

Living through the Impossible Emergency: What do you mean, my office is flooded?

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Background: Bethesda Hospital is a Long Term Acute Care Facility serving a variety of patient populations. Bethesda is located on the top of one of the highest hills in St. Paul, far away from any rivers. Despite those facts, my office flooded in September of 2008, on the eve of the APIC MN meeting.

An overhead pipe broke during early evening on a Sunday in an unoccupied office area located on a lower level of the building. Water flowed one level down into an outpatient clinic area, also not used on weekends. The Stores area, on a second level down, got a very small amount of water infiltration, luckily in their office area, not in the area where patient supplies are stored.

The problem was discovered after a few hours, but by that time, there were several inches of water standing in parts of the clinic and office areas. By the time I arrived on Monday morning, the water had been soaked up, but staff in the affected areas had only that day to remove items from our offices (while walls and flooring were being removed around us).

Items not removed would be discarded or stored for the duration of the repairs.

Challenges: While a victim myself, I needed to also be involved/aware of the clean up and repair process to make sure everything was being done correctly.

Office space was needed for approximately 25 people.

An alternate outpatient clinic area needed to be set up.

An alternate office for Stores needed to be set up and the Stores area protected during repair.

In the beginning, we did not know how extensive the damage was or how long the repairs would take.

Learnings: Proper storage and organization are essential.

I did not have items on the floor, but items others had on the floor were damaged.

Have important files where you can find them easily. In an emergency, there may not be time to hunt.

Figure out what you can absolutely not do without for the duration of an emergency.

Back up important computer files somewhere besides your computer in case it is damaged.

Regularly discard things you don't need to avoid having to sort when time is of the essence.

Outcome: It was determined the leak was caused by repairs done to a pipe many years ago using incompatible materials. As time went on, this incompatibility caused corrosion. After the flood, Facilities Management proactively looked for and repaired similar problems to avoid similar problems.

The initial cleanup included rapid drying out and extensive removal of wallboard, carpeting and furniture items made of MDF (multi-density Fiberboard). As a result, there were not problems with mold growth.

I was temporarily located to an office on a patient care area. My new location was more accessible to staff and became permanent because staff lobbied for me to stay in that office.