

## Experts cite need for disaster planning

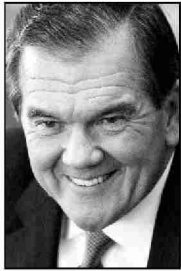
A Philadelphia conference drew 400 seeking advice on coping with calamity. Tom Ridge was a speaker.

By Henry J. Holcomb  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Tom Ridge, the former head of the Department of Homeland Security, and a dozen other experts coached business executives yesterday on how to get ready to survive disasters.

Only three of every 10 businesses have business-continuity plans, Ridge said after the program, "and we need to get that to 10 of 10."

"A resilient company can take a hit and move on," said Ridge, the former Pennsylvania governor. His luncheon comments were part of a conference attended by 400 and staged by the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce at the Loews Philadelphia Hotel in Center City.



**Tom Ridge:** You must be able to "take a hit and move on."

It attracted senior executives at large companies — including Sunoco Logistics Partners L.P., the engineering firm URS Corp., and the defense contractor BAE Systems — as well as officials from nonprofit service agencies and small-business owners.

Kevin Pierce, a former state trooper who is the new safety director for Krapf's Coaches, which operates 1,100 school, transit and chartered

buses, was there, thinking about how to refine emergency plans. Lately he has been teaching school bus drivers how to spot guns and other potential hazards.

While business executives were brainstorming on modern risks and disaster preparedness during the morning, Ridge huddled upstairs with senior officials of area universities. They worked on how to prevent a mass killing such as the one at Virginia Tech from occurring at one of this region's more than 80 colleges and universities.

Getting down to the basics of disaster planning, several speakers said each family must have a disaster plan that includes having enough food, medicines and water to survive several days at home, and that outlines what to do if evacuation becomes necessary.

"If employees are prepared at home, they will be able to return to work quicker," said Heather Blanchard of the Department of Homeland Security.

Tom Foley, chief executive officer of the American Red Cross regional chapter, said having multiple communications systems was essential.

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Ryan McGill of Denver, who manages Sprint Nextel's response to disasters, agreed. After touting his company's slogan that it's the most reliable, he added: "I carry several cell phones from rival carriers just in case."

Ken Barbet, owner of Shadow-Box Pictures L.L.C., a Yardley firm that produces film documentaries and television commercials, shared what he learned when his business was nearly washed away by floods three years in a row.

"When a disaster happens, it is overwhelming," he said. "You have to focus on the things you can do today. You have to be self-reliant, and get your body moving in the right direction, or you're going to go out of business."

He learned the hard way to keep in a safe place copies of documents that prove the cost of insured equipment, to document damage with photo-

graphs, and to put money aside to make payroll and keep the business going until insurance money arrives.

Speakers urged that businesses make emergency plans for:

- Replacing facilities, equipment and people, including designating backup decision-makers with purchasing authority.
- Communicating with employees, customers, suppliers and neighboring firms.
- Making advance agreements with providers of essential services and equipment, including food and temporary sleeping quarters for employees.
- Finding sites where employees are to go if their work space is unavailable.
- Sustaining recovery. "Everyone wants to come help immediately, and then they are burned out within a week," said Maj. Richard H. Arroyo, deputy director of the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management.

Various area firms discussed their engineering, software, equipment and services related to disaster recovery.

John Kile, vice president of Critical Situation Management Inc. of Bala Cynwyd, talked about software that helps keep plans up-to-date and preserves essential knowledge when key employees have left or are not available.

Without such planning tools, said Kile, a veteran chemical industry executive, "if the right person isn't on duty, the response is often shoddy and from the hip."

Contact staff writer Henry J. Holcomb at 215-854-2614 or [hholcomb@phillynews.com](mailto:hholcomb@phillynews.com).

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