

HAVING a PLAN



NOW MORE THAN EVER, BUSINESS OWNERS HAVE TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THEIR EMPLOYEES. AS SUCH, DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE FIRE SAFETY PLAN MIGHT JUST BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH WHEN A FIRE EMERGENCY ARISES.

Since the enactment of Bill C-45, building executives and company management with policy-making authority are legally responsible for preventing bodily harm to any persons in their facilities.

Given the enormous potential liabilities associated with this responsibility, building operators and their management personnel are much more aware of the risks to property and occupants in their facilities. For this reason, they are evaluating whether they have the key ingredients in place should, for example, a fire emergency arise.

One of the crucial responsibilities these operators bear to their occupants is to keep the fire alarm and emergency evacuation systems in full working order 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition to specialized electronic alerting systems, fire doors, smoke control fans, fire dampers, sprinklers and hand-held fire-fighting equipment all must be maintained in accordance with Canada's National Fire Code. Typically, businesses will hire specialized contractors to test, inspect and maintain this equipment year-round, in accordance with the aforementioned code.

While it isn't the occupants' responsibility to understand all the mechanical details of this equipment, they must be aware of the building's fire safety plan (FSP) in case a fire emergency occurs. And that is the responsibility of the owner

and/or manager of that particular facility.

It is therefore, by law, the responsibility of building owners and their property management administrators to develop and implement a validated FSP, a customized manual that outlines life safety procedures, as well as the availability and description of fire protection equipment within a building.

When crafting a FSP, its main objectives are 1) to increase safety awareness for all occupants of a building, and 2) to minimize the occurrence of situations that may be life-threatening. A FSP's planning process involves the identification of potentially hazardous situations (e.g., improper signage or not enough signage), general awareness of the mode of operation for the fire alarm system in the building and how to respond appropriately, education for the property management staff to avoid potential misdirection, the assessment of risk and the implementation of control measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of injury or harm that may occur during a fire evacuation.

Other items to include in an FSP are:

- An internal map of the premise to guide firefighters in the event of a fire; the map — posted prominently on each floor for all occupants to see — should provide an illustrated floor plan layout of a building, including all exits, stairwells and the location of fire and life safety equipment.
- Description of occupant evacuation pro-

cedures and fire drill schedules.

- Emergency contact telephone numbers, specified procedures for the floor warden teams and identification of occupants with special needs.
- Requirements for daily, weekly, monthly and yearly inspections and testing of the fire and life safety equipment in the building.

FSPs are typically prepared and submitted to the local fire department by specialized consulting firms. It is then the responsibility of someone within the fire department to review the FSP for full compliance, according to Section 2.8 of the National Fire Code. Upon review, their stamp is applied along with the date of approval.

Building operators, administrators and their staff have key roles to play during a fire emergency, and must have some form of training on the established FSP.

Providing training in "set fire evacuation procedures" and the establishment of clear escape routes are key steps to take in reducing risk of injury and potential loss of life. All occupants of a building, not just the personnel who co-ordinate the emergency fire evacuations, must be familiar with these procedures.

Knowledge of the FSP may just save their lives. ■

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