

Disaster recovery checklist for small business

If your business is impacted by a disaster, such as a fire, flood, or major building damage, the following steps can help you assess the situation, minimise the impact and return to business as usual.

Assess the damage

Assess the damage to your business premises, equipment, and inventory:

- Confirm with emergency services that it's safe to enter your premises.
- Take photos, videos and detailed notes of the damage.
- Secure your premises to prevent further damage or theft.

Documentation and records

Gather or request copies of key documents such as:

- bank statements
- insurance policies
- tax records
- lease agreements
- contracts with clients and suppliers

Wellbeing and support

If you're feeling anxious, uncertain or just need someone to talk to, you can access free and confidential support services tailored for small business owners:

- Speak with your GP if you are feeling overwhelmed and anxious
- NewAccess for Small Business Owners – (03) 9250 8305
- Ahead for Business – aheadforbusiness.org.au
- Small Business Debt Helpline – 1800 413 828

Lease

Contact your landlord or managing agent to confirm when you can re-enter the premises to assess the damage (eg: what can be salvaged and whether operations can continue).

Review your lease agreement for:

- Rent abatement or termination clauses relating to unavailable property
- Any personal guarantees

Contact the SBDC's free business advisory service to speak to a specialist commercial tenancy adviser. Call 133 140 or book online at smallbusiness.wa.gov.au/business-advisory-service.

Financial impact

Seek guidance from your accountant about your cash flow and your ability to meet your financial obligations (wages, suppliers, creditors, rent, ATO, loans, credit cards).

Assess the effect on your personal finances including living expenses, rent or home mortgage.

Seek assistance and support from:

- Small Business Debt Helpline – 1800 413 828
- National Debt Help Line – 1800 007 007
- WA Rent Relief Program – warentrelief.org.au
- Emergency Relief and Food Access Service – 1800 979 777
- Vinnies Emergency Assistance and Support – 1300 794 054
- WA Connect – waconnect.org.au

Make an insurance claim

Review your insurance policy to determine:

- The types of events covered (eg. fire and flood)
- The cover for damage to buildings and equipment, loss of stock, business interruption and income protection.

Notify your insurer and lodge a claim.
Providing supporting evidence such as:

- Photos of the damage.
- Inventory of damaged or lost items (such as the cost and purchase date).
- Police or fire reports, if relevant.

Banking and tax hardship support

Contact your bank or lender to discuss hardship support options on loans and credit cards:

Request relief, deferral of repayments, interest only repayments or restructuring of loans.

Visit the Australian Banking Association Financial Assistance Hub information on banking hardship – ausbanking.org.au/financial-assistance-hub

If a disaster prevents you from paying fees or lodging documents for your company call ASIC on 1300 300 630.

Contact the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to discuss:

Extra time to make payments or lodge returns and activity statements.

Have a payment plan tailored to your situation.

Have penalties or interest waived during hardship.

Read the ATO's information on [support in difficult times](https://ato.gov.au/support) (ato.gov.au/support) or call 1800 806 218.

Utilities

Contact your utility providers and discuss hardship arrangements, payment deferrals or suspensions, renegotiation or cancellation of service. This includes:

- Electricity
- Water
- Gas
- Waste disposal
- Telephone and internet

Communicate with suppliers and customers

Use your website, social media, email lists to inform customers, suppliers and other stakeholders of the disruption to your business.

Provide regular updates: closures, reduced hours, alternative operations, recovery timeline.

Communicate milestones on returning to normal operations.

Employees

Keep staff informed about changes, closures, relocations, reduced operations.

Check your employer obligations for paid and unpaid leave and ending employment. For advice on employer obligations contact:

- [Fair Work Ombudsman](https://www.fairwork.gov.au) – 13 13 94 (companies)
- [Wageline](https://www.wageline.com.au) – 1300 655 266 (sole traders, partnership and unincorporated trust)

Supplier relationships

Notify suppliers about disruptions to your business and request to:

Pause orders, deliveries and forward commitments until operations resume.

Negotiate revised payment terms, where possible.

Alternative trading strategies

Explore short term or interim options to keep revenue flowing:

Operate under reduced hours or limited offerings.

Shift to, or expand to, online sales.

Consider temporary leasing, pop-up shops or market stalls.

Partner with other businesses to share space.

Hire or rent equipment, subcontract tasks, use co-working facilities.

Moving forward

Stabilise your finances, maintain customer and supplier relationships and process insurance claims.

Decide whether to close, rebuild, relocate or pivot your business operations.

Redesign your business to be more resilient. This can include:

- Diversify your revenue streams
- Implement risk management and business continuity planning

Download our [risk management templates](https://smallbusiness.wa.gov.au) and [business continuity plan](https://smallbusiness.wa.gov.au) from smallbusiness.wa.gov.au

Business Support from the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC)

Contact our free [business advisory service](https://smallbusiness.wa.gov.au/business-advisory-service) for advice and support. You can call us on 133 140 or visit smallbusiness.wa.gov.au/business-advisory-service to book an appointment online.