The Case for "CEAS": Solving the Dilemma of Post Disaster Access Control

One of the quintessential issues that rise to the surface of nearly every major disaster is that of "post event access". How do we overcome the obstacles of getting critical, private sector people into an area that has been evacuated and cordoned off to the general public? How can we get needed supplies and service providers to the affected area? How can it be done in an orderly, safe, secure and rapid way? These questions have vexed emergency managers for quite some time. If we do not succeed in this endeavor, the risks of severe damage to critical infrastructure, the local economy and work force are inevitable and long term.

Restoring communities to pre-disaster levels is a task that can often take years. Restoring the businesses that are largely responsible for the resiliency of our infrastructure, economy and workforce, is key to a successful and rapid recovery. The creation of partnerships between the public and the private sectors expressly for the purpose of emergency preparedness can be the centerpiece of resolving this dilemma. Partnerships can take many forms but the development of a post emergency access control program for businesses is a worthy endeavor and one that has been on the collective minds of emergency managers for some time.

In 1999, the non-profit, Business Network of Emergency Resources, Inc. (BNET) released the final report of a study, funded by FEMA to determine what the most significant impediments to business recovery were following a disaster. The study, known as the *Joint Loss Reduction Partnership (JLRP)* was conducted in five (5) regions across New York State, including New York City. The overwhelming result of the study proved that "access to the workplace" was the number one impediment to business recovery. The study summarized the issue quite clearly; if businesses can't recover, communities can't recover.

 As a result of this, BNET set out act on the recommendations of the study and create the first community, post disaster access control system, known today as the **Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS)**. From its modest beginnings in the City of Buffalo NY, CEAS is now used in 7 major US Cities and surrounding counties. The success of CEAS can be attributed in part to the increased awareness at the local level of the vitally important role the private sector plays in emergency preparedness and response. CEAS is a true public-private partnership in the sense that there is real, tangible value for both sides of the partnership equation.

If you are fortunate enough to do business in a CEAS community, you may have been made aware of its existence at a meeting, conference or seminar. You may have thought to yourself, is CEAS right for my organization? How can I justify the need to participate in CEAS to my company executives? If I do participate, how can I determine, which employees in my company should be a CEAS cardholders? It is these common questions that this paper will try to answer for you.

If CEAS has not come to your community, now might be the time to discuss it with a local business group or trade organization or bring the idea to your public officials, who are well aware of the challenges they will face in a post disaster world but may not be aware of the CEAS program as a solution.

Making Effective Use of CEAS in My Company?

There are two challenges frequently faced by organizations considering the CEAS program. The first is determining if CEAS is right for my organization. The second and most challenging decision is, if CEAS is a good fit, who within my organization should have CEAS card and what is the most effective use of my company's allotment of cards? The goal of this document is to provide general guidance that will help you make these important decisions.

Does my company need CEAS?

To begin, it will be helpful to clearly define the purpose of the CEAS program to determine if your organization will benefit from participation in CEAS.   The CEAS program is an access control system used only in situations where government officials, as a result of a disaster or serious emergency, have instituted travel restrictions or created a restricted zone to protect a disaster site or to provide an exclusionary zone for emergency public safety operations. The system provides for the limited distribution of CEAS access credentials to area businesses on a pre-enrollment basis, meaning you must enroll in the CEAS program and have your cards before a disaster strikes. Once CEAS has been activated by local authority, the CEAS card allows the holder to travel during travel restrictions and/or access restricted areas for the purposes of entering their business facility(s). CEAS is not intended for business owners to conduct business as usual but to enable business continuity by maintaining core business functionalities, gaining access to vital records, equipment and information or by beginning assessment and restoration activities as quickly as possible so that once restrictions are lifted; the business is quickly able to resume normal operations. If your company can survive an extended business interruption, CEAS may not make sense for you. You must evaluate the extent of the damage both financial and reputational your business can withstand when you are physically unable to access your facility(s) for an extended period of time (at least 2 business days). If the impact is medium to high, CEAS is an affordable tool to mitigate this risk and provide peace of mind.

