

BUSINESS CONTINUITY GUIDANCE FOR MEDICAL FACILITIES & WILDFIRES

A Guide to Help Medical Facilities Prepare for, Maintain Operations During, and Recover After a Wildfire

Wildfires pose a significant risk to medical facilities, impacting their ability to provide essential care. Evacuation orders, smoke, fire damage, and/or power outages can disrupt operations, making preparedness critical to maintain continuity of care. This tailored guidance provides business continuity planning strategies for stand-alone medical facilities, including **imaging centers, specialty clinics, outpatient surgical centers, pharmacies, urgent care offices, and doctors' offices** to help sustain operations as long as possible and support swift recovery after a wildfire event.

Key Assumptions:

- **Forecasting & Preparation:** Conditions favorable for wildfire development and rapid spread are predictable, and National Weather Service (NWS) Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings often provide opportunities for facilities to prepare in advance.
- **Evacuations & Access Restrictions:** Some facilities may need to close temporarily or relocate operations.
- **Infrastructure & Equipment Damage:** Smoke, fire, loss of public water supplies, and power outages can impact critical systems.
- **Supply Chain Disruptions:** Medication and medical supply deliveries may be delayed.
- **Patient & Staff Safety:** Protecting people is the priority, requiring clear evacuation plans and air quality monitoring.

Before a Wildfire (Sunny Day Planning)

1. Develop Emergency Plans & Assess Hazards

- Establish a detailed plan that outlines staff roles and responsibilities, backup personnel, and emergency contacts.
- Work with your local fire department to develop a business pre-plan that outlines critical facility details. This pre-plan can help emergency responders locate and protect essential equipment, medical records, and hazardous materials in the event of an incident. Pre-planning also allows fire personnel to understand building layouts, access points, and fire suppression systems, improving response efficiency and minimizing damage.
- Identify critical functions specific to your type of business, such as patient records access, medication storage, imaging processing, and urgent care procedures.
- Assess facility vulnerabilities, including air filtration systems, backup power, and telemedicine capabilities.
- Establish alternative care locations in case of evacuation (applies to urgent care, doctors' offices, and specialty clinics).
- Determine where clients/patients will be referred to if the facility must close; consider creating a memorandum of understanding (MOUs) with nearby facilities as well as those outside the area.

2. Prepare Facility & Secure Assets

- Install air filtration systems to reduce wildfire smoke impact (applies to all facilities, especially imaging centers and outpatient surgical centers).
- Seal gaps around exterior doors, windows, and ventilation points to prevent soot and smoke from infiltrating the building. Soot accumulation has been observed near exterior doorways, and using weather stripping or door sweeps can help minimize indoor contamination.
- Ensure backup generators can power critical systems like refrigeration (for medications and specimens), imaging equipment, and surgical tools.
- Secure hazardous materials (oxygen tanks, medical gases) per fire safety regulations.
- Store essential paper documents in fireproof, waterproof containers and back up all digital records.

3. Inventory Management & Supply Chain Coordination

- Maintain at least a two-week supply of critical medications and medical supplies (applies to pharmacies, urgent care, and doctors' offices).
- Establish supplier agreements for priority resupply after the wildfire event.
- Ensure refrigerated medication storage has temperature monitoring and backup power (pharmacies, outpatient surgical centers).

4. Review Insurance Coverage

- Confirm policies cover wildfire-related damage, including smoke damage, loss of business income, and equipment replacement.
- Document facility conditions with photos and videos for potential claims. Include documentation of the inventory of medicine, medical supplies, and equipment to support insurance claims and ensure accurate replacement assessments.

5. Communication & Emergency Response Preparedness

- Implement a mass notification system for staff and patients.
- Train employees on fire evacuation routes and emergency response.
- Develop a telemedicine plan for continuity of patient care (doctors' offices, urgent care, specialty clinics).

6. Specific Tasks for Medical Imaging Centers

- Verify backup power supply to support imaging equipment and PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication System) servers for storing, retrieving and accessing medical images.
- Establish a plan for offsite imaging backups to prevent data loss.
- Ensure HVAC systems are functioning properly to prevent smoke infiltration into imaging rooms.
- Develop a relocation plan for scheduled imaging appointments in case of evacuation.
- Confirm vendor support agreements for emergency repair or replacement of imaging equipment.

7. Specific Tasks for Pharmacies

- Ensure backup power systems can maintain refrigeration for temperature-sensitive medications.
- Maintain an extended supply of essential medications, especially controlled substances and chronic condition treatments.
- Establish agreements with alternate pharmacy locations to fulfill prescriptions if evacuation is required.
- Develop an emergency prescription transfer system to ensure continuity of care for displaced patients.
- Secure flammable and hazardous materials in compliance with fire safety regulations.

