

Preparing for a Natural Disaster or Federal Government Shutout (or any other reason you cannot access your office)

All businesses and governments should prepare for a natural disaster; preparing for a federal government shutout should be an additional consideration for conservation districts. Who knows when a fire, tornado, flood, snow/ice storm, or earthquake will occur and damage your operation? A federal government shutout could wreak as much damage to your operation as a natural disaster. Your conservation district could be without access to your office for several days to several months. If your conservation district plans to continuing serving your constituents/customers, your conservation district board of supervisors should prepare for a disaster by adopting and implementing policy. Consider the following items as you develop your policy (some may be more applicable to a natural disaster than to a federal government shutout).

1. Find out what is available for insurance coverage when it comes to natural disasters. Confirm with your agent what is covered under your current policy and make sure you are satisfied with it. Only you know what you need, so by determining that, you are prepared for what could occur.
2. Assign an employee the position of safety controller in your plan for natural disaster preparedness. This person is responsible for posting emergency materials in your office and other buildings you own, coordinating fire exercises and evacuation strategies, arranging the installation and maintenance of safety, first aid and emergency equipment in your space, and arranging first aid and CPR trainings for your employee(s). Since many conservation districts share office space with USDA, these responsibilities could be shared with the federal agencies.
3. Set up emergency protocol for your employees to follow in case of a natural disaster. You could set up an emergency message service that directs your employees regarding work and emergency services. You could also request that your employees call *<insert appropriate officer - board president or other supervisor>* to ensure they are safe.
4. Establish a backup plan that will allow you to continue operating even in the event of a natural disaster or federal government shutout. The list of questions below will help you develop your own backup plan.
5. Back up files to an off-site server. You can set up your own server or pay a back-up service, just as long as the method you choose is secure and reliable. With the technology available these days, there is no reason why an operation would become incapacitated during a natural disaster because of a failure to back-up files.

Questions to answer in establishing a backup plan:

HOW WILL THE PUBLIC, YOUR PARTNERS, OTHER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS, AND KEY PEOPLE CONTACT YOU?

If you have no access to your conservation district office, the first point of contact should be the board chair with second contact to other supervisors.

Board chair name & phone number:

Key statewide contacts that should be informed of your new contact information:

SD Dept of Agriculture/Div of Resource Conservation & Forestry (RCF) Bill Smith Phone: 605-773-3623 Bill.Smith@state.sd.us 523 E Capitol Avenue Pierre SD 57501	SD Assn of Conservation Districts (SDACD) executive director Angela Ehlers Phone: 1-800-729-4099 sdoffice@sdconservation.net PO Box 275 Pierre SD 57501	SD Assn of Conservation District Employees (SDACDE) president Tami Moore Phone: 605-772-5642 tami.moore@sd.nacdnet.net 601 W. Farmer Ave., Ste. A Howard SD 57349-9643
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Since you cannot access your current office, how will you advertise your new location, phone number, e-mail? Consider newspaper, radio, social media, and posters.

WHERE WILL YOU BE LOCATED?

The location should be accessible to your constituents/customers and appropriate for your employees (electricity, heat, water, sewer, etc.). Keeping in mind some of your information is by law protected as private and confidential, consider some of these options:

- Private residence
- Courthouse, city hall, or other local or state government building
- Tree shed or building owned by the conservation district
- Local bank or other local business
- Any secure location that would give you the ability to keep functioning without having to rent

HOW WILL YOU GET YOUR MAIL?

- In the event of a government shutout: if USDA-NRCS leases the Post Office box or if mail is delivered to the federally-leased building, notify the US Postal Service of a change in delivery for conservation district mail or arrange to pick up conservation district mail at the Post Office. If it is an USDA postal box, you may be required to turn any keys in to the federal employees.

- If a natural disaster occurs and your building is inaccessible to mail delivery, notify the US Postal Service of a change in delivery.

WHAT MATERIALS DO YOU NEED TO CONTINUE OPERATING?

Remember, in case of a government shutout, you cannot remove USDA equipment, supplies, or files from their office. You can only take conservation district-owned equipment, supplies, or files.

- Conservation district-owned computer with bookkeeping program
- Printer and/or copier
- Financial records (checkbook, deposit book, deposit stamp)
- Customer files (tree plans, seed plans, etc.) NOT NRCS PRODUCER FILES
- Contact information for customers, partners, board members, etc.
- Board meeting materials (agenda, minutes, etc.)
- Conservation district personnel files, including time sheets
- Grant or loan folders
- Tax Information (monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, yearly)
- Insurance files and asset inventories
- Joint powers information
- Backups of only conservation district files (see item 5 above)
- Conservation district project files
- GPS, wheel, etc.
- Maps
- Office supplies owned by conservation district

WHERE DO YOU PLAN TO STORE EQUIPMENT OR PARK VEHICLES?

- In case of a government shutout, equipment stored in USDA buildings would be inaccessible. Vehicles parked on USDA property could be towed because they are trespassing on federal property.