

Houtkin Consulting-Newsletter

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This Newsletter: Your Relationship with Your Building manager

It was just beautiful this morning, wasn't it? The air, clean and clear -- no humidity and the sun was shining off all of the buildings in the City. The energy, though lively, was bright with the sun and you were in-tune with your life's goals and loves. The kids are growing up just fine. You did a good job, didn't you. And the house, well, the house always needs work -- if the weather holds up, maybe you'll work on the outside this weekend. You got your coffee -- which seemed like the best cup you have ever had and you walked straight into the building, held out your badge to security and then to the scanner. You rode up the elevator to your floor, dis-embarked and greeted your Colleagues and staff -- and you saw that everyone you work with felt the same way about the day.

You went to your office, opened the door, placed your coffee and breakfast on your desk, sat down and proceeded to get to those more pressing items of the day.

For some reason, at 8:30 am, you looked up from the papers on your desk. You are not sure why. And then you heard the explosion, felt the building shake and you stopped again to assess -- but this time you didn't go back to work.

Then you heard the screaming.

You quickly jumped up from your desk and looked outside to try to answer that nagging question, "what's going on?" A bomb? Is this 9/11 again? What happened? Why is everyone screaming? What do I do?

Your immediate thought is to get out of the building. But is it safe to do that? How do I get out of the building? There must be exits somewhere? Why is everyone so hysterical? Should I call my family? Leave? Pack my briefcase? Check on the people in the office?

Now, the fire engines are barely distinguishable because you are on the 80th floor but you can hear them along with the screaming that is coming from all directions.

You open the door to your office and its dark as night. There's smoke everywhere and you can barely make out the orange -- the fire. And you begin to wonder how bad it really is. Now you are scared? Do you focus on the elevator? Can you find it in the dark? Aren't I supposed to get on my hands/knees and crawl to safety -- I don't remember. I barely remember the information told to us during the fire drill.

Here goes. It's so dark, so smokey, you start to cough, you are running into bodies -- still bodies of your co-workers -- you can hear people, though and you start calling, but the smoke is choking you. You begin to wonder whether you will actually get out . . .

As you are reading this you probably think that this may never happen to you. Well, it could. Do you really know your building well enough to know how to handle a situation like this? Do you really know how to find out about your building, where the exits are, code violations, how the building will manage during an incident?, what services are running during an emergency?

If you are a building manager, do you have an emergency plan? Perhaps it is currently not required as in New York City. Is your staff trained to handle emergencies? Do you hold quarterly presentation-oriented fire drills or annual evacuation drills with your tenants? Have you identified assembly points? Do your tenants know which exits lead to the lobby or the street? Do you have a shelter-in-place plan for your building? Is your building up to code -- stairwells clear, all broken light-bulbs fixed in the exit stairwells, fire extinguishers current?

How do tenants and facilities/building managers work together for their mutual safety and for the safety of first responders?

The Fire Department of New York City has created a new law: FDNY Local Law 26.04 (guidelines: 26.02). This new rule requires that Building Management be prepared to respond to both fire and non-fire emergencies. The Building Management must create an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) that includes an evacuation process, an assembly point that is

as far away from the building as the building is high, the shelter-in-place process and an organization that supports the plan. The Building Management must also perform annual evacuation drills that take tenants from the building to the assembly point and permit the tenants to perform their accountability process. Tenants are required to create an Accountability Process that is responded to at the assembly point as well as be well-versed in the Emergency Action Plan and support it by creating whatever processes are required within the business, itself.

Many companies own and maintain their own buildings. Many companies work in leased buildings. There has always been a clear differentiation between the two scenarios - primarily from that of an insurance/liability and organizational perspective. Staff in a company-owned building rely on Corporate Services, whether Corporate Security, Facilities or the Global Business Continuity Management Team to create and support any safety-related processes. And, if you were a tenant, you assumed that the building had things under control and felt no need to interact with the building manager or their safety staff, if they had one. But with this law, which is being "watched" by other American municipalities, there is more reason for tenants in leased buildings to get to know their building manager, their Fire/Safety Director and their responsibilities to their staff - especially in response to non-fire emergencies, Shelter-in-Place and Staff Accountability.

