

Real Estate Journal

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Corporate Emergency Access System is the answer to post disaster building access



Peter Picarillo

What would happen if your building was evacuated following an emergency and you were prevented from entering for three days? Five days? A week or more? What would happen to your tenants and their critical business operations? This is an unsettling scenario for tenants and property managers alike; unfortunately this "what if" situation is often overlooked in many businesses' crisis management plans. Even the best business continuity or building safety plan cannot account for access restrictions put in place by authorities following a disaster or serious emergency.

The Business Network of Emergency Resources (BNET), established in New York, is now expanding its one-of-a-kind Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS) throughout the Northeast corridor and will launch soon in the State of New Jersey - the first state to implement the program statewide - along with Long Island's Nassau and Suffolk Counties. The new additions will effectively create a corridor from Boston to Philadelphia where this vital access system is active as part of major municipalities emergency planning and recovery strategy.

The Corporate Emergency Access System solves the problem of post disaster access restrictions by identifying critical business employees - second responders - for access to restricted areas following a disaster or serious emergency. The system uses a secure identification card recognized by the police. Governments must adopt the CEAS program in their jurisdiction before businesses can enroll and receive ID cards and local authorities can implement CEAS post emergency once immediate threats to life are stabilized.

A just announced CEAS program provides additional value to property manager's program participation. BNET now offers a multi-facility card option to allow designated employees access to an entire property portfolio using a single CEAS card. Additionally, vital restoration service providers for the real estate industry are now eligible to apply for the new non-restricted CEAS card that grants single-card access anywhere in New York City. Applicants for the new "All Area" cards must be approved by New York City Office of Emergency Management.

CEAS works closely with local governments and business associations like BOMA and the Real Estate Board of N.Y. before entering into an agreement to deploy CEAS. A municipality's chief elected official must support the program before a plan of administration can be developed, usually in cooperation with the local emergency management office. Local police departments must develop written procedures in the form of a department order, before the program can officially be implemented.

The CEAS program is supported solely by participating companies through an individual, two year participation fee of \$50 per standard card and \$100 per multi-facility and all area access card and is offered to governments at no cost.

During the 2004 Northeast blackout many building managers maintained basic operations with emergency generators whose operation was limited by the amount of on site fuel. Police officials had previously restricted access into Manhattan, which prevented critical fuel deliveries, other necessary supplies and service providers from entering the city to support property managers. In most disaster scenarios, 9-11 included, the inability of businesses to access their facilities to maintain or restore operations proved to be a serious impediment to recovery and a major contributor to business failure.

Property managers can assist tenants encouraging participation in CEAS and more importantly, CEAS participation by management signals to potential tenants that the property manager takes emergency planning and business continuity seriously.

Building owners and property managers interested in enrolling in CEAS may do so at www.CEAS.com.

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