



## **Lessons learned: Owners and managers can do more to help protect properties, tenants and assets**

October 09, 2009 - Owners Developers & Managers

We just observed the 8th anniversary of the tragedy of September 11, 2001. As you read this article, the world situation continues to appear to be unstable. America is being threatened by radical terrorist groups and even sovereign nations determined to destroy us. And these are not idle threats.

Eight years have gone by. Has complacency set in? We hope not, but there are indicators that hint that some of us have adopted a mind-set that it "can't happen here".

Please be aware that while the threat of a potential terrorist attack can come in the form of a radiological, biological or chemical attack, these threats can also come from non-terrorist sources such as a truck spills or spills in nearby buildings, if not from within your building.

There is always the potential threat of the introduction of contaminants into a buildings air supply. It is essential to protect against tampering with air intakes, air circulation units and air filtration compartments. Mechanical rooms must be secure at all times with an audit trail as to who gains access to these limited access rooms.

Your organization must have dedicated staff addressing the issues of safety and security who can prepare contingency plans for any, I repeat, any eventuality including explosions, natural disasters, floods, power outages.

The basic mission of an emergency action or crisis management team is to prepare policies and procedures which will guide and direct the entire operation as to what to do before, during and after an incident of any proportion.

With the terrorist threats to our city and the evident natural disasters across our country, ranging from hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and the like to raging fires, we are all attuned to the resulting devastation and should learn from these events. We may not be able to prevent them but we most certainly can react and respond quickly to avert greater loss of life and property. The NYPD has just recently expanded its potential threat zones.

What lessons have we learned...from others?

A critical and most important part of any emergency plan is that portion that deals with evacuation. Evacuation is critical to life safety, the single most important objective of any planning process. In fact, the evacuation process, which can be accomplished in many ways, shelter-in-place, in-building relocation to another part of the facility (invacuation), partial evacuation or full evacuation is now mandated by New York City law. This mandate states that all commercial buildings in New York must comply by submitting an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for non-fire related incidents. It's October 2009; have you satisfactorily complied with the law?

Your evacuation plan must be exercised. Periodic, random drills must be conducted to assure everyone's working knowledge of the plan. Building occupants, visitors and contractors should be

part of the testing and drill program on a periodic basis.

While the premise of this article is being prepared for any emergency, if you have a well written, comprehensive, tested plan you can prepare a listing of all possible or potential contingencies ranging from fires, floods, explosions, blackouts, telephone outages, power outages and weather related emergencies, such as wind and storm damage, to violence and crime in the workplace and medical emergencies. You can further list the contingencies related to computer downtime or the total loss of a computer or data facility.

Your emergency plan will have many sections to cover all of the contingencies previously mentioned. I would strongly suggest that you revisit your emergency planning activities and include as many contingency plans as there are contingencies. You never know. While some threats are real and some threats are likely, and some threats are probable, still they are all threats. When the meteorologists predict a CAT 5 hurricane to hit New York and inundate the city under 10-20 feet of water, who takes them seriously? I think we all should, just as we should take the saber rattling by those radical extremists seriously. If we have learned any lessons, we can do more.

Safeguards International, an Emergency Planning Consultant and an Emergency Action Plan provider, is prepared to assist all property owners with their EAPs as well as assisting owners and managers by performing the necessary disaster preparedness evaluations and reviews of your properties which will result in the preparation of "customized" emergency plans necessary to assure the safety of lives and the minimization of risk in times of need.

Allan Schwartz, CPP, CHS-III is president and CEO of Safeguards International, Inc., Yonkers, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540