It is important that the tenant make the effort to perform two very important activities: 1) create a method to account for staff in case of an incident; and 2) make an effort to meet with your Facilities/Building Manager and the Fire/Safety Director to understand their plans for both a fire and non-fire emergency. For accountability, the Tenant can create a call tree (contact list divided up in a process so everyone can be accounted for without assuming that someone will try to reach them and an 1-800 emergency number where status can be left and the staff can leave messages. With regards to the Building Manager, the Tenant should understand:

1. The building fire emergency process.
2. The building non-fire emergency process. Identify what process the building support and their policies regarding:
 - Evacuation: Do they have a process for non-fire emergencies? How will they respond to tenants who choose to leave on their own volition?
 - Assembly Points: Have they defined assembly points for tenants or do they expect tenants to provide their own?
 - Shelter-In-Place: Do they support Shelter-In-Place? If not, what is their policy for tenants who chose to stay in the building?
 - * Will a skeleton crew still be available to maintain the building?
 - * What services will be pending: generators? Hall lights? Stairwell lights? elevators and elevator services? Will the vents be shut or open? Will air conditioning be kept going?
 - * Are tenants left to their own devices?
- Most importantly:
 - Ask them if they are compliant with new laws and if not, where they are in the approval process.
 - If they are compliant, ask for a copy of their plan and emergency contact list?
 - Find out, as well, if they have created an organization to support the non-fire emergency and to introduce you to the team.
3. The Fire Warden team, process and education program. If so, ask who the Fire Warden is for your floor. If you do not have one, ask them who they inform of the name of your new Fire Warden and how they will integrate them into the education program. If there is a Fire Warden and they work with another tenant on your floor, ask the Building if you can create one for the floor area inhabited by you and your staff.
4. The building's expectation of their tenants in case of a non-fire emergency.

5. Schedule of their Fire Drill presentations and Evacuation drills. See if they would not mind coming up to our floor to perform a basic presentation of the building safety processes and where the exits are and how/when to communicate with the Security Team.
6. How the building supports physically-challenged staff during any kind of emergency.
7. If the building has a decontamination program.
8. The tenant process for responding to medical emergencies, bomb threats and/or physical crimes within the building? Do they call 911 and then Lobby Security or just Lobby Security/Security Number?

The building manager should be willing to share their plans, processes and procedures with Tenants to ensure that the tenant take responsibility for understanding the process, taking accountability of their staff and for creating processes where the building may not provide. The tenant needs to understand their responsibilities to the safety process.

As a tenant, you do not have to put you or your staff in the position, the person was at the beginning of this article. Through a simple handshake with your facilities/building manager and time with your staff, you can ensure you have the tools (process, masks, goggles, knowledge of exits) to help you and your staff evacuate from the building to safety in case of an incident.

There is never a process where partnership between tenant and facilities manager is so crucial and so satisfying.

Where do you start?

1. Meet with your Building Manager and ask them about their Emergency Action Plan.

2. If your Building Manager does not have an Emergency Action Plan check with the Fire Department local to your building to ask about evacuation and emergency process for your building.

3. Organize your staff call tree and call tree process.

Resources.

New York Office of Emergency Management (OEM).

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/home/home.shtml>

Ready New York.

www.nyc.gov/readynewyork

FEMA: Are You Ready?

www.fema.gov/areyouready/

National Fire Protection Association.

NFPA 1600. Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs
<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/pdf/nfpa1600.pdf>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Emergency Preparedness and Response
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>

FEMA, Voluntary Private Sector Preparedness Accreditation and Certification Program (PS-Prep)

<http://www.fema.gov/privatesector/preparedness/>

FDNY Emergency Action Plans - 3 RCNY §6-02

http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/html/units/fire_prevention/emergency_action_plans.shtml