



**DISASTER
RECOVERY
SERVICES**

10 QUALITY CHECKPOINTS FOR DISASTER RECOVERY PROVIDERS



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Introduction

“Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.” As heavyweight champion boxer Mike Tyson knew all too well, what defines you is not adversity itself but how you respond to that adversity.

The same is true when a business faces an emergency, such as a hurricane, earthquake, flood, fire, or other disaster. In the moment, the business needs to figure out how to salvage what it can, but it also needs to act with an eye toward full recovery. Businesses need a partner that can help them determine the extent of the damage and plan repairs.

But how can businesses choose the right partner when every disaster recovery company seems to offer the same services and make the same glowing claims about their work?

One critical factor to consider is quality, which includes a number of dimensions. Ten provider attributes affect quality:

1. Self-performance
2. Consistency
3. Customer service and communication
4. Estimate and scope development
5. Technology
6. Safety
7. Compliance
8. Licenses and certifications
9. Training
10. Culture

The following pages depict how each of these dimensions informs what businesses should look for when choosing a disaster recovery or environmental remediation provider.



1. Self-Performance

Many disaster recovery companies are either small “mom-and-pop” shops or franchise-based small firms. The demands of disasters and emergencies make it hard for smaller companies to scale a response quickly, and to multiple customers, given their limited resources. Their services are better geared toward day-to-day, small-scale events that are limited in their impact.

To handle major projects, smaller disaster recovery providers typically recruit a temporary labor force to handle surges in demand. That often means they have a harder time ensuring that workers have the necessary qualifications, that work meets the appropriate standards, and that project outcomes are up to expectations. In some cases, they’ll fall behind on deadlines and may not be able to finish the work—or finish it to their customers’ standards. While temporary labor may be suitable for some job tasks that can be completed by general labor, it may be difficult to control quality when specialized workers are needed on disaster recovery projects.

Large-scale disasters require large-scale providers. They have the requisite experience in managing catastrophe recovery. They also have unmatched organizational depth, experienced technicians, state-of-the-art equipment, and vetted national resources. And, depending on where the disaster occurs, larger providers also have the ability to deploy resources from outside an impact zone. Larger providers maintain adequate numbers of dedicated, trained employees who are able to absorb the workload of a major project, no matter where it’s located. Given their resources, they’re better able to devise and implement a customized recovery plan and work around the clock so businesses can reopen their doors sooner.

Additionally, firms that aren’t franchisees can coordinate better on catastrophic events because they can quickly mobilize staff and equipment from across multiple offices to address widespread events. In short, a provider that can self-perform the majority of the required services through a centralized governance structure gives optimum control over the scope of work, the schedule, the budget, safety, and quality. And, as a result, businesses can get back up to speed quickly and limit operational interruption.



ASK THESE QUESTIONS TO ASSESS THE RELIABILITY OF A DISASTER RECOVERY PROVIDER’S WORKFORCE:

- How large is your company’s workforce?
- How many technicians do you employ full-time?
- How many contractors’ licenses do you hold?
- How much of your work is self-performed?
- Do you have the capacity to work 24/7, including on the weekends?



2. Consistency

It's important to ensure that national organizations with multiple locations consistently deliver on their brand promise. The same is true of a disaster recovery services provider.

Many disaster recovery companies are national in scope. Franchises may advertise that they're all part of the same national brand, but that doesn't mean that they'll deliver the same service if a business is unlucky enough to suffer a hurricane in Florida, a flood in Texas, and a wildfire in California.



CONSISTENCY OF SERVICE MATTERS, PARTICULARLY WHEN A BUSINESS NEEDS TO ACT IMMEDIATELY TO RESPOND TO A DISASTER. BUSINESSES NEED TO FIND A PROVIDER THAT THEY CAN TRUST. ASK THESE QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE WHETHER A PROVIDER CAN OFFER CONSISTENTLY RELIABLE SERVICE, NO MATTER WHERE A DISASTER OCCURS:

- Do you use a franchise model?
- How do you ensure consistency in the delivery of your services in every location?
- What references do you have for similar work performed in my location(s)?
- How much of your disaster recovery work do you subcontract at each of your locations?
- Will you be using subcontractors for this project? If so, what licenses, certifications, and registrations do they have? What references do they have?
- What structures and processes do you use to oversee the delivery of the work?



