

Climate Resilient SMEs

Lead Organisation:

Sustainability West Midlands

Project Managers: Alan Carr (Sustainability Adviser), Anna Bright (Chief Executive)

Partners:



Customers:

Small to medium size enterprises.

Project Duration:

2013 - To date

The Project

Climate Resilient SME workshops, West Midlands

The impacts of extreme weather on small businesses is becoming increasingly better understood, particularly after a SWM survey conducted in 2011 showed that 74% of businesses interviewed had been affected by such impacts in the previous five years. It is highly likely that, five years on, this figure would be higher, especially given the significant number of flooding incidents the region has experienced in recent times.

However, it has also become apparent that becoming more resilient is not just about protection from the elements. It is equally, if not more importantly, an opportunity for businesses to raise their profile against their competitors and gain economic benefits as a result. If your business can withstand the barrage of abuse the weather can throw at you but your competitors cannot, you are seen as favourable and less of a risk to do business with. So increasing resilience to climate change is more than just checking the weather forecast; it's also about future-proofing your business to allow for growth and innovation.

Aims

SWM has convened many workshops over the past four years to help small businesses take those first steps to becoming more resilient. There are three key aspects to these workshops:

- Bringing a variety of businesses from the region together to share their experiences of what it's like to be affected by extreme weather.

- Learning from businesses that have already been there and got the t-shirt; those that have implemented actions and tangibly improved their resilience.
- Introducing a tool, co-developed by SWM and our colleagues at Climate UK, called the Business Resilience Healthcheck, which is a simple way of allowing businesses to benchmark how resilient they are and take simple steps to improve.

Two members of the SWM team are officially accredited by the Small Firms Development Initiative to use the Business Resilience Healthcheck and we have done so to support businesses extensively in the past. As such, we can also offer more one-to-one engagement with businesses to help them through this process.

Challenges

To the businesses:

Extreme weather can negatively affect SMEs in a variety of ways, including: costs as a result of property damage; delays to supplies and projects; health and safety concerns for staff; logistical issues for example road blockages; and, in the worst cases, significant economic disruption for a long period of time.

To the supporting organisations:

In most cases, understandably SMEs do not have the resource to focus much of their time on adapting to the impacts of severe weather. There is a huge variance in terms of whether a business has developed a business continuity plan, for example, or taken any actions towards becoming more resilient. As a result, many SMEs appreciate the support of other organisations, such as SWM, to help them. However, challenges to such organisations include:

- Identifying the SMEs most at need of support.
- Giving the SMEs enough time to obtain the help that they need, but so that there is no drain on their resource.
- Identifying the appropriate actions take, especially if there is no financial support on offer.
- Maintaining engagement so that an intervention is not seen as a one-off.

The supporting organisation needs to be empathic and flexible towards each SME that they engage with and allow them to take the lead. The supporting organisation almost needs to adopt a 'best friend' approach; someone who can support them to whatever extent is deemed required. SWM has learnt that this approach is most favoured when supporting SMEs with resilience planning.

The Outcome

Results

Benefits to the customer

Becoming more resilient to weather extremes and climate change has reduced the cost of



damage to businesses. However, it will also bring about economic benefits, as you stand tall ahead of your competitors in times when resilience is needed. It will allow you to not only continue business as usual, but also diversify your markets and inject innovation into your products.

The greatest strength about using the aforementioned Healthcheck to achieve resilience is that it is simple, easy to use and covers a broader range of considerations beyond risk solely from climate change and weather.

Our support has also resulted in two of our local businesses winning the Business in the Community Business Resilience Award in 2012 and 2013; go to the 'Links and Downloads' section for more information.

In the Future

SWM is aware that the impacts of severe weather in our region appear to be increasing. Coupling this with challenging and uncertain economic times results in an ever increasing need for SMEs to stand up to the challenge of becoming more resilient. SWM is aware of this and considers the need to maintain support hugely important, including:

- By promoting the Healthcheck and other resources to SMEs not previously engaged.
- To re-visit SMEs that have obtained support previously to determine progress and further support required.
- To focus on SMEs that have suffered from the impacts of severe weather but have recovered, to share this good practice elsewhere.
- To provide more one-to-one support to SMEs that require it the most.

The Extra's

Accolades

"Having been previously flooded attending the Business Resilience event in 2013 was a great opportunity to review our systems and procedures. We used the Business Resilience toolkit to produce what we feel is a robust Business Resilience Plan which now covers all sorts of eventualities, not just flooding." – Morris Site Machinery, Staffordshire.

Links and Downloads

[Business Resilience in a Changing Climate workshops 2014](#)

[Business Resilience in a Changing Climate workshop 2013 - Coventry](#)

[Business Resilience in a Changing Climate workshops 2013 - Telford](#)

[Business Resilience in a Changing Climate workshops 2013 - Birmingham](#)

[BITC Business Resilience Award winner 2013 – Cleone Foods](#)

[BITC Business Resilience Award winner 2012 – Globehuggers](#)

[Business Resilience Healthcheck](#)

[National case studies](#)

Contact Details

For further information or help with community resilience, please contact the SWM team on 0121 237 5890 or enquiries@swm.org.uk.