector, organizations with a Business Continuity Management program (BCM) may have minor enhancements to address this ongoing and escalating threat. For organizations that have not started developing a BCM program, the following provides some preliminary steps for organizations to plan their preparation activities:

Evaluating the Business Impact

For each location of your organization, identify critical functions and staff, determining activities that must continue to support the business. Which critical staff functions can be performed from home, shifted to an alternate location and provided with sufficient training? Identify any non-essential functions that can be suspended during the duration of the threat. This will determine the type of response needed to keep critical staff in the workplace.

For those identified as essential business functions, and critical staff, backup strategies should be planned and alternate arrangements put in place. Critical staff should be aware of their status and the company’s plan to manage their ongoing work.

Once the business needs have been determined, planning activities can commence.

Supply Chain and Logistics

- Consider reprioritization of your product line to respond to market impacts associated with the threat, increase safety stock levels and stockpile essential supplies / resources as needed,
- Prequalify alternative domestic / international suppliers and outsourced vendors in case primary suppliers cannot support you.
Technology

- Support resource requirements of alternative work strategy for critical functions, start to investigate additional options for technology services,
- Expand teleconferencing capabilities within corporate facilities as well as remote locations as an alternative to travel,
- Initiate and be prepared to support a virtual Emergency Operations Center (EOC),
- Ensure phone system has capability to transfer high numbers of calls to employees (i.e. call centers) in different locations.

Policies and Procedures

- Develop policy and procedures that will make it safer for employees to come to work. An employer has a responsibility for the health and safety of employees and visitors to a place of business,
- Develop ways to limit contact with the public, and/or customers and vendors through changes in receiving practices, barriers or distance. This is especially true for retail, restaurant, hospitality, and other industries with direct contact with customers,
- Implement travel restrictions, especially to more affected areas and travel restriction to specific countries.

Education and Awareness

- Employers will need to develop accurate information and deliver this to its employees on a timely basis,
- This will be needed to counteract any media hype, mass panic and expected public overreaction. Companies should be prepared to provide employees with factual information on the illness and related symptoms, as well as details of the company’s plan. Employees should be educated on the symptoms, and avoid coming in to work sick,
- Promote good hygiene practices in accordance with agencies,
- Develop policy and procedures for contact tracing for people who may begin to exhibit symptoms at work.

Surveillance and Communications

- Ensure the crisis management team is aggregating information related to the threat and prepared to make decisions as situations escalate,
- Determine trusted sources of information for worldwide and local health information related to infectious diseases,
- Create a mechanism to foster open communications between vendors, suppliers and key customers regarding impacts on their operations,
- Develop procedures to aggregate information for review, assessment and interpretation for decision making.

These minimum considerations and planning activities provide some of the essential activities to start your organization toward preparation and response. Mature plans take years to refine through ongoing rigorous audits, exercises and enhancements. As threats continue to challenge the global response, we encourage your organization to begin planning resiliency.

Disclaimer: This document has been provided as an informational resource for Aon clients and business partners. It is intended to provide general guidance on potential exposures, and is not intended to provide medical advice or address medical concerns or specific risk circumstances. Due to the dynamic nature of Ebola, and infectious disease in general, Aon cannot be held liable for the guidance provided. We strongly encourage visitors to seek additional safety, medical and epidemiologic information from credible sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization. As regards insurance coverage questions, whether coverage applies or a policy will respond to any risk or circumstance is subject to the specific terms and conditions of the insurance policies and contracts at issue and underwriter determinations.