3. Customer Service and Communication

Poor communication is a serious red flag and a common failure point for disaster recovery providers.

If a business coordinates a project with a national disaster recovery provider but then is transferred to a local franchise for the work itself, there's often a disconnect. If the company promised one thing and the franchise has fallen short or gone radio silent, the business is probably worried about the status of the project. In the aftermath of a crisis, businesses should be able to rely on a provider to keep them apprised of the status of the work and the timeline for completion. Businesses shouldn't have to check up to make sure that a disaster provider is living up to its commitments.

That's why it's important to look for a provider with strong project management, customer service, and communication capabilities. A disaster recovery team should commit to touchpoints in a service level agreement, and a dedicated project director should ensure that the team is adhering to its promises. This quality of delivery extends to all communications and documentation as well, from the initial estimate and scope documents to daily progress reports to invoicing.



TO MAKE SURE YOUR DISASTER RECOVERY PROVIDER UNDERSTANDS THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- What are your expectations for communication?
- How often will you communicate with us?
- How will you keep us updated on the status of our project?
- Is someone available to answer our questions 24/7/365?
- How do you ensure your work meets our standards for quality?
- What mechanisms do you have in place to get feedback on your work?
- How will you follow up if we are dissatisfied with the work and/or progress on our project?
- Do you have a net promoter score (NPS)? If so, what is it?

4. Scope Development

Once a provider has been selected, it's beyond frustrating to be quoted a reasonable estimate, only to reach the cost ceiling and have expenses continue to pile up with no end in sight. Providers that follow the same process for every type of damage can create cost overruns, delays, and safety problems.

That's why a provider should offer a customized proposal that takes into account all of the unique features of a property and the catastrophe at hand. It's also important for a provider to be well-versed in the latest technology, so they can use all the tools at their disposal to accurately estimate and complete the work required.

While it's often difficult to predict changes in the scope of work for disaster recovery and particularly remediation, businesses must be able to trust that the cost estimate is reliable. Keep in mind, of course, that with certain projects, such as remediation of water damage where a provider might only discover mold behind drywall after a cavity is opened, costs can rise unpredictably.



FIND OUT HOW ACCURATE A PROSPECTIVE PROVIDER'S ESTIMATES ARE BY ASKING QUESTIONS LIKE THESE:

- What is your estimated value for the project?
- What assumptions about the scope of work have you based your estimate on?
- What is your timeline for completion?
- Have you performed projects like this before? Did you exceed your anticipated contract value on those projects?
- What is the typical accuracy of your scope of work?
- What unforeseen factors might shift the ultimate cost of this project?



5. Technology

Innovative technology can expedite the process of repairing and restoring business assets. Before a disaster strikes, technology can help assess buildings and property so a business can understand the baseline and evaluate potential risks. Post-disaster technology can help rapidly evaluate the damage, accelerating the insurance claims cycle and speeding up disaster recovery so that the business can continue to function with as little disruption as possible.

For example, geospatial scans, which are more accurate than manual sketches, can deliver a comprehensive, interactive model complete with dimensions and notes. With these scans, businesses can eliminate the need for multiple time-consuming inspections and extensive paperwork. Aerial imagery can also reduce inspection time and help document measurements and roof characteristics. Drones can collect data that is then refined through multi-image triangulation, projective mapping, and other advanced techniques. The more accurate the site map, the more accurate the estimate and the better the results.