8. Specific Tasks for Outpatient Surgical Centers

- Ensure backup power is sufficient for surgical lighting, ventilators, sterilization equipment, and anesthesia machines.
- Maintain an emergency stockpile of sterile supplies, surgical instruments, and medications.
- Develop patient transfer agreements with nearby hospitals for surgical cases requiring evacuation.
- Establish protocols for sterilization and infection control in case of compromised air quality.
- Ensure proper disposal procedures for biomedical waste if normal pickup services are disrupted.

9. Specific Tasks for Specialty Clinics

- Ensure critical patient treatments and therapies can be continued remotely or rescheduled.
- Verify backup power sources for specialized medical equipment.
- Maintain a sufficient stock of specialty medications and treatment supplies.
- Develop contingency plans for patient referrals to other medical facilities if services are interrupted.

10. Specific Tasks for Specialty Clinics & Doctors' Offices

- Set up remote consultation capabilities for telehealth services.
- Maintain an emergency supply of critical medications and equipment.
- Ensure patient records and prescription data are backed up and accessible remotely.
- Develop a plan to communicate closures and alternative care options to patients.
- Coordinate with local hospitals or urgent care facilities for patient referrals in case of service disruptions.

When Wildfire Conditions Develop

A **Fire Weather Watch** or **Red Flag Warning** is issued by the National Weather Service (NWS) when the combination of dry fuels and weather conditions support extreme fire danger.

A **Fire Weather Watch** (issued up to 72 hours in advance) means to be prepared because dry fuels and forecasted weather conditions create an extreme fire threat. While not an immediate danger, medical facilities should use this time to prepare by informing the maintenance crews and staff to increase vigilance and review their wildfire emergency preparedness plan. Staying updated on fire weather conditions and taking preventive measures can help minimize wildfire risks. Check your local National Weather Service page by searching for your city or zip code for the latest watches and warnings in your area.

Red Flag Warning (issued up to 24 hours in advance) means critical fire weather conditions are occurring or expected and medical facility owners, managers, and maintenance staff should be ready to take immediate precautions to help safeguard the property in the event a wildfire develops. .

When a Wildfire Approaches

1. Monitor Wildfire Progress & Activate Emergency Plans

- Adjust staffing plans based on air quality and evacuation warnings and orders.
- Be aware that employees may receive evacuation orders before the medical facility does, depending on their place of residence. Have contingency plans in place to manage staff shortages and ensure continuity of critical operations.
- Prepare to close non-essential operations if the threat level escalates.

2. Secure Inventory & Equipment

- Shut down and cover sensitive imaging and surgical equipment to prevent smoke infiltration (applies to imaging centers, surgical centers, and specialty clinics).
- Move critical medications to temperature-controlled storage or relocate them (applies to pharmacies, urgent care, and doctors' offices).
- Safely remove and store lithium-ion batteries. Most medical devices, such as monitoring devices, utilize lithium-ion batteries for power and backup systems.
- Close all windows, doors, and vents to minimize smoke entry.

3. Patient & Staff Safety

- Provide N95 masks for staff if air quality declines.
- Maintain remote telehealth services for ongoing patient care.
- Consider shutting doors to business when under an evacuation warning and proactively evacuating all patients and staff. This proactive approach will lessen the impact on evacuation routes when official evacuation orders are issued, reducing risk and ensuring safer movement for those evacuating later.
- Follow all evacuation orders.

4. Specific Tasks for Medical Imaging Centers

- Reduce imaging operations to emergency-only services to limit staff exposure to smoke.
- Protect imaging machines with smoke-resistant covers.
- Power down non-essential imaging equipment to prevent damage from power fluctuations.
- Alert patients with scheduled imaging exams about potential rescheduling or facility closures.

5. Specific Tasks for Pharmacies

- Implement curbside pickup and home delivery to reduce patient exposure to smoke.
- Maintain a register of emergency refill authorizations to expedite prescriptions for affected patients. In the event the pharmacy is unable to operate, establish agreements with nearby or partner pharmacies to temporarily fill prescriptions. Ensure secure access to patient records and prescription history to support continuity of care during disruptions.
- Arrange to remotely monitor refrigeration temperatures continuously to prevent medication spoilage.
- Keep inventory records updated to facilitate restocking after the event.
- Coordinate with local healthcare providers to ensure access to critical medications for displaced patients.

6. Specific Tasks for Outpatient Surgical Centers

- Suspend all non-essential and elective procedures to minimize risks.
- Ensure all surgical waste and biohazards are properly contained to prevent contamination.
- Monitor air quality levels in operating rooms and pre/post-op areas.

