For Peace of Mind
Include Temporary HVAC Equipment in Contingency Planning

BY DANE TAIVAL, TRANE

Whether facilities professionals are recovering from a natural disaster, undertaking a major renovation or putting together a contingency plan, they are increasingly using rental equipment to meet their temporary heating, ventilation, air conditioning and power needs.

HVAC rental companies can offer a wide range of new, state-of-the-art HVAC and power equipment that can be modified with special framing, piping and electrical features that make delivery, installation and startup fast and efficient. Larger rental companies have equipment staged at various locations nationwide to respond quickly to their customers’ needs, whether during an emergency or when equipment may be down for maintenance.

An HVAC rental services company can help facility managers develop and implement plans to effectively meet heating and cooling needs when permanent systems are not available or cannot handle the job, for whatever reason.

For example, last hurricane season administrators at a regional hospital in Louisiana didn’t have to worry about whether Hurricane Isaac would knock their facility off the power grid because they planned ahead. As the storm approached, a rental generator was already on site to keep the lights burning, the HVAC running and lifesaving medical equipment working in the event of a power loss.

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temporary power and HVAC equipment partner and have the generator installed and ready to power the facility in about 24 hours.

Rental equipment also can help an organization deal with more routine sets of circumstances. For example, when a Florida school district needed to increase their cooling capacity temporarily they were able to quickly acquire four 400-ton air-cooled water chillers from an HVAC rental services company so that students could start school on time.

Temporary HVAC equipment can handle heating and cooling needs while scheduled maintenance is performed on a building’s permanent system. With advance planning and preparation, rented solutions can be installed quickly and efficiently, giving technicians the time they need to service permanent systems without disrupting normal operations. Rental solutions can also be useful for short-term dehumidification needs, such as controlling humidity in a specific area after painting, dry-walling or hardwood floor refinishing.

Facility managers often use rental solutions to meet seasonal cooling needs. For example, a grade school in Kankakee, Ill., rented two 35-ton rooftop air conditioning units to supplement the existing system and enhance the comfort of teachers and students during summer school sessions. And a Tuba City, Ariz. high school has rented a 400-ton air-cooled water chiller and a generator for several years in a row to reduce strain on the school’s chilled water system during two of the hottest months of the year.

Finally, rental HVAC systems and electric generators can be counted on for special events, such as graduations, receptions, social gatherings or sporting events. For example, rented systems can provide temporary heating or cooling to a field house not served by the school’s main HVAC system or to a tent in which a fundraising event is being held.

Effective Power and HVAC Contingency Planning is Essential

Every company needs to include a power and HVAC contingency plan as part of its comprehensive crisis-response plan. After all, it does not take a natural disaster to cause millions of dollars in damage, disrupt operations and erode stakeholder confidence. An effective power and HVAC contingency plan minimizes financial risk, protects the health and safety of building occupants, and provides peace of mind for the company and its stakeholders.

In fact, contingency planning is considered so important that some insurance carriers require companies to have a formal plan as a condition for providing business continuity coverage.

Here are some steps companies can use to evaluate, analyze, create and implement a contingency plan that meets their specific needs:

- Analyze the financial impact of a disruption in power or HVAC service. Experienced contingency service providers can help companies estimate the true costs of unplanned downtime, which go far beyond the cost of repairing equipment in a crisis mode. They may also include lost finished goods or inventory, reduced worker productivity, diminished levels of service, lost customers, and missed revenue or other business opportunities.
- Assess the level of risk by identifying potential causes of system failure – including natural disasters, power outages,
equipment failures or sabotage – and rank them based on their probability, potential to disrupt normal operations and financial cost.

Perform a critical equipment audit to identify mission-essential power and HVAC systems and assess their current operating condition. Address performance problems and document potential failure points. Many companies will engage a third-party expert to help with their audit.

Identify priorities and critical processes: By taking business priorities into account, the contingency plan can focus on areas within the facility that would have the greatest impact on mission-essential operations and the bottom line were an unplanned service interruption to occur.

Find the best place to position temporary equipment on the site and know in advance how the systems will be connected to the building. Identify potential challenges, prepare connection points in advance and arrange for any required permits. This includes determining whether current electrical service is sufficient to operate temporary equipment, such as a chilled water system or supplemental HVAC unit. There is no substitute for having the right connections for electrical, water and air ducts when it comes to speeding response time during a crisis situation.

Using all this data, develop a summary report. The report should outline requirements, actions that need to be taken and all associated costs and how they will be allocated.

Develop and implement the contingency plan. Assign roles and responsibilities and provide training. Conduct drills to verify the contingency process and identify areas for improvement. Make required building modifications in advance. Update the plan annually or whenever there is a significant change in the facility, such as a building modification or expansion.

Identifying reliable, experienced partners – including third-party contingency planning consultants and temporary equipment providers – is essential to developing and implementing an effective power and HVAC contingency plan. Leading HVAC industry contingency planning consultants have proven tools to ensure that the company develops a complete, effective and useful contingency plan; one that does not just sit on the shelf.

The best power and HVAC temporary equipment partners have large inventories of the equipment the company needs, well-positioned geographically, along with a proven track record, world-class response time and a reputation for high levels of customer service.

Time and money spent on contingency planning is an investment that often pays for itself several times the first time it is used. An effective, well-understood and broadly shared contingency plan enables a company to minimize service interruptions, reduce capital loss, maintain or restore normal operations sooner, and create peace of mind for the company, its customers, employees and other stakeholders.

Dane Taival is vice president of building services for Trane North America, a provider of indoor comfort solutions and services and a brand of Ingersoll Rand. Taival has been with Trane for 19 years and handles asset management and high performance building services, controls contracting and comprehensive solutions.