ASK THE POTENTIAL PROVIDER THESE QUESTIONS TO DISCOVER THE EXTENT OF THEIR TECHNOLOGICAL PROWESS:

- What technology do you use to accelerate disaster recovery?
- Can you quantify the gains you experience from your use of technology in the recovery and restoration process?
- How do you ensure the accuracy of your site maps and models?
- How do you use technology to improve customer service and communication?



6. Safety

Safety should be a priority for any disaster recovery project. That means that the provider should offer thorough, regular safety training for its workers.

At a minimum, disaster recovery workers and supervisors should be trained in how to use personal protective equipment and how to identify, prevent, and control hazards. They should also be focused on ensuring that the work environment stays as clean and orderly as possible. When business employees are trying to operate alongside restoration work, it's critical that they are not subjected to dangerous working conditions.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training is particularly beneficial for restoration workers. OSHA safety training provides a baseline introduction to workplace safety hazards and workers' rights under OSHA laws and regulations. A 10-hour OSHA course helps entry-level workers recognize, avoid, abate, and prevent workplace hazards. A 30-hour course is more in-depth and is designed for supervisors and employees with responsibility for safety.

Additional courses focus on job-specific duties that are applicable to the construction industry and disaster sites. For example, depending upon the job scope, technicians may be required to complete training on Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) and Asbestos, Lead, Mold, and Bloodborne Pathogens. Skilled workers should have a thorough understanding of the importance of personal protective equipment and proper decontamination procedures.



TO MAKE SURE THE PROVIDER IS APPROPRIATELY FOCUSED ON SAFETY, ASK QUESTIONS LIKE THESE:

- How do you train your employees on safety?
- What OSHA instruction do you give your employees?
- How many hours of safety training have your workers completed?
- What is your company's Experience Modification Rating (EMR)? (The EMR should be under 1 and is based on the company's safety history and the number of recordable accidents.)
- If your company works with subcontractors, what type of training do they require of their employees?



7. Compliance

Disaster recovery providers must follow restoration and remediation best practices and comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and rules from local, state, and federal governing entities. At a minimum, that means they must meet OSHA safety requirements, as discussed in the last section.

They must also satisfy environmental, privacy, and labor standards to avoid any unexpected events or emergencies. For example, companies working in the public sector must pay the prevailing wage: the standard hourly rate paid on public works projects in the closest labor market. So, providers must develop a protocol to ensure they thoroughly understand the laws and rules and confirm that all of their managers and employers are in compliance.



ASK THESE QUESTIONS TO MAKE SURE THAT THE PROVIDER TAKES THEIR COMPLIANCE RESPONSIBILITY SERIOUSLY:

- What standard operating procedures do you have that will govern your work on this project?
- How do you familiarize yourself with the laws, regulations, and rules that apply to your work?
- How do you ensure that your team is meeting all of the legal and regulatory requirements on a job?
- What labor standards do you follow?
- Do you conduct background checks on your employees?
- Do you conduct drug testing on your employees to ensure safety?
- If you use subcontractors or temporary labor, how do you ensure that they comply with legal and regulatory requirements?



8. Licenses and Certifications

Many disaster recovery companies boast a variety of licenses and certifications—but will they provide expert technicians who really have the know-how to back them up?

A baseline requirement for hiring a provider should be having the required licenses, permits, certifications, and qualifications for the project. A property owner that hires an unlicensed, inexperienced contractor can face dangerous consequences. At best, the work may be performed poorly, leading to further damage, danger, and expense.

Look for a provider that has gone above and beyond with a variety of certifications. In the restoration and disaster recovery industry, two key certifications to look for are the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning, and Restoration Certification (IICRC) and the Restoration Industry Association (RIA) certification. Firms with these certifications must demonstrate proof of insurance, maintain a written customer complaint policy, and provide ongoing education and training for their technicians.



HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK TO MAKE SURE THE COMPANY HAS THE REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING:

- What licenses and permits do you currently hold?
- Have you ever been denied a license or permit? If so, why? Follow up with state and local governments to confirm the accuracy of what you're told. If the license is attached to a person, ask for that person's résumé to verify their experience.
- What certifications and other qualifications have your employees attained? How many of your employees hold those qualifications?



