

focus on retail

Developing retail emergency management programs based on best practices can protect property and public safety—and keep the store open

By Jason D. Reid

the retail sector, by the nature of its business operation, is particularly susceptible to risk from internal and external factors. Thus, the sector has long recognized the need for effective and robust emergency management planning.

Effective EM plans aim to:

1) ensure the safety of employees and guests; mitigate or eliminate their exposure to risk; provide employees with the tools to respond effectively and provide support to visitors, tenants and arriving emergency services; and **2)** allow retailer to recover from emergencies in a timely and effective way. Retail EM programs

also support ongoing health and safety initiatives and provide strategic guidance for senior executives on how to approach crisis management, business continuity and reputational risk management.

A successful EM program in a retail environment demands foresight and imagination from all levels of retail facility operations,

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from the front line to senior management. Consultation with industry experts during the preparation of EM plans will add insight into industry best practices and enhance the overall risk/harm reduction effort, which is the main focus of the plan. The implementation of an EM plan is equally important and requires buy-in from all levels of facility operations and strong commitment from senior management.

An effective EM plan provides front-line staff and managers with the tools and confidence to mitigate, and often eliminate, minor crises before they grow into larger ones and to prevent significant crises from crippling the continuity of business operations.

Fire safety Plans, Floods & Leaks

Fire safety plans are a basic tool within a robust EM plan. They are also a legislated requirement under national and provincial fire codes. Well-written plans provide

a framework for occupant safety and contain detailed instructions to building occupants in the event of a fire including evacuation procedures and shelter in place. They also spell out supervisory staff responsibilities, including procedures for custodial staff and trades.

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Fire safety plans are only as effective as the information they contain, and many retail facility fire safety plans are out of date and lack vital information about the facility’s critical infrastructure and resources. Fire codes require updates and reviews of fire safety plans to be conducted at least annually and be approved by local fire services. Non-compliance may

expose retail facilities to legal action for regulatory infractions and civil liabilities risk in the event of fires resulting in property damage, serious injury or death.

Detailed and current information contained within a fire safety plan will assist responding fire services to formulate a response that may save lives and property. Additionally, in cases of major non-fire incidents, these plans may provide invaluable assistance to responding police services requiring technical information in support of an effective tactical response. An implementation of a best practice in a shopping centre EM program is the inclusion of tactical information in the Fire Safety Plan for use by arriving police services.

Another EM program best practice to consider is the identification of potential leak and flood occurrences. To prevent or minimize losses due to leaks and floods, it is important to identify domestic water-line isolation

valves for rapid access in case of a rupture. This requires using up-to-date drawings and floor plans to highlight these areas and training on-site security/operational personnel on shut-off procedures. An effective, rapid response means less damage and less impact on business operations.

Operational disruptions that affect public safety or prevent a retailer from serving customers are costly to the business and its reputation. It is vitally important to retail facility operations to prepare effective Emergency Management plans based on industry best practices, in consultation with stakeholders and industry experts. The effective implementation of accepted risk management practices in retail operations can make all the difference in the successful management of emergencies. 

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