

COMMERCIAL WATER RESTORATION PRODUCTION

Executing a commercial water damage loss requires a different set of skills and knowledge, and this “education gap,” if exposed, can spell doom for your restoration project. All parties on the commercial level have an expectation from the restorer that will not allow for incompetence or indecision. Nor will they allow for “on the job training” and mistakes in



understanding “how the game is played.” Before ever starting your first commercial restoration project, it is important to get this education and understand the value of information and how to implement it on the job. CREST is right here, by your side, for this important lesson.

The first key to success on executing a commercial project properly comes before the loss ever occurs.

PROPER STRUCTURAL PREPARATION AND PLANNING is vital to your company’s ability to make a good first impression. Showing up unprepared and unplanned is the



surest way to get yourself behind the “eight-ball” and hamper your chances of success. Let’s make sure that, first and foremost, you have identified your key person to run the project. That person- hopefully a well- educated and trained project manager who has read and watched most of CREST’s commercial training manuals and videos- will be the lynchpin for your

response. They will handle the checklists for loading the truck, response protocols and initial scope walkthroughs.

In addition to the key person, it is also important to anticipate the equipment and supply needs for a commercial loss.

Many times, the restorer will get the call for the large loss and overreact, throwing literally everything they have into every truck, sending out every person in the company, hoping to fool the client into believing that their size and capabilities are greater than they really are. This is NOT the time for the adage, "Fake it 'til you make it!" DO NOT PRETEND.



Instead, PREPARE. Proper planning can make your response more legitimate and fit into your business strategy for commercial- respond quickly, assess the situation, and then act. Your equipment and staffing needs should be determined after a thorough and complete walkthrough and consultation with all parties. There is time for this. On your initial response, think in terms of *stabilization*; bring things like extractors, air scrubbers and containment to the site right away, followed by your demo items (pry bars, demo tools, wheelbarrows, trach bags, etc.) and then drying equipment. There is no need to show off your inventory by loading the hallways with air movers, which may not be deployed for several hours - or days!



The second key to success is a word that seems easy to explain, but in reality, it is something that escapes most restorers the second they get on the project. That word is **CONFIDENCE**. You must have confidence in your abilities, but it must be based on planning and preparation, not on hubris or cockiness. At this level, you can't smooth talk the property managers and adjusters just by spouting a resume of success on the neighbor's home. These

professionals are going to sniff you out in a heartbeat, so there is no faking it. You need to prepare and plan, training, and training until you know that you can handle it.



There is a real misconception about commercial restoration: speed wins the job. Yes, getting to the site quickly is important. Once there, a good rule of thumb is to **slow down** as much as possible. First, get all your paperwork signed. This includes your work authorization AND your custom price list if you want to invoice using Time and Materials (recommended- see the Invoicing manual). You should not do

anything in the building without this paperwork. You can fall prey into starting work and thinking you are doing a great job, only to get thrown off when, hours later, their “preferred vendor” finally shows up. You have done the hard work and will get nothing out of it!

The third key to success is **COMMUNICATION**. There is an obligation on your part to be as transparent as possible. Share your thoughts with everyone and listen to theirs as well. Yes, you are the restoration expert, but on commercial losses there is more to the equation than just the science of drying at stake. Understand this and make room in your plans for differing opinions and thoughts. This will make for a much better outcome.

To that end, take your time walking the loss (with the property manager or owner, if possible), pointing out anything and everything that you are seeing. Use this time to develop trust and confidence between you and the decision-maker. This is a valuable period, as it will lay the groundwork for every second that will follow. It is important at this point to gather as much information as you can about the business within the building. Find out what they do, how big or successful the business is, and what their staffing would normally be under everyday circumstances. These data points are useful when developing your drying plan. They will give you perspective on whether or not the building can be shut down, whether or not operations can be suspended or modified, and whether or not you will be the main part of the response or just a small factor.



Once you have walked the loss and spoken to the decisionmaker(s), the next step is to try to have contact with the adjuster. Unlike a residential loss, it is particularly important to include the insurance company in your plans. In a house loss, there are very few discrepancies most times between what needs to be done and what your plans for accomplishing those goals entail. The adjuster usually sees things your way and things go smoothly. In a home, there are most times no concerns about business interruption, additional incurred expenses or business personal property that can change the importance of our work.



Commercial losses face these other risks almost every time. There must be a balancing act that focuses on the relative importance of several factors. Take a hotel, for instance. Your initial plan of action may be the one that is easiest for you to execute (use of stairs or elevators, access to the affected rooms, staffing, time frames for execution of the work, etc.) but will create additional problems and costs for both the manager and the carrier. Instead, they will want you to change the plan of action to include working in specific areas of the

hotel at certain times, allowing the hotel to continue functioning in the rest of the building without much interruption. This change might mean that you have to use freight elevators or back staircases to remove debris, and that you must park your vehicles in the back of the hotel even if the best access is out the front door.



There might have to be more containment erected to protect guests from stray debris or dust- and to keep snooping guests from wanting to enter your loss sight. The carrier will want the hotel to be able to continue operations at all cost, as closing the facility will result in much larger payments to the owner from the policy for loss of revenue and business interruption coverages. Your increased invoice will pale in comparison to this check, so they will push you to be creative and keep the building open. By the way, there are six terrific manuals targeted on specific building types (or “verticals”) that are on the CREST website, addressing in greater detail many of the unique issues you will face in that type of building loss. Please feel free to study them before the call comes in!



