

## Businesses must move quickly beyond the rubble in order to start again

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It was a morning Conny Simpson will not forget. She stood and watched her workplace Farris Veterinary Clinic facility burn to the ground.

"It was really heart wrenching," she said about the 5 a.m. event that happened almost a year ago.

In the last month, other businesses in the South Sound have experienced the same fate as the Puyallup-based veterinary clinic. Tacoma saw Hillside Quickie Market on the corner of South G and 16th streets start to collapse as firefighters fought the flames spurting out of the ceiling. Only a few days later, Olympia had an electrical fire at 1001 Cooper Point Dr SW. The first fire department unit arrived to find smoke was coming out of several roof vents of the strip mall complex located there. And tenants there were dislocated for much of the day.

But while the fire a year ago could have been the end for Farris Veterinary Clinic, the staff actually found ways to manage through their situation and come out on top.

"It was very stressful," said Simpson, the clinic's office manager. "We all took our vitamins and encouraged each other:" She felt that the same situation could have caused many workers to feel bitter and angry, but said her staff found solace in their shared religious views. And while the clinic did not have a business plan to manage such a catastrophe, she said, the community support really helped it make it through.

"There were so many more positives than negatives," Simpson said, adding that this experience taught her the value of being a good business person and having clients who appreciate their services.

The clinic was up and running in a temporary facility in just a matter of weeks and is planning to open its new facility this fall.

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## Expert: keep critical business documents off site

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"It will have the best of both worlds," Simpson said. "It will keep the character (of the old facility) ... and have more office space."

Her employer had insurance, and she advises other businesses to understand what types of coverage they have. They should also keep a complete inventory of everything in the business, in case a fire does occur.

Wendy Freitag, business liaison for Washington's Emergency Management Division, said businesses that experience disasters need to be in frequent contact with their insurance companies. What many business owners might not know is that different claims require different things from businesses. For example, a business must itemize everything that was lost in a fire, which often means sorting through ashes.

"That was pretty emotional and frustrating," Simpson said about this experience, adding that businesses should shoot video of the business and keep a valid inventory of everything they have to try and avoid this situation.

Besides having the right insurance and communicating with insurance carriers often, Freitag said there are many things businesses can do in advance to prepare for a disaster.

"If I could choose one thing businesses need to do before disaster strikes, it is to really make sure they have backed up their records," she said.

Freitag said a business should have any key records that are critical in keeping that business running copied and kept off site. She said often businesses make copies of records but keep them at the same location, so if something like a fire occurs they lose both set of records.

She also advises firms to set up game plans for what to do if their office is destroyed. They should also be friendly to their business neighbors, since they are the likely places one would go to for help. Freitag also said it is smart to use vendors located in different areas, so if a disaster strikes one certain location, your business will not lose all of its vendors. **BE**