

# FM's Pandemic Role

BY STEPHEN BALLESTY – IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIRMAN FMA AUSTRALIA; DEPUTY CHAIRMAN FM ACTION AGENDA; MANAGING DIRECTOR ADVISORY, RIDER LEVETT BUCKNALL

IFMA Foundation's Pandemic Preparedness Manual is an essential 'how-to-guide' for any industry in our global economy. The new Manual is just another example of the crucial contribution that Facilities Management (FM) has made, not only to a "... productive and sustainable Built Environment ...", but in support of business and community well being.



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**A** pandemic is an epidemic, or an outbreak of an infectious disease, that spreads across a large region, for example a continent, or even worldwide, affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population.

Seasonal influenza (or flu) epidemics may stricken millions, but fatalities are typically confined to a relatively small numbers of the elderly, very young children, and people with weaken immune systems. That's not the case during the worst pandemics, when new viral strains can infect the general population on a global scale

We all have a vested interest in mitigating the impact of a pandemic, and FM has a role to play.

Influenza pandemics have struck about three times every century since the 1500's, or roughly every 25–40 years. The most infamous pandemic flu of the 20th century, was that of 1918–1919. It is estimated up to 200 million were infected, and over 50 million people died in less than a year. What made the 1918 outbreak so different from seasonal flu epidemics was that it killed primarily young people, a significant proportion of the mortality rate including those aged 20–45. By comparison the most recent pandemic, in 1968, was relatively mild.

Today, in addition to an indeterminate death toll, a similar influenza pandemic could conservatively lead to workplace absenteeism of 25 to 50 percent of employees for up to four months. This could potentially lead to supply chain disruptions and the possible closure of commercial and retail facilities, causing significant economic losses.

The IFMA Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to expanding knowledge of the Built Environment in a changing world, has released a new seminal guideline to assist organisations plan for, control and respond to these concerns. The *Pandemic Preparedness Manual*, which was funded by the IFMA Foundation and prepared by Environmental & Occupational Risk Management Inc., is now available as a free-of-charge download on the IFMA Foundation's website, [www.ifmafoundation.org](http://www.ifmafoundation.org)

The IFMA Foundation's Manual is intended to assist businesses and communities remain vigilant against these threats and be better prepared should a pandemic occur, covering:

- ▶ Avian flu and pandemic influenza basics
- ▶ Pandemic impact, pre-planning and response checklists
- ▶ FM measures for influenza control and mitigation
- ▶ Business continuity planning guidance, templates and samples

The risk of a pandemic outbreak has not subsided in recent years. Indeed, earlier this year, the Director-General of the World Health Organisation, Dr. Margaret Chan, stated that 'we shouldn't let our guard down when it comes to pandemic threats'. In recent memory we have seen the impact of the threat of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), avian influenza (H5N1) and other infectious outbreaks.

The avian influenza, or bird flu, is naturally occurring in bird populations and has spread to humans working in close contact with infected birds. While humans have been infected, currently it is not known to have become transmissible from human-to-human. Tips on avoiding bird flu infection:

- ▶ Avoid close contact with people who are already sick
- ▶ Be aware that surfaces may have the virus on them
- ▶ Stay home when you are sick
- ▶ Cover the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- ▶ Frequently wash hands with soap or alcohol-based cleaner
- ▶ Avoid touching the eyes, mouth or nose

The Manual advises employers on steps they can take to help control the flu beginning with employee training on awareness and prevention measures. Employers are encouraged to make supplies such as tissues, hand soap and sanitary wipes available, and to be vigilant in sanitising commonly touched surfaces.

To further deal with these issues, the Manual suggests that FM professionals perform pre-planning and develop business continuity plans. Pre-planning involves establishing internal and external communication protocols, reviewing corporate policies on pay, time off, visitor restrictions, travel restrictions and medical clearance. Triggers for building closure, mandatory absences and other preventative measures also should be put into place.

*Business Continuity Planning* (BCP) is an interdisciplinary peer mentoring methodology used to create and validate a practiced logistical plan to enable an organisation to recover and partially or completely restore interrupted critical function(s) within a predetermined time after a disaster or extended disruption. Disasters may be natural or human-made, regardless though without proper risk mitigation measures a disaster will cause disruptions that have serve financial and social consequences. It is worth noting that business interruption insurance does not cover everything which can cause an interruption to your business. A successful BCP should:

- ▶ Avoid developing a plan for multiple groups – the plan will become too cumbersome and will not enable users to quickly find information. Keep each plan targeted to those that will use it.
- ▶ Limit plans to critical functions. Avoid the temptation to add less critical functions; doing this obscures the most vital information and detracts from top priorities.
- ▶ Strive for simplicity. Assume that individuals in key roles are competent and don't need instructions on how to perform tasks.

In simple terms BCP should be able to deal with how an organisation prepares for future incidents that disrupt normal operations and supply chains. Incidents can be they local; building fires or power failures, regional; earthquakes or floods, or national / international; terrorism or pandemic diseases. A current *Risk Assessment* will be required, to establish the likelihood and consequences of an event, with particular focus on site specifics, pandemic risk factors and options. Further your BCP will typically involve a *Business Impact Analysis* (BIA), here the Facility Managers could be expected to scope and provide analysis on critical functions, vital records, primary and alternate sites, internal and external service dependencies, customer / stakeholder priorities and recovery planning.

