

The Best Emergency Plan No One Ever Wants to Use

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In an emergency, retrieving company records may not spring to mind as constituting a top priority. But sooner or later, gathering billing records and company data and restoring networks become critical for a company to stay afloat.

NYC Office of Emergency Management introduces new Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS)

Business Network of Emergency Resources (BNet), a nonprofit crisis-management corporation, grew out of that basic, logistical need and has masterminded the Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS). The program is the first in the country to simplify access to buildings that happen to be in disaster zones, helping both emergency crews and business owners do what they need to

do without unnecessary delay.

The program is one of the best examples of government-sponsored corporate preparedness. Though its finer elements are still being finessed, CEAS is now in full swing south of Chambers Street, with more than 100 companies -- from Fortune 500 firms to neighborhood businesses -- signed up already.

CEAS was born from a 1997 study by the New York State Emergency Management Office, which showed that the top issue for business owners in a time of crisis was actually the ability to recover essential materials from the worksite. The findings led to a joint federal, state, and private-sector partnership that founded BNet, the organization that built CEAS and aims, ultimately, "to mitigate economic loss from disaster," says BNet Managing Director Peter Picarillo. Back then, the emergencies most business owners and state officials had in mind were among the natural-disaster variety -- hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, etc. "Terrorism wasn't even mentioned when we first thought up the program," says Picarillo. "But [CEAS] applies to any type of disaster. It would have worked well in Florida recently."



New program permits access for essential personnel at disaster-zone security checkpoints

The program is simple. Interested businesses simply enroll online (at <http://www.ceas.com/>) and sign up for a limited number of the three types of identification cards:

- *Standard*, which includes a photo, and lets an employee enter a specific company location. It costs \$50 per card and remains valid for two years.
- *Flex*, which is specific to the company and location but can be used by different employees. It costs \$70 for two years.
- *Tandem*, which must be used with either a Standard or Flex card to enter different company locations. It costs \$50 for one card, with a \$20 fee for each additional company location.

BNet has worked closed with the city's Office of Emergency Management and the police department to validate the cards, which can be used at security check points around a disaster zone.

Picarillo says that the low cost of the cards is one of the program's best features. "It's a relatively inexpensive insurance policy," he says. "It goes hand-in-hand with disaster planning for a company, which should be dedicating at least a little time thinking about 'What if there's an emergency and I can't get back into my business.'"

What's more, he adds, is that managing the program "doesn't cost the city a dime. Businesses will pay for the program through the cost of the cards."

"The best response to any emergency is getting the city back on its feet as quickly as possible," said Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly in a written statement. "It is important to get critically needed people back to work in an emergency. This [program] makes it happen and it helps the police know who is who."



One of the most important steps to making CEAS work well, according to Picarillo, is for companies to identify their "critical personnel," the people who would be most needed to recover essential business materials -- from insurance records and bank receipts to laptops and computer back-up disks.

"This program is a post-disaster tool, meant to address that short-term need, that first 72 hours," says Picarillo. "In an emergency evacuation, there can be several hours of data that's lost until back-up servers are up. This program will not resume normal business [functions] but will help recovery operations."

There are three types of identification cards available.

Both BNet and city officials recommend using the CEAS cards, which are embossed to prevent reproduction, together with a government-issued I.D. To help keep the cards in trusted hands, BNet also asks companies who enroll in the program to conduct their own employee background checks.

In addition to rolling out the program to all of New York City -- with sights set on midtown Manhattan in the coming months -- BNet also is developing a digital system that could eliminate the need for physical I.D. cards altogether.

Picarillo says that the real measure of the program's success will come with how well it is executed, that is, if it ever is executed. A pilot version of CEAS launched in Buffalo in 2001, and Boston followed earlier this year -- both cities where snowstorms occasionally restrict business access. But, says Picarillo, the program "has not been used yet -- and hopefully we'll never have to use it."

To learn more about CEAS and enroll in the program, please click [here](#). For more information on BNet, please click [here](#).

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