

To: Donald Kramer
Subject: Preventing the Office Disaster.....An article for collection industry magazines

"PREVENTING THE OFFICE DISASTER"

A checklist for your review
By Donald B. Kramer, Esq.

Perhaps the only ones who thrive on disasters are the news media and construction companies. Law firms need to learn from the history of those who suffered from unexpected events. Here are some thoughts for your consideration:

FIRE.....Fire extinguishers should not be hidden. They should particularly be in areas where files and paper products are kept. Watch out for excess use of electrical outlets. In addition to 911, the phone number of the nearby fire station should be on a visible poster. While fireproof filing cabinets are expensive, used units are often available, particularly through internet sources.

THEFT...Many employees have contact with money. Bonding of employees and partners is appropriate in all offices. Alarm systems are needed, particularly in the evening hours, to prevent theft of computers containing valuable personal details, and many creditors are now insisting upon alarms as well as cameras in strategic places. Maintain an alarm system in the event of a robbery.

FLOOD....If the office is in a flood plain, or subject to flooding for any reason, try to avoid using the lowest drawer of the filing cabinets for essential files. This will also help prevent back problems of file room personnel.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES...Have available the phone number of the nearest emergency room, to alert them to the arrival of a critical case. Know the location of the nearest trauma facility. Have several employees skilled in the Heimlich Manoeuvre and CPR. Many states now provide "Good Faith Immunity" from civil liability if a defibrillator is kept at the office and used by a trained person for cardiac arrest situation. This is particularly important in offices where older employees are working. Make certain a good First Aid Kit is on your premises in a location well known to personnel.

EARTHQUAKE AND TORNADO....Personnel should be instructed as to the place in the building which can sustain high winds or earthquake. If the office is not on the first floor, a "buddy" system should be designed to assist any employees with physical disabilities. This also applies to fire situations.

COMPUTER DISASTERS....Have a firewall in place to protect your network from outside hackers. Implement Zero hour virus protection to protect from malformed messages before a definition can be developed. Backup should be instituted at least daily, with backup tapes kept in a secure location off-site, as a protection from flood, fire, earthquake, tornado, etc.. A bank vault is an option for storage, but an offsite tape vault should also be considered, since the tapes might be needed at night, on weekends, on a holiday, or when bank entry is restricted. Care should be taken to make certain that the backup tapes do not contain a virus.. Some first suggest tape backup every night, with tapes archived every year and kept for at least a 2 year duration. Watch the temperature in the room where servers are kept, since the proper action of some servers may be hindered by heat or very cold air. A recommended temperature is 60 degrees. A gas fire suppression system is preferable in server rooms (Check with your local fire department as to what they would recommend).

PHONE THREATS....Instruct personnel how to record a phone conversation in the event of a threat of any type, including a bomb scare. Set up an emergency plan for evacuation of the office in the event of a threat.

BATHROOMS.....These are areas that tend to have flooding problems. The phone number of a nearby available plumber should be kept available. Know what nearby facilities are available for use by employees during the emergency. Employees should be warned about what can or cannot be flushed.

AND IN THESE DAYS OF UNUSUAL EVENTS.....JUST KEEP ALERT !

{Editor's note: Donald B. Kramer is Founder and President-Emeritus of Kramer & Frank, P.C. in St.Louis, MO. He is founder and Chairman-Emeritus of the National Association of Retail Collection Attorneys (NARCA) and was winner of the 2007 President's Cup awarded by the Commercial Law League of America.}