

Thin Ice – the continuous survey of business interruptions



..... **enVisionBCM**, the "zero tolerance" business continuity management framework

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We make no claims that the information presented here is an exhaustive survey of all business interruptions that a number that have occurred during the current survey "window". We mainly use information from the public domain and therefore do not include many of the disruptive events that doubtless do occur within companies but are not reported in the public domain.

Thoughtpiece

This is a thought provoking reflection from a BCM following invocation of the organisation's BC plan; originally titled "Shadow ERP systems" it deals with the consequences of not fully understanding the relationship between enterprise systems and the "informal" systems that often link to them. "Seemingly simple things, like recovery and availability, become unaccountably complex when we leave the happy confines of our cubes. Sometimes this complexity stems from a variance between the scope of our visions—between IT and users, for example; after all, we have a much more granular understanding of the system than most users. Other times, though, it comes from a misunderstanding of what is important to whom. I learned this truth the hard way after one particularly brutal disaster recovery fiasco.

The scenario

My team, a group of junior architects and senior engineers working on a network deployment, received an "all call" at 4 A.M. MST. Fortunately we were still awake, working hard on some problems with our test-bed message backbone. I phoned the call centre manager. The main data centre was on fire. All of the backbone services shut down. He needed hands to help get something working before people on the East Coast got in to work.

I sent half my team back to the hotel. The other half hit the keyboards. We lit phone lines up for hours, fielding questions and checking services. After the first few hours of chaos, we had enough of the system running and stable for people to limp along. Simultaneously, the call and data centre teams worked like maniacs to get applications online in the secondary data centre. When the other half of my team woke up, I put two on the phones. The rest went down to help the other teams.

In short order, we reconfigured the mail

system so that it did not rely on our central hub server, complicating the mail routing but restoring service. File/print services were mostly local, with the exception of a handful of large data repositories and some ancient shares on an old NetWare server that was currently slag. It took several days to get ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) back to full functionality.

Despite the initial confusion, the IT teams as a whole felt pretty good about the whole affair. We responded to a difficult situation quickly, focused restoring service in successive waves, and even kept the corporate executives / workers informed of our progress through a newly-designed phone tree system. Some things could certainly have been done more effectively. But given that we are human, that did not come as a huge surprise to anyone.

Our relative euphoria began to crash when we heard the muttering. Clients were getting angry because they could not get information. Most of the users from order entry to product shipping struggled to find their data. Some openly questioned if IT had actually done anything in the last three days.

I called up one of the IT user group leaders (let us call him Dave). Dave told me that there was a movement to burn us in effigy around the company. It seemed that, in all of our work, we missed something vital to the workers—a set of spreadsheets on the NetWare server that everyone used to process orders. While we congratulated ourselves, our users could just barely do their jobs.

Success and failure at the same time
Without getting into a discussion of the "shadow ERP," this experience taught me several important lessons about recovery operations. Some of them came from what we did right, others from the obvious mistakes we made.

First on the list of positives, our plan of restoring services in "layers" helped to manage our users' perception. We insured that first and foremost they had basic services (login, local printing, local and regional e-mail). We then worked on restoring what we thought of as critical site-to-site communications. Only after the users could do their jobs and clients place orders in a rudimentary fashion did we shift to restoring

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full services.

Second, our staff management plan worked very well. We broke the team into overlapping twelve hour shifts, insuring good coverage and that no one person was on the floor too long. We also shifted our staffing around as needed. A handful of people worked on the secondary data centre at first, and the rest of the team focused on answering calls, spreading information, and dealing with the service layers. As things calmed down we shifted staff until almost everyone worked on the secondary data-centre floor.

Third, our unrehearsed and ill-planned communications strategy spread data through the environment at a ferocious rate. We took advantage of formal and informal distribution channels. Even the users that wanted us lynched honestly appreciated that the recovery process was so open to them. They received real information on a regular basis, making it a great deal easier for them to trust us.

Unfortunately not everything worked as well as we wished. Take our layered approach. We successfully restored services that we thought were important. But we did not have the good sense to talk to our users before the disaster to discover what they wanted restored first. We guessed right sometimes. Sometimes we did not. Why guess, when the users could just have told us what services they considered the most critical?