OK, CEAS makes sense for my company, but which of my employees should have a CEAS card?

No two companies are alike, no two industries are alike, and therefore, it would be impractical to provide a cookie-cutter approach for all businesses to follow when it comes to deciding what personnel should receive CEAS cards. Instead, each company who elects to participate in CEAS should conduct an internal self-assessment to help make these determinations. Many larger companies have extensive business continuity plans that help define who, or at least what job titles, are critical to business recovery. Not all companies have the financial wherewithal or personnel to devote to business continuity planning; therefore some level of self-assessment needs to be conducted before determining who should be a CEAS cardholder in your company.

BNET in partnership with the Institute for Business and Home Safety has provided CEAS users with *"Open for Business"*, a free business continuity planning toolkit to assist you in making these self-assessments. The toolkit is designed for small to medium businesses and walks users step by step through the process of creating a simple business continuity plan and helps to establish priorities in making critical decisions. If your company has not planned for business continuity in the past, *Open for Business* will get you on the right path. If you've done some planning but need more structure or plan updating, this free tool will help.

Using CEAS in the Context of Your Business Continuity Plan:

Risk Assessment/ Hazard Analysis

At the highest level, the business continuity planning process first evaluates hazards and risks to the business and assesses the impact of those risks to the business. This is known as conducting a "Risk or Hazard Analysis". These hazards can run the gamut from fire to hurricanes depending on your business type and location. For the purpose of CEAS, it is most important to focus on only those hazards that can result in restrictions on travel or physical access to your facilities.

> *For Example: A recall of your product due to product tampering may be a real and serious risk to the business; however, it will rarely cause access problems.*

Once the risks have been identified, the impact of the risk must be quantified. Does the potential exist for an area evacuation or the imposition of a travel ban or access restrictions? Again, the primary concerns as it relates to CEAS are to focus on those events where the potential for travel or access restrictions exist. Finally, the risks and impacts should be ranked based on their adverse affect potential on the business.

Defining Your Critical Business Processes

Once the risks and the impacts have been fully considered, a business should begin to define the actual business processes that are critical to its viability. These "Critical Business Processes" are those functions your company, or an outside contractor, performs that are absolutely necessary to deliver your product or service. Unless these processes are returned to operation within a reasonable or specified amount of time, there is a real and tangible risk that your business will suffer extreme losses or be irreparably damaged.   This is often referred to as your "recovery time objective" or the time in which your business processes need to be restored to avoid serious impact. A business continuity or recovery plan will describe means and methodologies to protect these critical business processes.   If a hazard should impact the company the business continuity plan will also describe specific contingencies to keep those functions operating or to restore functions within a predefined recovery window. Once the critical business processes are identified, they too should be ranked in priority of importance.

These assessments and plans can be simple or very complex depending on the size and type of business you are in, but are key components when it comes to determining who in your organization should have a CEAS card. When making these determinations it is important to keep in mind that critical business

processes require people to make them happen; even if that process is completely automated, there is usually an IT or mechanical professional behind its functionality. In most cases it is the personnel behind these processes that will be on your list of cardholders.

It All Comes Down to People

The last piece of the puzzle is to identify the personnel who are critical to the restoration of the above described business processes. Keep in mind that you likely will NOT be able to staff the entire function due to the limitations on the amount of CEAS cards available to you, so you must be selective regarding who and how many individuals will receive CEAS cards. Your personnel selections should be based around the priority of importance placed on the business process.   This will give your company the ability to enable that "Critical Employee" who is behind a "Critical Business Process" to be able to perform his or her job during an emergency or disaster to help maintain the viability of the company. Consider your personnel carefully when you are deciding who should get CEAS cards, you will want to your most reliable, dependable employees, those whom you can count on in a crisis.

