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Seven ways to boost the resilience of your facility

Over the last few years, there seems to be non-stop coverage of major storms, floods, droughts and record snowfalls. These weather-related events, as well as more gradual results of climate change, are wreaking havoc on facilities across the country.

While these extreme weather events are expected to increase, the good news is that there are things you can do now to mitigate their impact on your facility and ensure business continuity. Here are seven ways you can increase your organization's resilience to changing conditions:

1. Prepare, prepare, prepare. Resilience planning takes time and it's important to begin the process now. Conduct a vulnerability assessment to determine how your operations and supply chains can withstand potential harm from both short- and long-term climate change impacts. Consider your geographic vulnerabilities. For example, facilities in the Western U.S. need to be prepared to address droughts and wildfires, while those on the East Coast should be more concerned with superstorms, flooding and increased stormwater discharges. Additionally, consider the types of mitigation solutions you need based on the needs of your occupants and how your facility is being used. Make sure your planning includes safe evacuation routes or preparations for dwelling in place in the event of extreme weather.

2. Be aware of changing regulations. Get up to date on new building and construction codes to ensure you are in compliance.
3. Look at the whole picture. Consider implementing holistic resilience measures in different areas throughout your facility and grounds. For example, increase the footprint of vegetated areas, construct pervious pavements and install new storm drains combined with backfill preventers when upgrading your facility to better manage stormwater runoff. Also make sure to prepare for the longer-term consequences of climate change, such as the incremental rise of sea levels, as well as the severe impact of short-term events such as storms.
4. Integrate sustainability and resilience thinking. You can increase the effectiveness of resilience measures by incorporating elements of sustainability, such as green roofs that can moderate the temperature of a building during blackouts, or by using natural wetlands to slow the movement of surface water and help prevent flooding.
5. Promote collaboration with all stakeholders. Bring together all of the stakeholders, both internally and externally, to find out about their specific needs and get buy-in for your initiatives. On the macro level, learn how you might best collaborate at the municipal or regional level.
6. Raise awareness. Educate internal audiences on the importance and benefits of emergency preparedness and how implementing measures now can decrease future problems and associated costs. Share key information with these constituents, such as scenario planning and economic risk assessments.
7. Protect your organization financially. At the same time you are making preparations to implement resilience measures, make sure you have the right insurance in place to handle potential damage from climate-related impacts.

While many organizations are focused on short-term, immediate concerns, maintaining safety, integrity of infrastructure, operational continuity, and long-term viability of supply chains should be top priorities. As forward-thinking organizations are quickly realizing, undertaking preparedness measures today will go a long way to prevent problems in the years to come.