The waves of information we released into the environment sometimes conflicted with each other. The three managers (myself, the call centre manager, and the data centre manager) did not always synchronize our information before releasing it. We should have either appointed one of us to be the primary communicator or tossed it up one level to the CIO. However, he was so busy with the executive team and the COO (the fire damaged more than the data centre) that we did not want to bother him.

Beware of the shadow (ERP)
Finally, the shadow ERP bit us. We focused on restoring the formal ERP. But most organizations have a secondary, shadow, ERP comprised of linked spreadsheets and desktop databases that manages a great deal of the day-to-day work. Ours lived on an old, unprotected NetWare file server. Although

corporate policy usually prevents us from formally supporting this shadow, recovery sometimes requires us to break policy long enough to restore business function. We honestly should have moved the shared components over to a server we could back up long before the problem arose.

Although dozens of other factors arise in business continuance (legal, operational, and political), the core concepts of layer of restoration, rotating staff, fast coordinated communication, and identifying our users' (rather than our own) key services have helped me through worse disasters than the one described above."

Business Interruptions January – March 2007

Adverse Weather (14)

Bomb Scare (2)

Burst Water Main (0)

Civil Disturbance (0)

Fire (11)

Gas Leak (5)

Hazardous Chemical Spill (14)

Industrial Action (1)

IT Equipment Failure (1)

Power Failure (4)

Software fault (4)

Telecommunications Failure (3)

Terror Alert/Attack (0)

Virus (0)

Other (2)

An interesting occurrence in this category was a widespread occurrence of "flu-like" symptoms at a company in the U.S. Initially it was thought that the cause of this might be "Avian flu", although this proved to be a false alarm, the company involved came close to invoking its Pandemic BC plan.

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Getting to know more about enVisionBCM

Dealing with spontaneity

Imagine that you are in the process of looking at a BC Plan, Business Impact Analysis or another important part of your BC plan. Maybe you want certain parts of your organisation to update their plans for a particular type of risk (Avian Flu, for instance). You might also wish to start a discussion on a particular issue relating to business continuity – an update to the corporate BC policy, for instance. How would you currently do that? Send a few dozen emails, create a log in Excel or a word processing document, receive emails and then reply with queries questions etc? In other words to manage an ad hoc change to a subset of plans you need to work with three or more applications and manage dozens of individual discussion threads.

