

Building management must prepare the on-site staff for the worst possible scenarios. The staff must be provided with the training and tools needed to minimize the risks during a fire or other adversity. In addition, the building security personnel must be aware of the fire safety measures that have been implemented. Other key steps include the following: identifying and locating occupants with special needs, and ensuring that equipment to supply backup power is in full working order. To emphasize the importance of backup power, one must not forget the blackout of the summer of 2003 when the daily work and home lives of so many people in Ontario were suddenly thrown off course.

Preparation of the fire emergency plan begins with the election of a building evacuation coordination team. Key members must include resident man-

agers, handymen, and building service employees. This team is responsible for the implementation of the fire emergency plan. An adequate number



of floor wardens from among the building occupants must also be appointed. The wardens must become familiar with the fire emergency plan. They will enforce the plan by commu-

nicating evacuation routes to occupants during a fire emergency.

Floor wardens must ensure that all exits are operable and labeled at all times. Special attention must be paid to the evacuation route diagrams. These diagrams are posted on every floor and exit in elevators, lobbies, and major building junctions. In addition, the floor wardens must ensure that fire hose stations, fire extinguishers, and stairwells are not blocked with furniture or other storage materials. Accordingly, wardens must be trained for specific duties such as conducting regular floor status audits and enforcing standard procedures for the safe evacuation of occupants, as outlined in the approved building fire safety plan. The wardens must also coordinate and conduct fire drills. These duties are key components in preparing for unexpected emergencies.

Building management must ensure that all occupants know whom to call in the event of an emergency. Occupants must be aware of the proper sequence of notification and whether it must be initiated by means of an alarm system, public address system, telephone fan-out system, or oral communication. The most effective method of familiarizing occupants with fire emergency procedures is to conduct a fire drill at least once a year, or more frequently, depending on the occupancy classification as specified by the National Fire Code. A fire drill will allow the floor wardens to become familiar with the notification and evacuation procedures, as well as providing an opportunity for the fire alarm system to be tested.

Most importantly, the building's fire safety plan (FSP) must be properly implemented. This will enhance the

level of safety awareness among all occupants of the building. Increased awareness of procedures for prevention and protection will be vital for survival in the event of a fire condition. The lack of an FSP or the failure to implement the provisions of an approved FSP is considered a serious violation of the National Fire Code.

The fire department will regularly inspect the building premises in order to check the status of the fire safety equipment with the owners or designates. The department will determine if the FSP is being implemented properly and whether the operators understand their roles and responsibilities for fire safety planning. Owners and/or their building operators are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their buildings comply with the National Fire Code during the development and implementation of an

FSP that has been approved by the Chief Fire Official.

FSPs are to be reviewed periodically, as internal floor layouts and exit paths may be altered over time, emergency contact telephone numbers may have changed, or fire wardens may no longer be residents or employees within the building. Finally, it is critical that the FSP includes an up-to-date record of occupants with special needs or disabilities, and their supporting team structure, for reference in the event of an evacuation. An amendment to the FSP must be made immediately whenever a special needs occupant moves in or out of the building. ■

Fred P. Baumgartner and Ray Goulet are with Firepoint Technologies specializing in the development of approved fire safety plans and evacuation procedures. For more information, see our website at www.firepoint.cc or email info@firepoint.cc