



What if?

Highlights

- The state of Wisconsin did not have adequate continuity plans in effect when it experienced a major continuity event in 2014.
- State of Minnesota agencies must have continuity plans that include a human resource element.
- The Department of Public Safety is responsible for coordinating agency continuity efforts.

What if you tuned into the local news this morning and found your workplace was the lead story: *Fire at Minnesota state office building*? Would you expect to be contacted by your supervisor before the media reported the event? Would you know what to do in such a situation (e.g., who to contact, where or when to report to work)?

This is not just a hypothetical situation. In 2014, an electrical fire at a state office building in downtown Madison, Wisconsin caused approximately \$15 million in damages and left the building unusable for three months. Fortunately, no one was in the building at the time, but 1,300 employees suddenly had no place to work.

Because of gaps in their continuity plans, state officials were not prepared to effectively manage the event. For example, the incident command team did not promptly communicate with employees, which led to rumors and misinformation. Here is how the media described the situation:

- The building is closed and employees are not allowed to return until clean-up is complete (the initial estimated time for clean-up is eight weeks).
- Some managers told state workers to take vacation or unpaid time until new office facilities are located.
- Officials are working to identify alternative locations and determine which employees may be able to work remotely.

An informed, educated and trained workforce gives any organization the best opportunity to respond effectively during emergencies or disasters. In an emergency, people tend to experience less stress or fear when they know what to expect and how to react. Continuity plans typically include steps intended to help ease employee tension and provide a plan for

resuming operations. Effective plans typically include:

- A method to ensure all employees are safe and accounted for during an evacuation, such as conducting roll call and activating an employee call list;
- A means to keep employees informed about an incident, as well as when and where to report to work if the workplace is damaged; and
- Training and exercise programs to ensure employees are comfortable with the plan and better equipped to react in a real-life situation

State agency continuity plans must have a human resource element (see the [Governor's Executive Order 15-14](#) on the mn.gov website). The human resource element, one of eleven elements required in agency plans, includes a process for contacting employees in the event of an emergency and assisting employees with human resource concerns.

The requirements outlined in the executive order mainly follow federal guidance from the Federal Emergency Planning Agency (FEMA). The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS), is responsible for coordinating agency continuity efforts.

Suggested action steps: Make sure you know your role during a continuity event. Contact your continuity coordinator or DPS (Patrick.Wolfgram@state.mn.us) for further guidance or questions about your agency continuity plan. You can also find certain state-wide information on the [BeReadyMN](#) website when a statewide event occurs.

If you have questions, please contact Jo Kane at Jo.Kane@state.mn.us or (651) 201-8174. Special thanks to Patrick Wolfgram, DPS, Continuity of Government Operations Coordinator, who contributed to this bulletin.