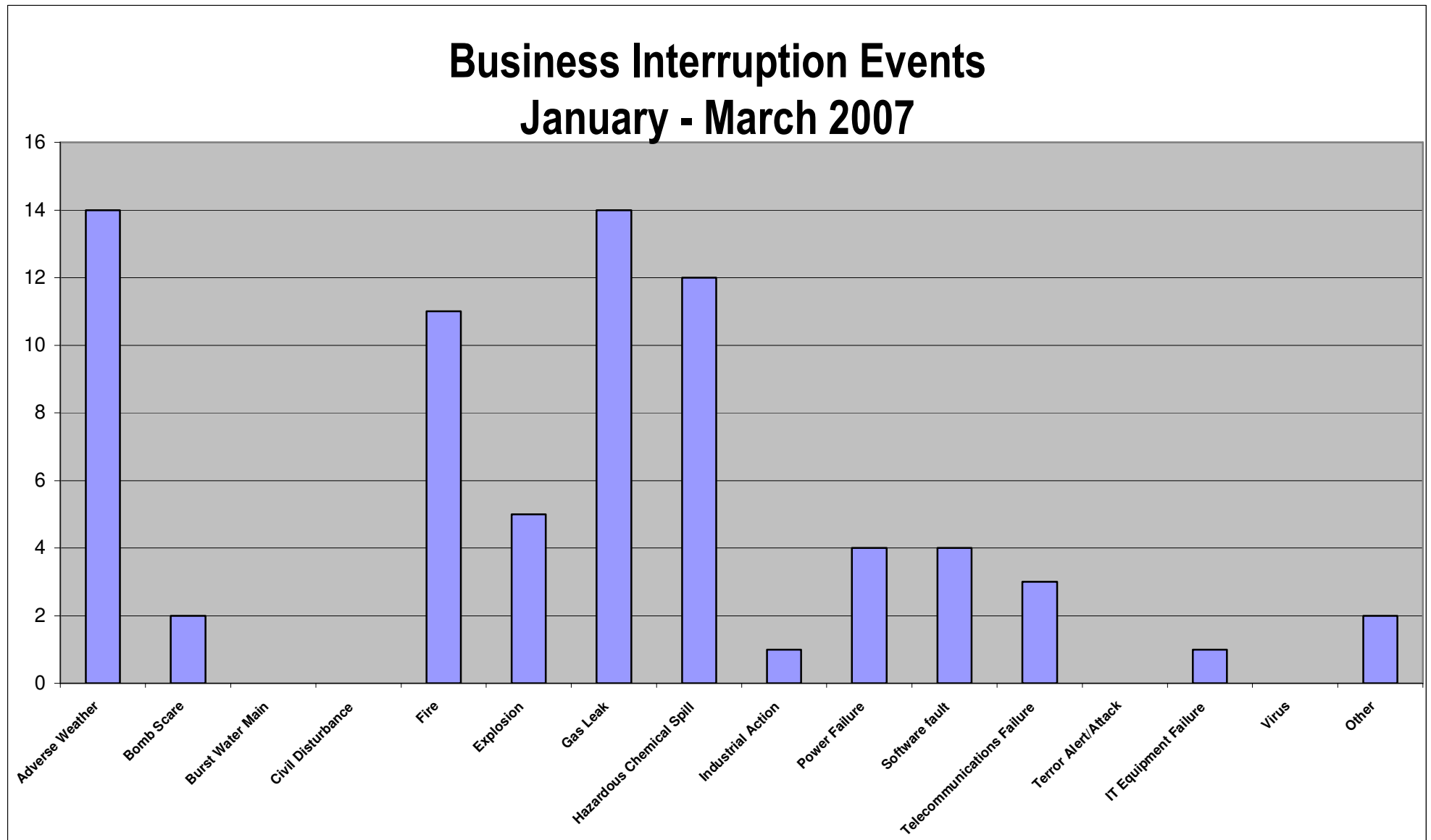
envisionBCM changes all of this; with Action Items and Discussions on Demand a BC Co-ordinator can:

- Create an Action Item, with a completion date, on one or several plans. When they do, the plan owner is advised by e-mail that an Action Item has been put on their plan. They access the Action Item by clicking a link in the body of the e-mail. When they respond to the Action Item (by clicking the "Action Item Complete" button on the form), the BC Co-ordinator is alerted via e-mail that the Action Item is complete and ready for review. On receipt the BC Co-ordinator can either "Accept" the response (in which case the Action Item is closed) or they can "Reject" it – and the process of action and review is repeated. BC Co-ordinators can see all Action Items by status & responsibilities and other users can see just their Action Items.
- Alternatively, a document can be put into the Risk Library and opened for discussion. Individuals invited to the discussion are alerted via e-mail and can then post their responses in the documents Discussion Pane. All responses are shown as a chronological discussion "thread" and all participants within the discussion group are alerted when a new response has been added.

