Editor's note: FMs are long aware of healthy and unhealthy aspects of buildings and their occupancies. In the intensive efforts by the health professions, especially epidemiologists, to find how COVID-19 (WHO permanent term for the corona virus agent in the current pandemic) spreads, the Feb. 11 NYT reports incidents where the virus infected without personal proximity other than presence, well separated, in the same building in *A Store, a Chalet, an Unsealed Pipe: Coronavirus Hot Spots Flare Far From Wuhan - A handful of buildings around the world have been linked to multiple cases of the new virus, raising fears of rapid transmission.*

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/world/asia/china-coronavirus-clusters.html

Much more is at stake than health related building performance. FM is a hub for various areas essential to business continuity. For FM to effectively serve the larger organization ("demand organization" the ISO 41001 term for an organization using FM services, insourced or out) scope is much larger. In the feature article this month, FMCC member Stephen Brown sets out measures for FM to take in rallying and guiding business continuity planning. His treatment is clear and complete, using pandemic as an example - while COVID-19 has our attention.

DR - 02-13-2020

PANDEMIC – The oft-neglected threat in Business Continuity

By Stephen Brown*, CFM, CBCP

Pandemic - a worldwide spread of a new disease.

Although coronavirus is getting significant media coverage, it has not yet been formally declared a pandemic because the majority impact has been in China. But the potential is real. The coronavirus, now termed COVID-19 by WHO, the World Health Organization, has infected more than 34,000 persons and resulted in 724 deaths in China in a few short weeks. (*ed. note - as of this morning, February 13, NYT reports numbers are closer to 60,000 and 1400 with revisions of data reporting methods in Hubei province, where Wuhan is a principal city*.)

Another threat is the Influenza virus that has affected more than 19 million persons and resulted in 180,000 hospitalizations and 10,000 deaths over the past six months. Again, there is a very real potential to reach pandemic status.

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) a list of ten major health threats.

https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019

Included in the list:

#3   Influenza   A pandemic is expected – not 'if', but 'when'

#6　Ebola and high threat pathogens　Includes MERS, SARS and the current coronavirus

#8　Vaccine hesitancy　　Potential to reduce 1.5 million fatalities from existing health threats

#9　Dengue　390 million infections each year with a 20% mortality rate in severe cases

#10　HIV　Significant improvements, but still responsible for about 1 million annual fatalities

The threats are quite viable, and the potential impact is global.

The purpose of this article is not to create anxiety but to raise awareness and to speak to the impact of Business Continuity. If your demand organization does not have a Pandemic Plan as part of the broader Business Continuity Plan, *now is the time to plan, organize and be prepared*.

The ultimate responsibility for an organization's Business Continuity Plan may be assigned to any one (or more) departments - Finance, Risk Management, Facilities Management, Human Resources, Operations, Administration, and others. But the Facilities Management unit is a common thread and has involvements and accountability for many of the deliverables. As a Facility Manager, you need to be aware and contribute to the solutions.

By definition, a Business Continuity Plan is a document that outlines how a business will continue operating during an unplanned disruption in services. It's more comprehensive than a disaster recovery plan and contains contingencies for virtually every aspect of the business that might be affected - business processes, assets, human resources and business partners.

A Pandemic Plan typically follows the PPRR model

Prevention　　　　**P**reparedness　　　　**R**esponse　　　　**R**ecovery

Pandemic plans differ slightly from traditional Business Continuity Plans (BCP) because they focus more on people and less on technology. All BCP's provide a structured approach for responding to incidents and situations that threaten an organization's ability to meet corporate objectives and sustain operations. When you consider the health threat to employees from a pandemic, a carefully designed recovery plan can help the enterprise continue primary operations, even with a reduction of staff and recover to normal operations as soon as practicable.

The key objectives of a Pandemic Plan include:

1. Achieving effective preparation and response through clarity, process familiarity and confidence for associates and other stakeholders.
2. Sharing appropriate information - _from official sources_ – with employees, customers, and business partners in a timely manner.

3. Modifying operations and procedures to protect the building occupants.

There are six key actions that businesses should undertake. The following is a summary listing.

- ❖ Plan for the impact of the health emergency on the business
    - o Completion of Business Impact Analyses (BIA's) will help identify the risks, critical activities and functions, mitigation options, and essential positions – including succession planning.
- ❖ Plan for the impact of the health emergency on the employees and customers
    - o Identify alternative protocols for personal interaction, access to healthcare, response to increased absenteeism, and similar impacts to the operations.
- ❖ Establish and document policies that will be in effect during a pandemic
    - o Facilitate effective telecommuting options, recognize unique sick leave needs (including mandatory leave for infected persons), and restrict employee travel to affected areas.
- ❖ Allocate resources for protection and mitigation activities
    - o Ensure availability of infection control supplies (masks, hand sanitizers), expand cleaning regimens, and implement effective status communications.
- ❖ Communicate to and educate all persons in the organization
    - o Develop and distribute accurate fundamental information, anticipate and plan to overcome rumors, and ensure the emergency contact information is up to date.
- ❖ Coordinate with external agencies and support community needs
    - o Collaborate with health insurance providers, government agencies, and share best practices with others to improve community response efforts.

Globally, we face increasing risks and threats. Prompt and deliberate actions can mitigate the impact to the demand organization, it's occupants, and the broader community. We must be proactive and minimize exposure to the perils.