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The private real estate community can learn much from the Massachusetts Army National Guard - by Johanna Hall

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A hallmark of military agencies is that they have contingency plans which cover what to do in case the original plan does not work or in the event of an emergency. Much can be learned by the private sector from such planning. For example, Weston & Sampson is working with the Massachusetts Army National Guard to develop Installation Energy and Water Plans (IEWP) for all Army National Guard installations in the state. The IEWP provides a roadmap for these installations to achieve increased security, resilience, readiness, and mission assurance by characterizing baseline conditions and risks associated with energy and water security. This information is then used to

develop a holistic IEWP roadmap that the installation can use to identify infrastructure improvements and improve water and energy security and the resilience and security of the installation.

So how can this roadmap for the Army National Guard be translated to meaningful lessons for the private real estate community? We can begin with the concept of “critical missions.” Of course, the Army National Guard has many critical missions including natural disaster staging, emergency communications, and armory functions which must be carried out despite, or in the face of, various threats and hazards. Extreme weather events, cyber security threats, climate change, and other hazards are all possibilities in today’s world.

The private real estate community likewise has its own set of critical missions which must be functional and operational at all times. This includes conducting needed maintenance and upgrades to keep tenants engaged and under contract. Parallels can be drawn between the National Guard and the private real estate community in terms of threats and hazards. These include rising energy and water costs, inefficient HVAC systems, deteriorating building envelopes, or rising costs of materials needed for construction and building improvements. Natural disasters and routine weather events can also present a threat to available electric and water supply. The real estate community cannot let these threats or hazards interrupt their operations or disrupt tenants who rely upon these services and assurances. Money and reputations are at stake.

By developing their own IEWP or equivalent plan, private real estate owners and managers can be better prepared to face the variety of threats and hazards typical of this line of business. One tactic that private real estate can employ is to conduct an energy audit or assessment of a building, facility, or even a campus. This exercise provides a baseline of energy use which can be compared against any changes in either use, demand, or costs. Similarly, a water use baseline analysis can help identify leaks or other problems that may be associated with a sudden increase in water use or costs.

Once a baseline has been developed for existing energy and water use, a priority list of improvements or upgrades can be developed to ensure that the most important needs are addressed before a threat occurs. For example, a roof or window replacement project will not only improve the building envelope and protect a building against storms and other harsh weather, but it can also help improve a building’s efficiency and reduce energy costs. Installation of behind-the-meter solar photovoltaics can also help to offset existing energy costs and allow for a hedge against electricity availability due to the threat of interrupted electric supply.

Work under the Massachusetts Army National Guard contracts includes:

- Reviewing existing installation plans, water and energy usage and supply data, and performance metrics;
- Establishing energy and water needs for critical missions;

- Identifying threats and hazards;
- Assessing risks and their impact on the mission; and
- Developing baselines, generating solutions, and developing implementation plans.

Real estate owners and managers can use a methodology like this as a way of being mindful of the threats and hazards their own portfolios may encounter. Taking the lessons learned from the Army National Guard and developing an improvement plan, ahead of any emergency situation, will only help protect their substantial investment and increase resilience, security, and reliability for customers and tenants.

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