



When Disaster Strikes: 7 Multifamily Disaster Planning Mistakes

When disaster strikes, multifamily properties can be hit hard. From hurricanes and floods to fires and power outages, the potential for disaster can be overwhelming. That's why having a solid disaster plan is essential to protecting your property, staff, and residents.

However, despite the importance of disaster planning, there are common mistakes that can make a bad situation even worse. This ebook will explore seven disaster planning pitfalls to avoid in order to ensure your property is prepared for anything.



The Importance of Disaster Planning

Effective disaster planning is essential in the multifamily industry to ensure the safety and well-being of residents and the continued operation of the property. Multifamily properties are particularly vulnerable to disasters such as hurricanes, fires, and even active shooter situations.

When disaster strikes, it's important to have clear policies and procedures for staff and residents to follow. Without this knowledge, confusion and chaos can ensue, putting everyone at risk.

Having a comprehensive disaster plan in place allows property managers and owners to establish emergency policies and procedures so that everyone knows what to do in the event of a disaster. Quickly sharing critical information during an emergency is key. By providing clear instructions on evacuation procedures, emergency contacts, and other relevant information, residents and employees can be better prepared to protect themselves and their property.

Plus, access to important property details, such as utility shut-off valve locations, can help prevent further damage during an emergency. Proactively considering your disaster strategy is essential for the safety and security of your residents and the successful operation of your property.



7 Common Disaster Planning Mistakes in Multifamily Properties

Effective disaster planning is crucial for multifamily properties, but there are common mistakes that property managers and owners often make. Avoid these seven pitfalls to help minimize risks, ensure preparedness, and protect both lives and assets.



1. Not knowing where to find emergency policies or procedures.

When disaster strikes, having clear and well-defined emergency policies and procedures is critical. Unfortunately, one common mistake in disaster planning is failing to have a system or plan in place that makes these crucial guidelines easily accessible. In the face of disaster, property teams often don't know how or where to access emergency plans. And the resulting chaos creates an unstable environment that puts both residents and staff at risk.

Regardless of the emergency, having preparedness measures in place is vital. By knowing the appropriate protocols for each type of emergency, property managers and owners can ensure everyone's safety and well-being.

Additionally, a lack of knowledge regarding emergency policies can hinder effective risk mitigation efforts. Without understanding potential risks and developing strategies to lessen them, multifamily properties are left vulnerable to the full impact of disasters.

2. Not having details for emergency utility shut-off valves.

One of the critical mistakes multifamily properties often make in disaster planning is not having the necessary details for emergency shut-off valves for utilities such as water and electricity. Knowing the location and operation of these shut-off valves is crucial in preventing further damage, particularly in the chaos of a disaster.

Picture This: A pipe bursts, and water rapidly floods the property. Without knowing how to find the emergency shut-off valve for the water supply, valuable time is wasted trying to research and locate it. This delay can result in extensive water damage and potential harm.

Property managers should take a proactive approach to emergency management and ensure all shut-off valves are clearly marked and documented. This information should be readily available to all staff members and easily accessible in the event of an emergency. Regular inspections and maintenance checks should be conducted to ensure shut-off valves function correctly.



3. Not knowing the chain of communication for any disaster.

During a disaster, multifamily property managers must know who is available to respond to the situation. Not having this information can slow the emergency response and put residents and property at risk.

Imagine This: A fire breaks out in the middle of the night, and the property manager must take quick action on who to contact when.. This lack of knowledge can delay notifying emergency services and evacuation procedures, resulting in potential harm to residents and property damage.

To avoid this pitfall, multifamily property teams should have a clear system to know who is working at all times and what role each person plays during an emergency. Examples of this can include:

- Maintaining up-to-date staff schedules.
- Implementing an emergency check-in procedure for employees.
- Regularly communicating with staff to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities in a disaster.

By knowing who is available and prepared to respond, property managers can quickly mobilize resources, communicate effectively with staff, and ensure the safety of residents.