Your conversations with the adjuster should be factual and open. You should give your “take” on the situation and provide the adjuster with your **plan of action**. Then, you **MUST** allow for his input and opinion. On these projects, your ego must take a back seat to collaboration. It is in your interest - and the interest of your client - to work with the insurer to get to a workable solution and plan for your work.

Another part of the process that cannot be ignored is the simple fact that the adjuster will engage several “experts” to assist him on his claim process. These experts will be



there representing the adjuster and carrying out his mandate. Mostly, they will interact with all parties on the claim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the work and files. Included among them will be construction experts who will want to discuss the project and your plan with you. On residential losses, these parties show up **AFTER** the project is completed and work to undermine our work and invoice. These third

party, peer review companies are not part of the process and should be treated with disdain or suspicion. On commercial losses, however, these companies **are** part of the process while the project is going on and have earned a seat at the table.



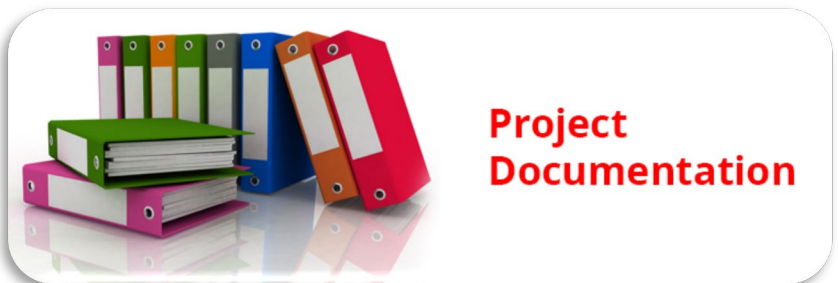
For us to properly work with the carrier and maximize our ability to get paid on the project, we should include these experts in our conversations, take their advice and guidance to heart, and collaborate as much as possible within our own priorities and guidelines for a successful project.

Once there is consensus on how to proceed, **ONLY THEN** should you start to mobilize your staff according to the agreed-upon plan. “Spiking the job” is never a good idea, and only points out your lack of knowledge of the commercial process.

Needless to say, all communications with the owner, property manager and the insurance professionals should all be documented. If these conversations are taking place in person or over the phone, **PLEASE** make sure that you have someone taking notes of the meetings, and then those notes are memorialized in emails to everyone involved in the loss. This method of keeping everyone in the loop is vital to your success, as it guarantees that, later, no one will question your intent or actions.



As we hinted at before, the final key to the commercial restoration process is **DOCUMENTATION**. Everything must be documented to prove what we are going to invoice. Conversation should be written down to support our actions; workers should sign in and out of the project to prove their hours billed; equipment should be logged and photographed to prove their use. Moisture maps should be created to justify the use of the equipment. Consumables logs should track the use of plastic, filters, PPE, and other items. If you can't prove it, you can't charge for it. If you remember this simple phrase you will understand the importance of documentation.



**Project
Documentation**



When finally executing the project, please keep in mind that there can be vast differences between the materials and building techniques on a commercial building compared to what you have experienced in a residence. Most of us know most commercial walls have metal beams, not wood. We may also know that commercial carpeting is different than residential. There will be others, however, that may be unique or new to you.

For instance, you may not know that in structures that require an enhanced level of fire rating on the walls and ceilings (hotels, multiple residences, etc.), the builder may have used multiple layers of thicker drywall, different insulation, and fire caulking around all of the electrical boxes in the wall. Educate yourself on commercial building codes and read up on some types of structures. This will save you time, effort and (possibly) embarrassment in the future.

As you progress through the loss, there will inevitably be changes or hurdles in the way of your initial scope and plan of action. When these arise, once again your first instinct will be wrong. Please don't steamroll ahead and fix the problem. Instead, slow down again and communicate your issues with the parties. Get consensus on the next steps and work collaboratively with everyone to relieve the pressure- both on the project and on you!





Once the work is completed, make sure that two things happen right away: first, provide the owner and their reps with your invoice as soon as possible. If you are working the project utilizing all the techniques and training derived from the CREST program, you should be able to generate the invoice within a day of finishing your work. Please refer to the CREST Invoicing manual before starting

your project. It will give you the roadmap to successful invoice preparation and collection.

Second, provide the owner and their representatives with all your supporting documentation. Remember, it is your responsibility to document everything that happens on the project. There are a multitude of forms on the CREST website that are specifically designed to help you document your work. Labor logs, equipment logs and consumables logs, along with meeting notes logs and other field docs, are available for you to guarantee proper documentation of the project.

Commercial water restoration production does not have to be overwhelming or daunting. There are a ton of resource and support materials available to you as a CREST Member, and you always have the ability, at any level of Membership, to enlist the support of our stable of experts to guide you through your loss. Our team has hundreds of years of experience on large loss and has worked with hundreds of restorers around the globe, making their work easier and more profitable. Reach out to CREST to be your support system on your loss.



For additional questions or challenges you may encounter, please call or email:

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