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Is your office prepared for the next disaster?

Law



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Over the past few years, from 9/11 to Hurricane Sandy, our region of the country has experienced real emergencies that have taken a toll, both emotionally and economically, on our lives, our businesses and our buildings. What threats lurk behind the next corner remains unknown. What is known, however, is that businesses must be prepared to safeguard property for the sake of their employees and continuity of commerce. This article explores some ideas for preparing for the unknown.

In today's digital world, businesses are rightly concerned about safeguarding data and threats to cyber security. We should not lose sight though of the need to protect our hard real estate assets. Identifying best practices and implementing emergency and security preparedness before the next

emergency may save significant time, money and lives.

High profile properties, such as apartment buildings, shopping malls, office buildings and hotels, have all been identified as potential terrorist targets. In response, the real estate industry has partnered with the Federal Government to identify potential threats and mitigate potential damages from malicious activity. The Real Estate Information Sharing and Analysis Center (REISAC), is a not-for-profit information sharing entity organized by the Real Estate Roundtable, a public/private venture between the United States commercial facilities sector and Federal homeland security officials, the purpose of which is to identify threats and develop techniques to mitigate damages from those threats. Being prepared means thinking about ways to protect critical infrastructure, create methods to effectively respond to any incident that may affect real estate assets and the people in them, and restore normal operations as soon as possible following any disruptions.

According to the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), since September 2011, the real estate industry has more than doubled its expenditures in providing safe and prepared office environments. BOMA has identified various low-cost or no-cost actions that owners, managers and tenants can undertake to help contain threats. Some low-tech no-cost methods include having regular drills so that personnel know how to evacuate a building, know where emergency exit and stairwells are located, identify team leaders to arrange evacuation of areas of offices, implement secure access points into office space with card key or automatic locking systems, invite local emergency responders to participate with a company's evacuation exercises, remind personnel to properly display badges, and escort all visitors entering and departing the premises. Other techniques that may require more investment include increased lighting on perimeter of buildings and in parking lots, deploying visible

security cameras and motion sensors, instituting a vehicle inspection program for visitors' parking and parking garages, and conducting vulnerability studies focusing on physical security, structural engineering and impact to utility systems.

If your business is situated in a multi-tenant facility, it is recommended that discussions be had with building ownership/management to coordinate what the building owner is doing for all of the tenants in the facility and to coordinate your efforts with other tenants in the facility so that there is a uniform and coordinated approach to emergency planning and preparedness programs.

We cannot accurately predict the next event or the timing thereof. However, business owners and property owners can take steps today to identify potential threats and mitigate the impacts therefrom should they occur.

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