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Information Management: Now a Business-Critical Choice

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In the early morning hours of Sept. 4, Hurricane Ike, a massive storm 240 miles in diameter with sustained winds of 145 mph, hit the coast of Texas. As the storm slammed across the state, it triggered flooding that caused \$27 billion in property destruction, 32 deaths and the evacuation of more than a million people in Texas alone.

The city of Houston, not normally considered a target of tropical storms, sustained severe flooding, loss of power and shut-downs of such companies as Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips, and BASF. Equally devastating was the storm's impact on thousands of hospitals, schools and small businesses.

That's because without a plan in place to deal not only with loss of power but damage to vital busi-

ness files and records, an organization's ability to resume operations can be severely compromised. Thus, to the many challenges of running an organization these days, you can now add information management and continuity planning.

Here are three key reasons why:

- Regulatory mandates that require maintenance of medical and financial records
- Economic incentives to maximize costly real estate used for physical records storage
- Contingency and continuity planning for fires, floods, earthquakes or other natural disasters

Virtually every organization in the health care field is seeking better ways to manage, archive and retrieve its business critical data, often by securing the services of an outside information management provider.

When outsourcing makes sense

Here are key questions to ask when vetting a potential partner in managing health care files and business data.

Records management. Can you develop a customized program to keep our physical files securely archived and accessible for rapid retrieval?

Compliance management. How will you reduce our risk exposure regarding compliance with HIPAA Sarbanes-Oxley and other regulatory mandates?

Imaging services. Do you provide trained staff to help us convert smoothly from physical files to electronic data?

Business continuity planning. Can you help us prepare a comprehensive recovery plan focused on data security and retrieval?

Without question, your organization benefits by moving aging files and physical records off-premises and using the space they occupied to more profitable advantage. But comprehensive information management only begins—not ends—with the archiving process.

Like the Boy Scouts, managers must always be prepared—for the worst that can occur.

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