No Business Continuity Plan, No Problem

Not every company has a well developed business continuity plan in place to help them determine employee criticality, but most business owners have an innate sense of who is important to their business. Intuition is one way of assigning CEAS cards, but not the most reliable. The last thing you want during a crisis is to realize that that your intuition was wrong. But by simply going through some basic steps and self assessments outlined above, your critical business functions and personnel will begin to stand out.   The *"Open for Business"* toolkit referred to earlier can help with these assessments.

Some General Rules of Thumb

There are as many commonalities as there are differences regarding the assignment of CEAS cards. Selecting qualified staff to address critical business processes is essential to a successful recovery. A job title that is critical to a brokerage firm may not even exist in a manufacturing firm. There are however, some general functions that are essential to "most" businesses that may not be viewed as "business functions" related to the delivery of a product or service but are indirectly responsible for your ability to deliver them.

> *For Example: if you operate within a large commercial building there are certain building related functions that will always be essential to your recovery. These can be as basic as heat and water. While your facility HVAC may not be directly related to production or service delivery, without it you may not be able to occupy your facility.*

In this and most instances, facilities personnel will be part of your company's contingent of cardholders. Getting your facility in condition to operate is typically an essential business recovery operation.

Some of the most common functions organizations include in their CEAS card assignments are discussed below. Keep in mind there may be functions unique to your business that are not covered here but should be considered:

- **Facilities**: In order to bring your facility back up and running these employees will be critical. Facilities employees will be responsible to assess any damage to building infrastructure and correct it. Often times government agencies will not allow your reoccupy of a structure until certain issues have been mitigated. Therefore, as a rule of thumb those responsible for your building should be considered in your CEAS card allotments.
    - Note: If you do not own and operate your own facility it will be incumbent of you to ensure that your property manager is aware of the CEAS program and has sufficient plans for building access during an emergency.
- **Security**: Many companies' staff or contract security services. Security is often a corporate first responder during an emergency. If securing your assets is a priority for your company you may want to consider assigning some CEAS cards to these staff or have your security contractor enroll in CEAS.
- **Information Technology**: Today almost every business relies in some way on Information Technology. More often than not it is the backbone that supports your company. To get back in business, technology infrastructure needs to be restored or preserved. A team of IT professionals to respond to your facility will likely be a priority.
- **Essential Service Providers**: In today's business environment, companies increasingly outsource business functions, many of which can be considered critical. If your business can not function or recover without these service providers they must be worked into your CEAS card assignments. Alternatively, you can make your contractors aware of CEAS and encourage them to enroll. Some companies, as part of due diligence, require contractors to provide business continuity plans. Companies may want to consider building CEAS participation into their contracts as a requirement to obtaining or maintaining the contract.

In the scenario outlined above, CEAS allows participants to either enroll their essential service providers under their own application or under the contractors own application. As a general rule of thumb, if your service provider assigns the same individuals to you on a daily basis, it may make more sense to include those personnel under your employee allotments. If you see someone different every day, it may make more sense for your contractor to enroll in CEAS and assign cards internally to service you. If you require guidance, speak to a CEAS support specialist to find out what works best for your company.

Summary

Whether or not your company should participate in CEAS will include many factors, the most important of which is how tolerant your company is to business interruption. If like many business who participate in CEAS you've determined that the rewards outweigh the risks of non participation, you will need to take a systematic approach to assessing your business and determining the key personnel that you would like to be CEAS cardholders.

Your business continuity plan or self assessment should define the physical risks your company faces, the impact of those risks and a prioritization of what risks are most likely to result in evacuation, travel

bans or area access restrictions. A review of the critical business processes your company performs to deliver its product or service should be conducted. A list of the key staff required making those processes function or return to its normal state in a timely fashion is essential. These are the individuals who are your most likely candidates to receive a CEAS card. Finally, do not forget to look at those daily, routine functions performed in your company or by an outside contractor that can adversely impact your recovery efforts if not maintained. Some common functions include facility operations, protection, IT and services provided by outside contractors.

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