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SYDNEY PREPARES FOR AN APEC EXPERIENCE

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This e-mail newsletter contains every news story published on Continuity Central during the previous seven days.

This article by Tim Janes, director of Fulcrum Risk Services, considers the business continuity issues created by September's APEC Leader's Week in Sydney, Australia: including possible business continuity impacts, responses and potential opportunities.

As a major commercial city, Sydney is used to its fair share of significant, but disruptive events. Sydney is about to experience another major event, which is expected to create some interesting business continuity challenges, but also provide some potential opportunities at the same time.

From January to September 2007 Australia is hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum; representing over 100 days of inter-governmental seminars and meetings around the country. It all culminates in the APEC Leaders Week in Sydney between the 2nd and 9th September 2007.

There are 21 APEC member countries, including China, Russia, Japan and the United States. The APEC Leaders Week will bring 21 world leaders to Sydney, making it the biggest event in Sydney since the 2000 Olympics. Each leader will be accompanied by an entourage of political and security support personnel, plus their own national media to cover the event. All told, over 7,500 people will converge for a week of high-level discourse, and photo opportunities, in and around the Sydney CBD.

Based on recent similar global meetings in Germany (G8 Summit Heiligendamm, 2007) and Melbourne (G20 Summit 2006), Sydney can also anticipate a multitude of protest groups to accompany the leaders to Sydney. They will undoubtedly cover a spectrum of special interests, but each group will seek to make their case heard to the assembled politicians, and international media. How they choose to express their opinions remains to be seen, but we can only hope they are all as well behaved as the APEC

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delegates.

What can certainly be anticipated is the disruption that the influx of thousands of people will cause to the centre of Sydney for the duration of APEC Leaders Week. Necessary security measures already announced by the NSW Police will require the closure of roads, car parks, train stations and ferry terminals and associated traffic diversions around a zone from the Sydney Opera House and Circular Quay stretching back several city blocks across the CBD. Security concerns and changing schedules will mean that these arrangements will be updated frequently and may not be finalised until the APEC Leaders Week starts.

So what does all this mean to business continuity practitioners? Clearly, those organisations that have premises in the Sydney CBD or adjacent zones are assessing the potential impact on their operations during the APEC Leaders Week.

The NSW Government has declared Friday 7th September of the Leaders Week as a Public Holiday, but this only applies in metropolitan Sydney, not the entire city or state. Financial markets around the world will still be trading. The rest of NSW and Australia will still be open for business, requiring most call centres and IT facilities to keep on working.

Organisations with premises in the APEC zone will benefit from the protection of extensive layered security controls in and around the APEC venues and hotels. Access into and around the APEC zone will be controlled, with ID required for entry. However, distinguishing between a genuine worker and a protester may not be straightforward since many call centre staff don't wear suits and not all protesters look like Kurt Cobain. It is those organisations with premises on the periphery of the APEC zone that may have the greatest risks. Since the protest groups will be barred from the APEC zone, they may attempt to demonstrate their message against nearby, available and less well protected targets.

The APEC planning authorities are conducting an effective awareness campaign for organisations in Sydney. This has prompted a range of activity and ideas amongst the Sydney business continuity community. For example, many organisations have been carefully developing their 'work from home' business continuity strategies and technologies for pandemic planning purposes. The APEC Leaders Week provides a practical opportunity to put these strategies and processes to the test.

Some organisations are considering arranging a relocation exercise, sending staff to work in an alternate site outside the CBD during the APEC Leaders Week.

This raises interesting questions for organisations that may seek to make use of their commercial alternate site arrangements. Can the alternate site be invoked for a known and anticipated event? If the alternate site contract is for shared seats, will we know how many seats we will be allocated? Site providers and their clients are working through these challenging questions.

The preparation for APEC has also provided an opportunity for organisations to revisit their old lists of key processes and personnel, to reconfirm who absolutely needs to be in the office and what they really need to be doing. There will also be useful business continuity lessons to be gained if organisations take time to conduct a thorough post-APEC review.

Most importantly, the APEC Leaders Week is that rare thing; a predictable disruptive event, where the timing and likely consequences are known in advance and can be planned for. It is providing a great stimulus for business continuity reviews and plan updates, or simply just a contemporary variation from more conventional scenario exercises.

So what does all this mean for organisations that do not have premises in the Sydney CBD? The APEC Leaders Week will still provide a practical lesson in the impacts of a major CBD shutdown, whether for planned or unplanned reasons (e.g. terrorism). The experience is likely to provide useful information and scenario material for exercising business continuity and crisis management plans that should be of interest to any organisation located in a major, modern CBD. And if none of this is relevant to your own situation, at least you might gain some vicarious amusement in watching Sydney get tied in knots again for a few days.

Tim Janes MBCI is a director of Fulcrum Risk Services, a specialist business continuity and crisis management consultancy based in Sydney, Australia. See www.fulcrumrisk.com for more information.

Information about the APEC Forum and Leaders Week can be found at <http://www.apec2007.org/>

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