SME EMERGENCY RESPONSE

SME Emergency Response Guidelines for Major Crises and Disasters

For a cross-industry, EU-wide applicable emergency framework for SMEs, a structured, priority-based model is essential—comparable to a triage logic: first protect life, stabilize decision-making, contain damage, preserve critical capability, then recover.

The following framework provides practical emergency actions for SMEs, aligned with recognized European and international resilience and crisis management principles, including ISO 22301 (Business Continuity Management), ISO 31000 (Risk Management), ISO/IEC 27001 resilience principles, NIS2 governance expectations (where relevant), and European civil protection coordination mechanisms such as the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

PROTECT PEOPLE → STABILISE → CONTAIN → CONTINUE → RECOVER

PRIORITY	OBJECTIVE AND RESPONSE MEASURES
01 Protect People	**Objective:** Prevent injury and loss of life. **Measures:** Evacuate, shelter in place, or isolate affected areas • Assign an on-site emergency lead • Ensure access to first aid / emergency support • Account for all employees, visitors, and contractors • Activate emergency staff communication ***Principle:*** *People come before operations.*
02 Activate Crisis Leadership	**Objective:** Maintain clear leadership and decision-making. **Measures:** Activate a small crisis team (typically 3–5 people) • Assign roles: leadership, operations, communication, IT, logistics • Define backups for key roles • Maintain a clear chain of command • Record critical decisions **NIS2 relevance:** Governance accountability and documented decisions may be relevant. ***Principle:*** *Clear leadership prevents paralysis.*
03 Understand the Situation	**Objective:** Build a reliable picture before major action. **Measures:** Confirm what happened • Identify what is affected • Verify what still works • Check staff availability • Assess immediate threats and likely escalation ***Principle:*** *Act on facts, not assumptions.*
04 Check External Dependencies	**Objective:** Identify disruptions beyond the organization. **Measures:** Check critical suppliers • Assess transport and logistics access • Verify power, water, fuel, telecom, internet availability, facility access • Confirm workforce accessibility • Consider disruption affecting customers or service partners **NIS2 relevance:** Third-party dependency risks may be relevant. ***Principle:*** *The crisis may extend beyond your business.*
05 Stop the Damage from Spreading	**Objective:** Prevent escalation. **Measures:** Isolate affected systems, processes, or locations • Restrict unsafe access • Shut down hazardous operations if necessary • Protect critical data, assets, essential infrastructure • Coordinate with emergency responders and relevant authorities ***Principle:*** *Contain first, restore second.*
06 Prioritize Critical Operations	**Objective:** Protect organizational survival. **Measures:** Classify activities: • Critical (immediate / <24h tolerance) • Important (short-term / <72h tolerance) • Deferrable (can pause) • Then: • focus resources on critical functions • suspend non-essential activities • reassign people and resources where needed ***Principle:*** *Save what matters most.*

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CONTINUE ESSENTIAL OPERATIONS AND RECOVER | PRIORITIES 07–13

PRIORITY	OBJECTIVE AND RESPONSE MEASURES
07 Keep Operating with Temporary Alternatives	**Objective:** Maintain essential capability under disruption. **Measures:** Activate manual fallback procedures • Use temporary substitute tools or workarounds • Relocate essential activities if required • Use backup suppliers or alternative delivery routes • Continue with reduced service levels if necessary **NIS2 relevance:** Maintaining essential functions supports resilience expectations. ***Principle:*** *Function matters more than normality.*
08 Communicate Clearly and Early	**Objective:** Prevent confusion and maintain trust. **Measures:** Establish one trusted communication source • Inform employees quickly and consistently • Coordinate messaging with customers, suppliers, and partners • Maintain contact with relevant public authorities or sector networks • Monitor misinformation or conflicting reports • Continue communication throughout the incident **NIS2 relevance:** Coordinated incident communication may be relevant. ***Principle:*** *Fast, clear communication builds control.*
09 Maintain Essential Operations	**Objective:** Keep the business functioning at minimum viable level. **Measures:** Define essential services • Focus staff and resources accordingly • Preserve critical revenue or mission-essential activity • Reduce complexity • Accept temporary reduced performance ***Principle:*** *Stay operational, even at reduced capacity.*
10 Expect Multiple Failures	**Objective:** Remain resilient during compound disruption. **Measures:** Assume simultaneous failure of: IT systems • telecom/internet • electricity • workforce availability • logistics • suppliers • facility access • Avoid dependence on a single critical resource. ***Principle:*** *Real crises rarely affect only one system.*
11 Meet Legal and Reporting Obligations	**Objective:** Reduce legal, regulatory, and contractual risk. **Measures:** Fulfill required incident reporting obligations • Document key actions and decisions • Review contractual obligations and force majeure provisions • Preserve records and audit trails where feasible • Coordinate with relevant authorities **NIS2 relevance:** Reporting and incident documentation obligations may apply. ***Principle:*** *Emergency conditions do not suspend accountability.*
12 Protect Cash and Financial Stability	**Objective:** Preserve solvency. **Measures:** Assess liquidity immediately • Prioritize payroll and critical payments • Confirm access to credit or emergency financing • Delay non-essential spending • Review available public support mechanisms, ask your local EEN partner ***Principle:*** *Cash flow supports survival.*
13 Recover and Strengthen Resilience	**Objective:** Restore operations and improve preparedness. **Measures:** Restore systems and operations by business priority • Implement phased recovery • Capture lessons learned • Update emergency procedures • train employees based on findings **NIS2 relevance:** Continuous resilience improvement may be relevant. ***Principle:*** *Recover stronger, not just faster.*

Why this framework works

This framework combines clear emergency action priorities with modern resilience thinking, helping SMEs respond not only to isolated incidents, but also to broader interconnected crises affecting operations, suppliers, infrastructure, and external dependencies.