



The essentials of building safety: Critical strategies for ensuring the safety of your property's occupants

July 25, 2008 - Spotlights

In my last feature article I suggested that we should all be prepared for the impending hurricane season. The essence of my message was a simple exercise in crisis preparedness planning where we should not have to ask, "What do we do now?"

Above and beyond the ever present issues of terrorist threats, general basic safety measures should be addressed by all building owners and managers.

In the New York Times Magazine Section on July 6, Erik Klinenberg, professor of sociology at N.Y.U. wrote, in his article, "Are You Ready for The Next Disaster?" and I quote, "Is there anything we can do to avert such dangers?" While he talks about catastrophic events such as hurricanes, heat waves, fires and floods, the same mindset applies to the essentials for building safety and emergency preparedness. You will recall my addressing these issues in my series of articles in this journal. There is the recommended need to have back-up generators, emergency building lighting, back-up cellular phone service and even reserve oil tanks as applicable.

It is equally necessary for building owners and managers to specifically address life safety preparations.

There are minimum necessities that are suggested to assure that tenants and staff of your property have the life safety tools available when emergency conditions occur.

If there is a serious smoke condition and you need to evacuate building occupants, the availability of smoke hoods, or respiratory aided devices, can save lives. These easy to put on devices will provide the wearer more time to exit from the life-threatening smoke condition by filtering dangerous toxic gases.

As commonplace as fire extinguishers are, it is highly recommended that fire extinguisher maintenance procedures be reviewed, maintenance logs be checked and training procedures on the use of portable fire extinguishers for building occupants be examined to assure they at least exist and are easily understandable.

In the event of any type of emergency, it is imperative that communications are not lost. It is recommended that emergency call stations be strategically located throughout the facility using cellular back-up technology. If building occupants can communicate to describe their locations and what the existing conditions are in their areas, the first responders will be in a better position to help save lives.

When an emergency occurs, we generally think of evacuating the property. There may be conditions where a shelter-in-place policy is advisable. If a shelter-in place plan is implemented, it is necessary that "shelter-in-place provisioning" has been planned for. A minimum list of such provisions would include potable drinking water, packaged foods, paper or plastic plates and utensils, first aid kits, sanitary facilities, flashlights and/or candles and batteries for flashlights and cell phones. It is further

recommended that a list of occupants and their essential prescription medications be compiled. There is an increase in the utilization of automated external defibrillators, commonly referred to as AEDs. These battery operated portable devices can be used by anyone with a minimum of training to help save a life of someone suffering from cardiac arrest. The AED automatically analyzes the condition of the person apparently in need of assistance and either applies or does not apply the necessary shock to the heart. AEDs save lives when defibrillation is administered in time. Any supplier of these devices will be more than pleased to provide sufficient in-house training.

Emergency provisions should be made to evacuate disabled persons. A common form of such an emergency provision is an evacuation assisting device in the form of an evacuation chair. The use of an evacuation chair is not only for the handicapped, but for people suffering a temporary disability due to the emergency condition, as well as expectant mothers.

Evacuation chair staging stations should be set up at areas of known disabled persons, as well as at stairwell locations.

What are most necessary for all properties are well written and tested emergency plans; training of personnel in the administration of the emergency plan; early warning alarm and notification systems for fire, smoke, floods and air quality sensing; drills and simulated exercises to reinforce responsible preparedness by management; and an evaluation system for all tested, written emergency procedures and the performed periodic drills on these procedures.

I wish to remind my loyal readers that NYFD Local Law 26 still mandates Office Building Emergency Action Plans.

These recommended critical strategies are essential for the safety of your property's occupants. You may contact Safeguards International, Inc. for complete risk and vulnerability assessments and the preparation of customized emergency plans necessary to assure the safety of lives and the minimization of risk in times of need.

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