

Crisis Management Case Studies



Tropical Cyclone Ului, a Category 3 storm system with winds gusts of up to 200 kilometres, crossed the north Queensland coast at 1:00am, Sunday 21 March 2010. The impact caused widespread but moderate damage across the region and cut power for several days to an estimated 60,000 homes and businesses between Airlie Beach and Townsville.

Cape Hillsborough Resort, Mackay Hinterland

www.capehillsboroughresort.com.au/

Cape Hillsborough Resort fronts Casuarina Bay just north of Mackay. Set amid national park with direct access to the beach, the resort provides budget to mid-range accommodation and facilities, including camping and caravan sites.

The resort is popular for its abundant wildlife, nature walks and wildlife encounters and attracts bird watchers, photographers and artists as well as families and couples who enjoy a tranquil environment and nature-based activities.

The business has been in operation for eight years, is owner-operated and at present employs 10 staff.

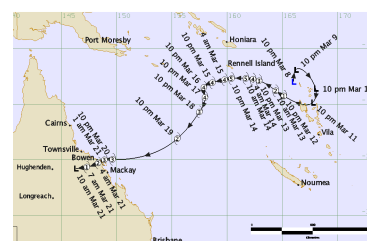
1. Risk Management

Cape Hillsborough has a Risk Management Plan that forms part of its Business Plan.

2. Cyclone Warnings

Owner Robyn Shulkins, had two days notice that Ului posed a strong threat of crossing the coast, somewhere in the immediate region.


Radio and television bulletins were the main source of her information about the cyclone progress. Robyn kept a close eye on where the cyclone was and where it would likely cross the coast through hourly mainstream media updates.



3. Preparations

On the Thursday prior to Cyclone Ului making landfall, media bulletins confirmed there was a high possibility that the cyclone would go to cross the coast, somewhere between Mackay and Airlie Beach. At this point, Robyn and her staff sprang into action.

All loose items were put away and equipment that couldn't be easily removed was secured. Robyn stopped taking in guests and asked all campers and caravan users to vacate the resort for their own safety. Their own on-site caravans were moved and secured in an area behind the main two-storey motel block. This block houses reception and administration on the ground floor and motel accommodation on the first floor.



By Saturday evening only five guests remained on the premises. They were given rooms in the main block and advised that a large room on the ground floor would provide emergency shelter should it be required during the storm.

The resort has a generator that automatically kicks in if mains power is interrupted for any reason. As part of its regular maintenance regime, the generator is checked each month to ensure it is in good working order.

On a personal note, very little preparation was required. With the closest town, Seaford, being several kilometres away, the resort is self-sufficient. Food stocks, a generator and heating facilities, fuel, cash, batteries and other necessary stocks were all on hand in ample quantities.

4. The Impact

Once the storm had cleared, Robyn inspected the damage. There were a lot of trees down and debris from the surrounding forest was scattered throughout the resort grounds.

On the upside, all the equipment and stock were in tact. However, falling trees had caused structural damage to some of the roofs of the surrounding buildings. The amenities block was worst hit, its roof completely torn away, while other roof damage on a smaller scale could be temporarily managed using tarpaulin covers.

Robyn was surprised by the relatively minor nature of the damage. In her view it could have been far worse and she considers herself lucky 'that the trees seemed to fall in the right direction'.

While the property appeared to stand up well to the battering, the damage was enough to cause a temporary two-week closure of the resort while repairs were done to the amenities block and the debris was cleared.

Bookings were heavy over the Easter period so immediate work was undertaken to restore the amenities block and the smaller jobs were postponed until after the holidays.

The final repairs, which included replacement of street and highway signage, were only completed in mid-August.

5. Lessons Learned

Robyn is philosophical about cyclones. In her view you can only prepare as much as is possible and then you just have to wait and see, and deal with the outcome as it presents itself. The lessons she came away with include:

1. The importance of keeping trees lopped and checked as part of the ongoing maintenance of the resort. Some of the trees that came down were estimated to be 20 metres in height and it was fortunate they fell the right way, had they not, the damage may have been far more severe.
2. Regular maintenance of the generator meant a seamless power supply and made the resort's recovery process much faster and more comfortable.
3. Having good information to work from. Robyn is aware that cyclones are notoriously difficult to track and warnings may not be as accurate as everyone in the affected areas might like. However, she does feel better information from weather authorities could help businesses and the community better prepare for such events.