



All-Hazards 'Evacuation' Drills Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Summary: Partnering with the private sector, the City of Pittsburgh recently evaluated the risks and vulnerabilities of the numerous high-rise buildings in the city. The city council then worked with building managers and owners to develop evacuation plans and procedures that would help them become better prepared for a potential emergency or disaster.

When UAL Flight 93 crashed within 50 miles of downtown Pittsburgh, Mayor Tom Murphy realized that his city needed procedures to address the hazards to the numerous high-rise buildings that make up the city's skyline. The mayor created an emergency operations working group to assess risks to high-rise buildings, identify gaps and develop recommendations to remedy areas of need. Headed by the president of the Pittsburgh Building Owners and Managers Association, the working group represented a public/private approach that resulted in a comprehensive all-hazards building ordinance mandating evacuation drills for all buildings seven stories and higher in the city.

Under the previous code, building owners were required to file fire evacuation plans through the fire department. The new ordinance, however, calls for procedures to address not just fire, but a wide range of hazards, including weapons of mass destruction, earthquakes, hazardous materials incidents, civil disturbances, criminal or violent behavior, bomb threats and inclement weather. Managers of every building seven stories and higher – more than 300 buildings – must conduct a drill evacuating at least half the building occupants twice a year. Every three years, there must be an evacuation drill involving all the building's occupants. The drills are to be observed and evaluated by fire and EMS personnel.

The drills are based on all-hazards plan templates available from the city, which building owners use to develop their own building-specific plans. The plans, which are reviewed and evaluated by the city, must contain procedures that take into account not only occupants, but also visitors and disabled individuals. "It is an all-hazard ordinance," said Catherine Beahn, project manager for Pittsburgh's emergency operations. "We simply needed to find a way to be more alert and more prepared, and have residents and workers better prepared."

Thinking Locally:

How can you institute all-hazards procedures for your area?
Do you have a contingency plan if residents can't evacuate?

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