

Learning from a flood to build resilience



This case study describes how a tool hire depot operated by Plantool Ltd in Kettering was affected by flooding in June 2007, and the steps the company has taken to minimise the impact that future flooding could have on the business.

About Plantool Ltd

Plantool Ltd is a tool hire company supplying equipment to industrial, commercial and domestic customers. They supply a wide range of tools which include drying equipment, gardening equipment, diggers, scaffold towers, and cherry pickers.

Plantool Ltd has been in operation for over thirty years and has grown from one depot to now operating from six depots covering Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, South Leicestershire and their surrounding areas. The premises for all the depots are leased, and they have a total of 28 staff spread out across their six depots. A lot of the staff have been in the tool hire trade for many years, some for over 20 years.

Background

Heavy rain occurred one afternoon in June 2007, just as staff at the Hire Centre in Kettering were going home for the day. Later in the evening, a local business on the same business estate managed to get hold of the Hire Centre manager on his mobile, as they urgently needed to hire a pump. This alerted the Hire Centre staff to the seriousness of the situation.

Local roads were flooded and the Police were not letting cars through. The Hire Centre staff managed to gain entry to the depot to find the water was waist high throughout the building. The water was littered with empty gas canisters and wooden scaffold boards were floating around.

The water level held for around two hours but then disappeared as quickly as it came. By this time the emergency services had evacuated all the buildings and the industrial estate, telling people they could not return until the following morning.

The next day the staff arrived to find the building in total disarray. Sludge and silt were left everywhere the water had been.

Flood impacts on the business

A large quantity of tools and equipment were stored on the ground, and these were badly affected by the flood. Fortunately, the till and computers were about an inch above the height of the flood water, so they were fine. Some equipment had floated off on the flood water, and this needed to be found.

None of the staff had experienced a flood before and they did not have a recovery plan in place. There was no gas or electricity supply, as these had been disconnected by the emergency services. Without their computer system, and with the phone system down, staff had to cope with just mobile phones. This situation continued for days.

The staff focused on getting the front of shop cleaned up first, so that the business could continue to serve customers. The landlord arranged for his insurers to attend to the building. The depot had to be stripped out

and then dried. All the flooring and doors had to be replaced and then redecorated. These costs were covered by the landlord.

The clean up of the building took around nine months, including the drying out period.

Every hire item that was affected by the flood water had to be checked, cleaned and repaired where possible, before being used again. Some of the equipment was sent to a company that professionally restores electrical equipment damaged by water. This was a lengthy process which in some cases took many months. Around 10% of the flood damaged equipment had to be scrapped.

The business was badly affected:

- **Turnover fell by 70% overnight.**
- **The option of shutting the depot was considered by the management, but because of all the effort put in by the staff, they decided to keep it open.**
- **It took over 13 months before the depot was back up and running fully, and over 2 years after that before trade was back to where it had been before the flood.**

What has the company done to increase its resilience?

- Plantool Ltd now has a company-wide **Business Continuity Plan** in place to cover most problems that could occur, including those related to severe weather events.
- **Health & Safety** now has higher priority.
- At the Kettering depot they now have a **Flood Plan** adapted to that depot, which includes emergency contact details of utility suppliers.
- The depot is now signed up to receive **Flood Warnings** from the Environment Agency.
- Staff are now trained in 'what to do next'.

Some physical changes have been made to the depot, to help keep losses and costs to a minimum by avoiding water damage if another flood does occur:

- **As much equipment/ stock as possible has been raised up off the floor**
- **Some electric sockets have been raised**
- **Gas canisters are locked away in a gas cage**
- **Ladders are kept tied up.**



During the June 2007 flood event in the Slade Brook catchment, intense localised rainfall on a predominantly urban catchment resulted in flooding along the lower reaches of the Slade Brook. Surface water run-off in the urban area upstream of the Hire Centre significantly contributed to the volume of water rapidly entering the brook. There was too much water for the brook to contain, leading to out-of-bank flow and surface drainage issues. Ground observations estimated that the Slade Brook rose rapidly: over 2 metres in one hour.

Orion Way (top) and Pytchley Road (bottom), during the flooding in June 2007



The Slade Brook with water levels back to normal.

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Lessons learned

Depending on the nature of the business, a flood could provide an opportunity to increase sales, if a business is well placed to help others recover from a flood. For example, a resilient tool hire centre would be able to hire out pumps, dehumidifiers and carpet cleaners, to others affected by the floods.

Mark Issitt, the current manager of the Kettering depot said:

“This should have been a time for us to shine and offer our service to other businesses that were affected, but it was us that was severely affected and not ready for the hidden challenges to our business. Since then we have taken steps to make sure we are better prepared.”



Mark Issitt, Depot Manager

The speed of the flooding was a big challenge, as was the time of day that it occurred (in the evening). Both these aspects made it more difficult

to mobilise a prompt response to the flooding.

Signing up for Environment Agency Flood Warnings can give a business valuable time to prepare for a flood. Find out more about Flood Warnings here:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/31618.aspx

Plantool Ltd realised that they can become more resilient through having a company-wide Business Continuity Plan, and are now able to react to such events in a coordinated way as a company, rather than as an individual depot.

Staff now know what to do in the event of an emergency, which will help to minimise disruption and allow the business to continue to trade. It should also help to reduce staff stress.

Contact Details and Further Information

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Further Information

Weathering the Storm – a guide to saving and making money in a changing climate:

www.climate-em.org.uk/resources/item/weathering-the-storm-a-business-guide-to-climate-change-adaptation/

Check your **flood risk** on the Environment Agency website, and sign up for **flood warnings**:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/

Prepare a **flood plan** for your business:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/flooding/32362.aspx

The **Business Resilience Health Check** is an online tool which you can use to create a bespoke action plan for your business:

www.businessresiliencehealthcheck.co.uk

Climate Ready is a support service to help businesses prepare for climate change:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/137557.aspx

One of a series of case studies about building business resilience to severe weather, developed as part of the Business Resilience in a Changing Climate (BRiCC) project, in partnership with the Environment Agency. Other case studies can be viewed at the web address below. Published March 2014.