In the end it's all about planning and implementing a return to 'business as usual', which in most organisations will ultimately fall to the FM department or provider.

However, BCP may also form part of an organisational learning culture helping reduce operational risks associated with poor information management controls. This process may be integrated with facility performance improvement, information security measures and corporate risk management practices.

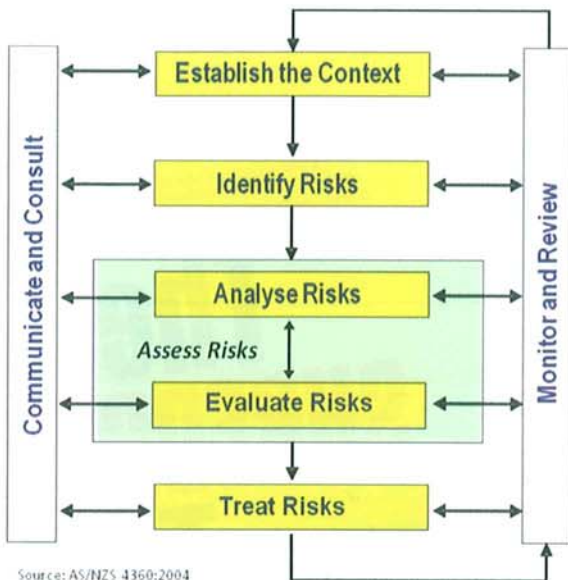
BCP methodology is scalable for an organisation of any size and complexity. Even though the methodology has roots in regulated industries, any type of organisation may create a BCP manual, and arguably some form of BCP is good business for every organisation concerned with its longevity. Compelling evidence for the case for BCP can be found in USA disaster survival statistics. Fires have been blamed for the permanent closure of up to 44% of the business affected. Specifically in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, 150 businesses out of 350 affected failed to survive the event. Conversely, the firms affected in 2001 by the September 11 attacks on the same site with well-developed and tested BCP manuals were back in business within days.

A BCP manual for a small organisation may be simply a printed manual stored safely away from the primary work location, containing the names, addresses, and phone numbers for crisis management staff, general staff members, clients, and vendors along with the location of the offsite data backup storage media, copies of insurance contracts, and other critical materials necessary for organisational survival. At its most complex, a BCP manual may outline a secondary work site, technical requirements and readiness, regulatory reporting requirements, work recovery measures, the means to reestablish physical records, the means to establish a new supply chain, or the means to establish new production centers. Firms should ensure that their BCP manual is current, realistic and easy to use during a crisis. As such, BCP sits along side crisis management and disaster recovery planning and is a part of an organisation's overall risk management procedures.

The development of a BCP manual can have five main phases:

- ▶ Analysis
- ▶ Solution design
- ▶ Implementation
- ▶ Testing and organisation acceptance
- ▶ Maintenance.

The above list is not exhaustive. There are a number of other



considerations that could be included in your own plan / manual; Functional priorities, Roles and Responsibilities, Identification of top risks and mitigating strategies, and consideration of resource reallocation e.g. skills matrix for larger organisations. Business Impact Analyses and Risk Assessments are valid only to the extent that they represent actual FM operations and priorities.

Many now argue the influenza pandemic clock is ticking and it is only a matter of time before another pandemic is launched upon an unprepared world. Certainly it would appear the world is long overdue for such an occurrence, and currently avian flu virus seems to have established a permanent niche among tens of millions of wild and domesticated birds throughout Asia. Should this virus change and spread to infect more hosts, and as resistance grows to existing antiviral drugs, some argue it is only a matter of time before the virus transforms into a deadly new human infection.

Regardless of the implications for human health and wellbeing which may confront the world, should a new pandemic human flu occur there will be a significant role for FM in meeting such challenges and restoring / maintaining 'business as usual'.



STEPHEN BALLESTY

#### About our contributor:

Stephen Ballesty, is FMA Australia's Immediate Past Chairman and their 2007 Member of the Year, Deputy Chairman FM Action Agenda and MD Advisory of Rider Levett Bucknall ([www.rlb.com](http://www.rlb.com)). Commencing 1st July, he is also now the first Australian appointed to the global Board of Trustees for the IFMA Foundation [www.ifmafoundation.org](http://www.ifmafoundation.org). The IFMA Foundation is a separate non profit

entity to the International Facility Management Association, which was formed in 1990 to promote and support scholarships, educational and research opportunities for the advancement of Facility Management worldwide. Should you require further details or wish to support FM research, education or scholarships please contact [stephen.ballesty@au.rlb.com](mailto:stephen.ballesty@au.rlb.com). The *National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic* outlines how Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments will work together to protect Australia against the threat of an influenza pandemic and support the Australian community should one occur. Useful references detailing Australian government pandemic response principles include:

[www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/pandemic/index.cfm](http://www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/pandemic/index.cfm)

[www.health.gov.au/pandemic](http://www.health.gov.au/pandemic)

[www.industry.gov.au/pandemicbusinesscontinuity](http://www.industry.gov.au/pandemicbusinesscontinuity)