

Business owners learn disaster preparation



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By [Karen Pearlman \(/staff/karen-pearlman/\)](#) | 4:19 p.m. Feb. 4, 2016

SPRING VALLEY — Small business owners in San Diego County learned strategies to prepare for emergencies at a disaster preparedness forum Thursday at the Spring Valley Community Center.

Nearly 150 people listened to speakers from both public and private sectors at the two-hour meeting sponsored by the South County and East County economic development councils.

Topics included how businesses can protect themselves, employees and customers from natural and man-made disasters. Planning ahead for fires, what to do in a shooting and taking precautions against cyber crimes were also covered.

Some of the information dealt with general preparation — having an emergency first aid kit, knowing to “drop, cover and hold on” during an earthquake and keeping landscape trimmed to help defend against wildfires. Also recommended were keeping sandbags handy in an El Nino and stocking up on basic supplies like water, food, batteries and cash.

But specific additional guidelines for businesses were also shared by presenters including Mike Davis of the County Office of Emergency Services; Sara Agahi, flood control district manager of the County Department of Public Works; and Maricarmen Corum of San Diego Gas & Electric.

“Nearly 40 percent of small businesses don’t come back after natural disasters,” said Davis, who encouraged businesses to join the Ready San Diego Business Alliance, a free partnership program run by the county.

“Analyze your business and help predict consequences of some event happening,” he said. “Consider a variety of circumstances. This can help you save your business.”

Suggestions included having a written inventory of items in the business, including furniture, computers, office supplies, vehicles and equipment. Speakers recommended scanning important documents, such as business licenses and saving them to a storage device, and having a contact list for emergency personnel, employees and clients.

“Don’t panic, that’s most important,” Corum said. “You can create your own emergencies if you don’t do the right thing.”

Renee Hinton, who owns Bedrock Boulders & Landscape Products in El Cajon, said she gleaned important information from the forum. She and several people sitting with her downloaded an app from the Office of Emergency Services on their phones during the meeting. The app contains disaster preparedness information, offers interactive checklists to create an emergency plan, and when disaster strikes will show emergency updates, interactive maps and shelter locations.

“I also learned that I need to back up data off site,” Hinton said.

Jason Van’t Hof of the Law Enforcement Coordination Center explained best practices if an armed terrorist were to strike.

“Run, hide or fight,” until help comes, he said. When police arrive, he said, it is important to stay out of their way, don’t pick up any items, avoid quick movements and don’t reach for officers.

Presenters noted that most of the information shared can be accessed at readysandiego.org, which has links to other websites.

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