4. Not having a plan at all.

One of the biggest mistakes in disaster planning is simply not having a plan at all. Believing that fires, floods, hurricanes, or death “can’t happen here” leaves properties vulnerable and unprepared for the potential impact of the situation.

Without a comprehensive disaster plan in place, property managers and owners will find themselves trapped in an entirely reactive posture and forced to play catch-up when a crisis occurs.

Taking a proactive approach to disaster planning involves identifying a range of potential scenarios, outlining the risks, and developing strategies to mitigate them. By having a plan in place, property managers can prepare residents and staff to know what to do and where to go in the event of a disaster.

Reacting to emergency situations after disaster strikes will surely lead to response delays and potential chaos, ultimately putting both lives and assets at risk. Having a thorough and proactive plan for potential disasters can help minimize the impact of the emergency situation and protect everyone involved.





5. Poor communication with employees and residents.

Effective communication is vital during a disaster, yet limited communication channels are a common mistake in multifamily disaster planning. Without various ways to reach residents and employees, critical information may be delayed — or worse, not received — putting lives and property at risk.

Property managers and owners should establish various communication channels, such as email, text messaging, and social media, to avoid this pitfall. These channels enable the timely sharing of critical information and allow for ongoing updates during an emergency so everyone gets necessary instructions to stay safe.

Email should be used for detailed communication and attachments, while text messaging is invaluable for providing quick and concise details. Social media platforms help reach a wider audience and provide real-time updates. In the event of an outage for all communication, such as cell and internet, you should have a plan in place for staff to share updates with residents (i.e., a meeting space).

Multifamily properties can enhance their preparedness and response capabilities by prioritizing communication across these channels during disasters. Effective communication empowers residents and staff with the information they need to take appropriate actions, minimizing the impact of the disaster and ensuring everyone's safety.

6. Not educating residents about the disaster plan.

When it comes to disaster planning for multifamily properties, one critical mistake is not educating residents about the disaster plan. While it may be tempting to assume residents will automatically know what to do in an emergency, this is not always true. Without proper education and clear instructions, residents may panic or make uninformed decisions that put themselves and others at risk.

By providing clear instructions on evacuation procedures, emergency contacts, and other relevant information, residents can be better prepared to protect themselves and the property. Ongoing disaster planning education is key to ensuring everyone is up-to-date and aware of the proper protocols; this shouldn't be relegated to a single communication when residents first move in.

Involving residents in the disaster planning process can help foster a sense of community and encourage a collaborative approach to preparedness. Property managers and owners can ensure everyone is on the same page and working together to stay safe by including residents in discussions and providing ample opportunities for them to ask questions and provide feedback.



7. Not having accessible and current emergency contacts.

Having current and available resident and staff emergency contacts is an often overlooked aspect of effective disaster planning. When disaster strikes, time is of the essence. Up-to-date emergency contacts allow property managers and owners to quickly connect with residents and staff to ensure their safety and well-being.

Whether it's notifying residents of evacuation procedures or contacting staff members to mobilize response teams, having the correct contact information at your fingertips is essential.

Regularly updating and maintaining a comprehensive list of emergency contacts should be part of every disaster preparedness strategy, including regularly verifying phone numbers, email addresses, and other relevant contact details. A good best practice is updating this information during every renewal signing. It is also important to have backup contacts in case the primary ones are unavailable during an emergency. Prioritizing the accuracy and availability of this information will enhance the overall safety and emergency preparedness at your property.



Conclusion

Having a comprehensive disaster plan in place is essential for multifamily properties. Understanding and avoiding disaster planning mistakes is critical to maintaining residents' safety and security.

No matter how daunting this task may seem, with appropriate knowledge and preparation, disastrous consequences can be minimized, if not entirely prevented. Property managers and owners who develop comprehensive and effective disaster plans create resilient multifamily communities, even in adverse circumstances.

With resident well-being as the highest priority, a thorough and proactive disaster plan can lay the foundation for a safer, stronger multifamily living experience.

Need help creating a comprehensive disaster plan?

Talk to our multifamily experts today!

