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DEFINITION

contingency plan

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🧭   This definition is part of our Essential Guide: Disaster prevention and mitigation strategies: Strike early and often

A contingency plan is a course of action designed to help an organization respond effectively to a significant future event or situation that may or may not happen.

A contingency plan is sometimes referred to as "Plan B," because it can be also used as an alternative for action if expected results fail to materialize. Contingency planning is a component of business continuity, disaster recovery and risk management.

The seven-steps outlined for an IT contingency plan in the NIST 800-34 Rev. 1 publication are:

1. **Develop the contingency planning policy statement.** A formal policy provides the authority and guidance necessary to develop an effective contingency plan.

2. **Conduct the business impact analysis (BIA).** The BIA helps identify and prioritize information systems and components critical to supporting the organization's mission/business functions.

3. **Identify preventive controls.** Measures taken to reduce the effects of system disruptions can increase system availability and reduce contingency life cycle costs.

4. **Create contingency strategies.** Thorough recovery strategies ensure that the system may be recovered quickly and effectively following a disruption.

5. **Develop an information system contingency plan.** The contingency plan should contain detailed guidance and procedures for restoring a damaged system unique to the system's security impact level and recovery requirements.

6. **Ensure plan testing, training and exercises.** Testing validates recovery capabilities, whereas training prepares recovery personnel for plan activation and exercising the plan identifies planning gaps; combined, the activities improve plan effectiveness and overall organization preparedness.

7. **Ensure plan maintenance.** The plan should be a living document that is updated regularly to remain current with system enhancements and organizational changes.

See a discussion of what a contingency plan is and is not:

Contingency Planning: What It Is and What It Is Not

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This was last updated in September 2015

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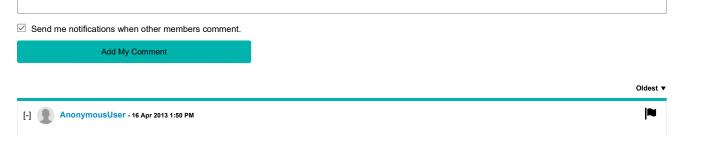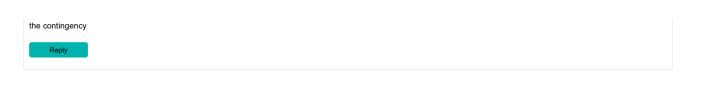
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