7. Specific Tasks for Specialty Clinics

- Suspend non-essential treatments while ensuring critical therapies continue safely.
- Keep patients and staff updated on alternative treatment locations.
- Monitor air quality inside treatment rooms and adjust operations accordingly.
- Provide extra precautions for immunocompromised patients who may be at higher risk.

8. Specific Tasks for Doctors' Offices

- Move to telemedicine services where possible.
- Coordinate with local pharmacies to ensure patients can still access necessary medications.
- Monitor staff availability and patient appointment schedules for necessary adjustments.
- Ensure patients are informed about evacuation procedures and alternative care locations.

Recovering After a Wildfire

1. Assess Facility Safety & Damage

- Inspect for structural damage, smoke contamination, and air quality issues before reopening.
- Conduct HVAC system maintenance to remove soot and ash. Be aware that soot and ash can also accumulate inside doors, on floors, and on surfaces such as counters, medical equipment, and furniture (including waiting room areas). A thorough cleaning of these areas is necessary to ensure a safe and sanitary environment before resuming operations.
- Consider conducting a water quality assessment to ensure the facility's water supply is safe and not contaminated by ash, chemicals, or debris. If concerns arise, coordinate with local health authorities or water service providers for testing and necessary treatment before resuming medical operations.
- Inspect the immediate area around the facility for hot spots or smoldering debris that could still pose a fire risk. While the fire department may have already conducted an assessment, it is best to double-check and mitigate any remaining hot spots to ensure the safety of the structure, staff, and patients.
- Document all damage with photos for insurance claims.

2. Restore Operations & Critical Functions

- Clean and sanitize all medical equipment and surfaces before patient care resumes.
- Verify backup generators and IT systems are functioning properly.
- Restock medications and medical supplies, prioritizing life-sustaining treatments.
- Communicate reopening plans with staff, patients, and suppliers.

3. Support Employees & Patients

- Offer mental health support and flexibility for staff affected by the disaster.
- Assist patients with rescheduling appointments and prescription refills.
- Provide clear guidance on air quality risks and necessary precautions.

4. Review & Update Plans

- Conduct a post-event review to identify improvement areas.
- Update emergency response protocols based on lessons learned.

5. Specific Tasks for Medical Imaging Centers

- Inspect imaging machines for smoke contamination or signs of overheating.
- Conduct calibration tests to ensure image quality has not been affected.
- Work with vendors to replace or repair any damaged imaging equipment.
- Resume operations with priority given to rescheduled and urgent imaging exams.
- Notify referring providers that imaging services have resumed and of any changes in scheduling capacity.

6. Specific Tasks for Pharmacies

- Verify medication integrity, especially refrigerated or smoke-exposed, or soot and ash-contaminated items.
- Work with suppliers to expedite restocking of essential medications.
- Resume operations with priority for chronic care and emergency prescriptions.
- Notify healthcare providers and patients about restored pharmacy services.
- Assess and update backup power and emergency response plans for future events.

7. Specific Tasks for Outpatient Surgical Centers

- Clean and sanitize all medical equipment and surfaces before patient care resumes.
- Verify backup generators and IT systems are functioning properly.
- Restock medications and medical supplies, prioritizing life-sustaining treatments.
- Communicate reopening plans with staff, patients, and suppliers.
- Ensure all surgical tools and equipment are re-sterilized before resuming procedures.
- Work with vendors to replace compromised sterile supplies.
- Conduct full testing of anesthesia and ventilation systems before surgeries resume.
- Notify referring physicians and patients of service restoration.

8. Specific Tasks for Specialty Clinics

- Resume critical treatments first, prioritizing patient backlogs.
- Inspect and recalibrate specialized medical equipment.
- Contact patients regarding rescheduled appointments and alternative treatment options.

9. Specific Tasks for Doctors' Offices

- Reopen gradually, prioritizing urgent care needs.
- Assist patients with prescription refills and medical documentation requests.
- Continue offering telehealth services until in-office visits are fully restored.

By implementing these proactive business continuity strategies, small medical facilities can better withstand wildfire disruptions, protect critical assets, and continue serving patients with minimal interruptions. For additional guidance, refer to our Make Your Business Wildfire Ready webpage: ibhs.org/WildfireReadyBusiness/.

Disclaimer: This guidance supports business continuity planning for medical facilities in the event of a wildfire. It is not focused on life safety or medical emergency response. Facilities should follow all local, state, and federal regulations regarding patient and staff safety and consult appropriate emergency management and medical professionals for life safety planning. Further, this guidance does not address HIPAA and other laws, regulations, and requirements related to the medical profession. Property owners should ensure that their business continuity plans meet all such laws, regulations, and requirements.