

Disasters: Plans All Climbing Gyms Can Have In Place

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Posted By: **Robert C. Angell LLC** in [CWA Blog](#)



We watched the news accounts in horror. Flash floods caused by almost unimaginable amounts of rainfall struck along the Guadalupe River and its tributaries in the Texas Hill Country over Fourth of July Weekend. At least 135 people died. Among the dead were at least 27 campers and staff at Camp Mystic, a girls' camp at the intersection of the Guadalupe and Cyprus Creek.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Robert Angell, the CWA's General Counsel. Robert writes legal and claim-related articles for the CWA.
- **Who Should Read:** Decision makers in the indoor climbing industry and senior managers in indoor climbing gyms.
- **What Will You Learn:** Ways that various disasters can impact your business, and steps you can have in place before that happens.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** Throughout the article, we reference the [Ready.gov \(U.S\) site](#) for their best practices on steps that can be taken ahead of time.

Incoming Disasters

The Guadalupe River floods almost every year. But this flood was caused by an amount of rainfall that even the National Weather Service did not anticipate. Urgent flash flood warnings were broadcast, but many people were asleep and did not hear them.

Now that recovery efforts are being concluded, the question on everyone's mind is: Could the loss of life have been avoided, and if so, how?

The flood was described as a 100-year flood, but it struck in an area known as Flash Flood Alley. According to BBC Verify, the cabins at Camp Mystic were built too close to the river. Other camps along the river, where cabins were built on higher ground, sustained damage but not loss of life.

Your gym may not be in a flood plain. But hazards of all kinds may await you, regardless of where your facility is located. The southern suburbs of Oklahoma City have been described as the most tornado-prone area in the world, and tornadoes have occurred in every state and every month of the year. (This summer has seen rare high-altitude tornadoes in Colorado.)

If you operate a climbing gym in southern California, you may already have had the experience of feeling the earth move under your feet, or had your operation threatened by wildfire. A hurricane devastated areas in the Great Smoky Mountains last year.

CWA Resources

The CWA's ClimbSmart! Initiative has many posters available to help mitigate risk in your facility with visible, easy to read, signage. Explore our different signage opportunities below, priced special for CWA members.

[Apply Here](#)

Add to that the threat of man-made disasters – terrorism, crime, civil disturbance – and thinking about this subject can be daunting.

The CWA presented a panel at the 2025 CWA Summit about disaster preparedness, interviewing gym owners in Texas and Tennessee about their experiences and how they dealt with them.

Many disasters are hard to completely avoid, as we alluded to above. Some of it, however, can be mitigated by strengthening your community before the disaster. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many gym owners saw their customers, surprisingly, hold onto their membership even during closures. If they didn't, our COVID-19 data dashboards showed that membership did come back. Mask mandates and proof-of-vaccination proved to be another challenge to some customers, but gyms managed to navigate that too. Disasters can take many forms, it's important to remember they don't all come in the form of floodwaters.

However, hopefully you will never have to deal with a disaster on the scale of the Texas flood, or any disaster, for that matter. But it is a good idea to be as well prepared as possible.

What Are Your Disaster Preparedness Plans?

The good news is that disaster preparedness plans are available. The Department of Homeland Security's [Ready.gov site](#) is a great starting point. They break down four areas of business disaster preparedness.

Business Continuity Plan: [See Resources Here](#)

In essence, this is the more complicated document. Ready.gov has more than nine videos and many downloadable resources on building a BCP, but the very simple versions involve asking questions about what your team will do in the initial phases of various disasters, and what steps need to be taken in what order. A crucial part of this is that every role knows when to do what.

Crisis Communications: [See Resources Here](#)

Building out a crisis communication plan is something every business should have in place, and can turn to immediately. Hopefully handled by communications or marketing teams, but simple enough to delegate to senior managers, this will involve identifying the type of communications and persons that need to be notified in what order, according to the disaster. Depending on the type of disaster, emergency services are the likely first call. But who is the second? When do you notify families, your members, and your insurance company?

Emergency Response: [See Resources Here](#)

What do you do in the first minute? Is this an emerging disaster, like a fire or a shooting or a catastrophic injury, or is this a natural disaster that requires you to close your doors (or shelter in place?) When calling emergency services, what types of information do you need to have ready for the dispatcher to assist you?

IT Disaster Recovery: [See Resources Here](#)

As the name suggests, this refers to restoring (or preventing the loss of) critical data and informational infrastructure that your business needs to function. Some of this is hardware like laptops, hard drives, etc., and others is software that needs to be stored securely and rebooted when the time comes. Something as simple as having a digital vault that stores important passwords so different folks in a chain of command can login to systems could be invaluable.

Identify Your Unique Vulnerabilities

Beyond having a written emergency response plan, take some time to look over your facility with these considerations in mind. Engage in some "what-if" thinking to see where your operation may be vulnerable and how best to protect it.

"If 'X' happens, what do we need to do? Can we remain open? How do we best protect our staff

and patrons if disaster strikes?"

That is probably not the most pleasant way to spend a couple of hours, but you have a great deal invested in your gym: money, time, training, perseverance, and love. Protecting that investment is well worth some time and planning.

About The Author



Robert Angell is an Ohio- and Colorado-licensed attorney concentrating in the areas of administrative law, recreation, amusement, and entertainment law, and business formation. He served on the CWA Board of Directors from 2006 to 2013 and was reappointed to the Board in 2019. Bob has been instrumental in regulatory initiatives on behalf of CWA members across the U.S. since 2005. His clients include many gyms in Ohio and other states.



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