Danger In The Parking Lot

Most of our business continuity plans include evacuation procedures of some sort. Many are simply “get out and gather in the parking lot.” Onl “shelter-in-place” options. I use the term “options” deliberately, because “shelter-in-place” is more than just staying inside a building. Shelter-in environment.

HazMat Threats

For many planners considering a shelter-in-place option, the risk comes from hazardous materials. If the organization is located along a busy h seaway, if it is near a sea or airport, or if it is situated near chemical plants or other operations which emit dangerous gases, the hazmat risk m reason to include a shelter-in-place option.

But there are other reasons. Two near the top of my list are tornados and earthquakes.

Unfortunately, there still are other reasons, such as bombs. The bomb may not be intended for your facility, but if your facility is in close proxim discriminatory.

An occasional correspondent told me of two “shelter-in-place” incidents which occurred with his organization, a large insurance company.

One incident goes back to September 21, 2006 and a “fire down below” event in Philadelphia. A fire and related gas buildup caused explosion city’s streets. The explosions were so powerful they sent man hole covers flying into the air and shook nearby buildings.

My correspondent’s organization has offices in two adjacent high-rise buildings. Each building apparently has independent management; one h was not.

The evacuees left the relative safety of the buildings for the dangers of the street and flying “maintenance hole” covers, each weighing more th

On the other hand, since at the time no one knew what was going on, those who remained in the building could have been killed had the buildi make a good case for identifying the danger before making a move; rather like touching a door to see if it is cool before opening it to an area th

The second incident happened in another town when someone placed a bomb across the street from my correspondent’s facility.

It wasn’t much of a bomb. He said the folks in the office reported it looked like a small gasoline can and it was not intended for this organizatio the people of the office did go to a safe room.

Safe Rooms

The first consideration of any shelter-in-place option is to determine the safe room specifications.

From what risks is the “safe room” supposed to provide safety?

In most parts of the United States and Canada, the most common threat is a tornado. Tornado-proof rooms have been around for some time a

In California and, actually, many other places in North America, earthquakes are a concern. Perhaps not as high on the probability scale as tor consideration. Earthquake-resistant structures are commonplace in Japan and are gaining acceptance in parts of North America.

Elsewhere, along rivers, railroad tracks, major highways, and near ports of all types, hazardous material accidents are a threat. Locations nea considered at risk for a hazmat accident.

The best time to plan for a safe room – regardless of threat – is before a structure is designed. Unfortunately, business continuity planners rare thoughts at this stage. (Perhaps we should make ourselves available to architects as a “value-added service.”)

Creating a “safe room” in a low-rise building – according to the U.S. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), a building less than 75 feet/2 is being designed should be a simple and relatively low-cost option. Retro-fitting a safe room into an existing structure is another matter.

“Safe rooms can be included in the design of high-rise structures,” according to Janice Olshesky at the Olshesky Design Group in Alexandria, shelter will depend on the ability of the building in which the safe room is located to withstand damage and remain standing. While the shelter impact, it is not reasonable to expect the safe room to withstand the weight of the building crashing down upon it.

"There are many ways the building can be structurally strengthened in new design. These ways would include incorporating continuity, redund which would allow a damaged building to bridge over a failed element and redistribute loads. This will limit the debris that might otherwise fall c room."

As far as retrofitting an existing structure, Olshesky said, "Safe rooms can be retrofitted into existing low-rise and high-rise buildings. An existir as a shelter is unlikely to provide the same degree of protection as a shelter designed as new construction.

"While retrofitting existing buildings to include a shelter can be expensive and disruptive to users, it may be the only available option. When ret building is considered, interior conference rooms, stairwells and other areas that can be structurally and mechanically isolated provide the bes

"I do not know what the cost would be," she added.

Is it Legal?

Can you force someone to stay inside when they want to leave?

What happens if Jane Doe needs to go pick up little Susie at day care while the building is locked down? Of if Frank from finance needs to tak Or simply that, according to Mabel, "It's time to go home, so I'm going."

Can an employer or employer's agent – a business continuity planner, for example – force a person to say inside when the person may be inju preventing a person from leaving because in the process of going out, the risk – chemical, human, something we can't foresee – will enter the someone be obliged to stay with the group during an evacuation?

I am not a lawyer and I don't play one on TV, but I will make one suggestion: if your organization anticipates having a safe room, have policies out – in simple, unambiguous language – what is expected of all personnel *and* make certain all personnel acknowledge they have read, unde and procedures.

And hope there are no claustrophobic clients or vendors in the building when the lockdown commences.

Something to consider when creating the policies and procedures to allow or deny a person to endanger themselves and others by leaving the stay inside past their normal shift, do they get paid? Can they make personal calls? What about food – will the junk food machines be unlocke And, by the way, what about people with special diets?

Nothing's simple.

Evacuating to the Parking Lot

At the beginning of this exercise I hinted that having people stroll out to the packing lot may not be the best way to design an evacuation plan.

First, there needs to be a buddy system to help assure that everyone exits the facility. There also needs to be "hall monitors" or "fire wardens" the halls" of lingerers. Very senior management must sign up for evacuation exercises and join the peons in filing outside. If the boss can stay not me? Right?

Second, people need to have something between them and the building they just abandoned.

If there is a fire, there could be an explosion. If there is an explosion, there could be flying debris. The evacuees need to put some protection b debris (even if it "only" is glass from a broken window).

Congregating in a parking lot adjacent to the evacuated building probably is congregating too close to danger. On the other hand, the cars in t protection from projectiles. Other things sometimes found in/near parking lots also may be helpful – dumpsters are fine, but generators are "iff generators you usually have fuel and that is a hazard on several levels.

Congregating in a parking lot has an additional disadvantage – emergency responders (fire, police) will be coming with their equipment and ha blocking the way will prove counter-productive.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has a publication that recommends ways out of a high-rise building (75 feet/2 most U.S. government publications, the two-page Evacuating High-Rise Buildings Fact Sheet is available to download for free from the Interne http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/evacuating-highrise-factsheet.pdf/

About The Author

John Glenn, MBCI, has been helping organizations of all types avoid or mitigate risks to their operations since 1994. Comments about this article, or others at h
sent to Planner@JohnGlennMBCI.com