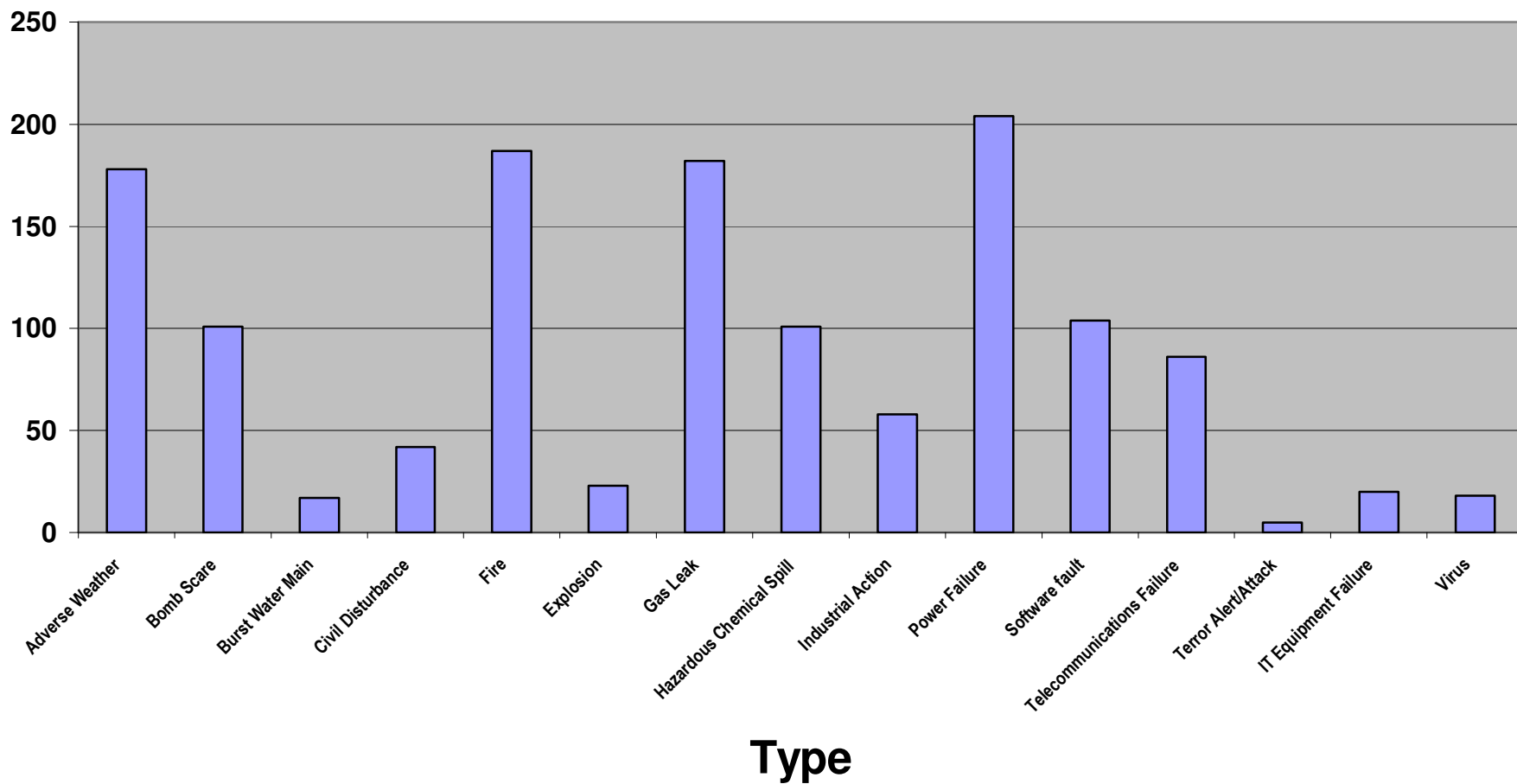
How much better is that? No more chasing

individual pieces of information & no more transposing of information. enVisionBCM lets you create a dynamic workflow and keeps all information at your fingertips.

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Business Interruption Events - Cumulative



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Interruption Type	Country		Synopsis
Fire	New Zealand	Q1 2007	Rubbish skip fire damages electrical cabling to nearby businesses
Industrial Action	India	Q1 2007	Protestors disrupt public transport
Other	South Africa	Q1 2007	Island's tourist business disrupted as ferry malfunctions
Adverse weather	India	Q1 2007	Unusually cold weather cripples public transport system
Civil Disturbance	Pakistan	Q1 2007	Civil disturbance closes businesses and public services
Telecomms failure	New Zealand	Q1 2007	Telecommunications failure hits thousands of businesses
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Chemical leak evacuates food processing plant
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Gas-line rupture causes evacuation of nearby businesses
Fire	UK	Q1 2007	Factory fire causes widespread evacuation of surrounding homes & businesses
Adverse Weather	USA	Q1 2007	Flooding prompts business evacuation and causes damage to many business premises
Adverse Weather	USA	Q1 2007	Storm causes widespread power failures
Adverse Weather	USA	Q1 2007	Floods damage business premises
Bomb Scare	USA	Q1 2007	Suspicious device found in suitcase
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Fuel tanker spill forces evacuations
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Natural gas line explosion forces evacuation of hospital & nearby businesses
Adverse Weather	USA	Q1 2007	Snow & Ice storms disrupt power supply to 125,000 homes & businesses
Adverse Weather	USA	Q1 2007	Storms affect major steel works, halting manufacturing & shipping
Adverse Weather	USA	Q1 2007	Power supply failure disrupts oil pipeline
Adverse Weather	UK	Q1 2007	Thousands of homes & businesses without power following major storm
Power failure	South Africa	Q1 2007	Homes & businesses hit by power failures
Fire	UK	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated following fire at commercial complex
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated after derailment of rail cars carrying phosphoric acid
Staff Sickness	USA	Q1 2007	Business evacuated after workers complain of "flu-like" symptoms
Fire	USA	Q1 2007	Shopping centre evacuated during fire
Software failure	USA	Q1 2007	IT error wipes out several month's tax data
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Gas Leak forces evacuation of shopping centre
Damage to Premises	USA	Q1 2007	Retail building evacuation following storm related damage
Fire	USA	Q1 2007	Care home evacuated following fire
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated following gas line break