9. Training

Training helps disaster recovery providers ensure that they deliver a consistent, high-quality service every time. But when companies work through franchises, subcontractors, and temporary workers, it's harder to ensure that their rotating staff have a sufficient baseline of knowledge to complete the work accurately and to specifications.

Both on-site and off-site training round out the essential knowledge and updates that employees need. Leading disaster recovery companies rely on the knowledge of skilled technicians and competent supervisors, who have developed a bank of knowledge over time that they can call on in challenging situations. Experienced supervisors also spend time cultivating the know-how of their technicians through on-site training. Depth of knowledge gained in real-world situations is critical, because while many disasters call on the same skill sets, no two situations are alike. Leading disaster services providers have a stable of technicians equipped with years of hands-on, technical knowledge, including operation of technologies, job site safety, abatement best practices, and environmental, safety, and health training.

Top companies also show a significant investment in off-site employee development. Some organizations have developed national training centers for their field and management employees to ensure not only that everyone has the same foundational knowledge but that they also are learning the competencies that will take them to the next level. Leading companies also make sure that they have the requisite industry memberships, such as American Bio-Recovery Association (ABRA), that demonstrate that their technicians know the most up-to-date best practices and possess safety-forward skills.



HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK TO MAKE SURE A PROVIDER'S TECHNICIANS HAVE OBTAINED THE TRAINING—AND POSSESS THE KNOWLEDGE—NECESSARY TO DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY WORK:

- What training do you offer your employees?
- How do you share valuable on-the-job learnings across your organization?
- How often do you train your employees?
- How do you follow up and reinforce your employees' learning?



10. Culture

A provider's culture can tell a lot about how its people will approach a project. If a provider seems very concerned about tracking every nickel and dime, that's a red flag. Some companies will station people on projects to count how many pieces of equipment are used. But a company focused on quality is more concerned about getting a business back up and running quickly and safely.

Customer-focused companies also realize that their people are their product. When a company treats its employees right, they're less likely to be stressed and more likely to be able to focus on their work. That spills over into the quality of their work, trustworthiness, and customer service.



CULTURE CAN BE HARD TO ASCERTAIN UNDER THE STRESSES OF A CATASTROPHE. HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK TO QUICKLY TAKE STOCK OF A COMPANY'S CULTURE:

- In conversations with the provider, do you feel like you're a number, or does the provider treat you like you're a long-term partner?
- How focused is the provider on the bottom line? Is the provider worried about how many people and how much equipment will be used, or is the provider focused on getting you back to business?
- How loyal are the company's employees? Ask about average length of service and any incentives the company provides its employees for good service.
- How much does the company invest in training and development of its employees?



Conclusion

Facing an emergency can feel like getting punched in the mouth. A business leader's first impulse may be to look for the most convenient, lowest-cost option for disaster recovery services. But that approach can lead to a second punch that knocks them out and keeps them down.

That's why quality has to be the top consideration when choosing an emergency service provider. Businesses don't want to pick a low-cost provider or a provider with great name recognition, only to find that it can't deliver the expected value on a reasonable timeline. Small, inexperienced, and underqualified providers that aren't held to a consistent standard can cost more time and money in the long run due to mid-project change orders and poor craftsmanship. They can also lead to legal troubles and other headaches, including labor concerns, building code infractions, and permit violations.

That's why it's essential to take the time to look for a disaster recovery services provider that is committed to complying with the contract, scope of work, and all applicable laws and regulations. The provider's technicians should have the requisite licenses, certifications, and training that enable them to deliver the work on time and on budget and to exacting standards. And most importantly, the company should have a culture that values and invests in its employees, so they're empowered and motivated to do their best work.

The best time to evaluate quality and select the right provider is before a disaster, so that a business can establish an agreement upfront and jump-start the recovery process as soon as the property loss occurs.





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