

Emergency and Disaster Preparation Information for Georgia State-Chartered Institutions

Each state-chartered institution should have an emergency preparedness plan in place that documents how the institution will respond to various scenarios in the event of a disaster or emergency. The plan should be tested regularly and updated as needed.

Branch Closures

If you find it necessary to close a branch or office in preparation for an impending emergency, you should post notices in the branch and other communication methods for your customers. You should also notify the Department by sending an email to DBFCorp@dbf.state.ga.us. In your email, please include the address of the location affected and the closing time.

If you need to close a branch temporarily in order to complete repairs, or if some of your facilities cannot open because they lack essential services such as electricity, telephone, or security, you should also notify the Department by emailing DBFCorp@dbf.state.ga.us. In your email, please include the following information for each closed branch:

- Address of branch;
- Description of the situation;
- Estimated time when the branch will reopen; and
- Methods of communication to customers.

An email should also be sent to DBFCorp@dbf.state.ga.us once the branch is re-opened.

Declarations Issued by the Governor

If the Governor proclaims that an emergency exists in a particular area of the state and designates specific days for the general cessation of business in that area, then all of your branches located within that area must remain closed for the designated days or until the declaration of emergency has been lifted by the Governor.

If the Governor authorizes, but does not mandate that your institution close, your institution may decide whether to close or remain open, depending on the specific conditions impacting your institution and taking into consideration the safety of staff and customers.

If an emergency exists, but it is not practical to obtain a proclamation from the Governor before closing one or more branches, your institution may close each branch as necessary to protect property, staff, and customers. The Department should be notified as soon as possible by emailing DBFCorp@dbf.state.ga.us. In your email, please include the following information for each closed branch:

- Address of branch;
- Description of the situation;
- Estimated time when the branch will reopen; and
- Methods of communication to customers.

Temporary Locations

If your institution suffers the loss of one or more branches following a storm or disaster, it is not necessary to seek prior approval to establish temporary locations from the Department. However, an after-the-fact notice should be provided within 24 hours of the establishment of a temporary facility. The notice can be emailed to DBFCorp@dbf.state.ga.us. The temporary facility must have sufficient security measures in place to conduct financial transactions.

Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency Re-Entry Credentials

Financial institutions should apply for a Re-Entry Permit with the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency at <https://gema.georgia.gov/plan-prepare/re-entry>. Financial institutions qualify for Phase 3 permits as “Essential Public and Private Sector Personnel” to support re-entry by the general public. Re-Entry Permits are valid for a three-year period and should be renewed as necessary. These credentials must be obtained prior to an emergency event. Re-Entry Permits are approved at the state level and sent to local counties. The Re-Entry Permit is only valid in cases where there is a mandatory evacuation. Please let the Department know if you have difficulties obtaining re-entry credentials. If your institution operates branches outside of Georgia, you will need to contact each respective state’s Emergency Management Division to obtain information regarding re-entry credentials at the state and local level.

Emergency Preparedness Considerations

Below is a listing of other actions that institutions should consider as part of their emergency preparedness:

- Develop a plan to ensure your institution is able to maintain adequate cash during an emergency event.
- Institutions that operate along evacuation routes should consider increasing cash supplies, particularly in ATMs, prior to an emergency event.
- Review cash transportation agreements. Institutions may consider entering into multiple cash transportation agreements in the event that their normal carrier is unable to deliver during an emergency event.
- Review Federal Reserve Bank cash guidance at:
 - <https://www.frbservices.org/financial-services/cash/business-continuity>
 - <https://www.frbservices.org/binaries/content/assets/crsocms/financial-services/cash/contingency/armored-carrier-communications.pdf>
- Institutions may consider developing shared service plans with other institutions in communities in which they operate to enable the sharing of facilities and/or currency.
- Institutions should review their vendors’ business continuity plans and verify that vendors are testing their plans.

Emergency Communication System (ECS)

The Department may use multiple tools to communicate with institutions in the event of an emergency. One of those tools is ECS. ECS is a communication channel established by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, which partners with the Department. This system is available to all Georgia state-chartered institutions and allows the Department to quickly and simultaneously establish two-way communication channels with all registered financial institutions during a crisis so that essential information can be easily shared. We urge all Georgia state-chartered institutions to visit <https://bsr.stlouisfed.org/ecs> to register and maintain updated contact information for this service which is the Department's primary form of communication during an emergency event.

Post Emergency Considerations

The Department encourages institutions to take prudent steps to meet the financial needs of the communities in which your institution operates in the aftermath of a disaster or other event. Examiners will not criticize reasonable responses to assist customers as long as the actions are taken in a manner consistent with sound banking practices.