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Interruption Type	Country		Synopsis
Adverse weather	South Africa	Q1 2007	Severe gales close businesses and force widespread evacuations
Fire	USA	Q1 2007	Fire forces evacuation of several businesses
Fire	UK	Q1 2007	Track-side fire halts Eurostar service
Software failure	Brazil	Q1 2007	Computer failure brings Sao Paulo Airport to a halt
Adverse weather	Ireland	Q1 2007	Ferry trips disrupted by storms
Adverse weather/Industrial Action	USA	Q1 2007	Strike & Freezing temperatures disrupt propane gas supply chain
Bomb Scare	USA	Q1 2007	Town centre evacuated following bomb scare
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Homes & business evacuated following ammonia spill from rail car
Adverse weather	USA	Q1 2007	Storms ground more than 2000 flights
Telecomms failure	Canada	Q1 2007	Network equipment failure knocks out telephone services in major city
Power failure	Pakistan	Q1 2007	Fault in high tension lines causes widespread power failure in Karachi
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Gas leak in town centre forces many businesses to close temporarily
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Gas leak forces evacuation of homes & businesses
Software failure	USA	Q1 2007	City computer systems fail for 24 hours
Fire	USA	Q1 2007	Shopping centre evacuated
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Train derailment forces evacuation following liquid propane leak
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated following gas leak
Hazardous Chemical Spill	UK	Q1 2007	Town centre cordoned off for five hours following chemical leak scare
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Cracked gas main forces evacuation of nearby businesses
Fire	USA	Q1 2007	500 homes & businesses evacuated in brush fire
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated following carbon monoxide leak from faulty heating system
Hazardous Chemical Spill	Canada	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated following ammonia leak
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Homes and businesses evacuated following propane gas tanker leak
Fire	USA	Q1 2007	Fire destroys retail businesses
Telecomms failure	Pakistan	Q1 2007	Terrestrial, mobile and Internet services disrupted following fire damage to cables & routers
Flood	USA	Q1 2007	Faulty equipment causes reservoir to overflow
Software failure	UK	Q1 2007	Payments system failure stalls 400,000 salary payments
Hazardous Chemical Spill	UK	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated after food processing factory pipe leaks toxic fumes into the air

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Interruption Type	Country		Synopsis
Fire	USA	Q1 2007	Chemical fire destroys storage facility & prompts widespread evacuation of homes & businesses
Adverse Weather	New Zealand	Q1 2007	Floods destroy homes & businesses and prompt widespread evacuations
Gas leak	Australia	Q1 2007	City centre is shut down following accidental gas line rupture
Adverse Weather	South Korea	Q1 2007	Heavy rains flood city centre
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Gas leak shuts down shopping mall
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Businesses evacuated after liquid oxygen spill
IT Equipment Failure	USA	Q1 2007	Air conditioning breakdown forces shut-down of government computers
Power failure	New Zealand	Q1 2007	Faults in upgrade work cause major power outage
Other	USA	Q1 2007	TV network equipment failure takes major programmes offline
Hazardous Chemical Spill	USA	Q1 2007	Business Evacuated After Ammonia Leak
Gas leak	UK	Q1 2007	Business park evacuated following gas leak
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Dozens of homes and businesses evacuated after ruptured gas main causes explosion & underground fire
Gas leak	USA	Q1 2007	Gas leak closes shopping centre
Power failure	UK	Q1 2007	Electrical failure stops luggage check-in at major airport



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