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BOMA International releases 12 top tips for emergency planning

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September was National Preparedness Month. To bring awareness to the importance of emergency planning in commercial real estate, BOMA International has released its top 12 ways for property professionals to be prepared for any emergency situation that may arise.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, National Preparedness Month is a nationwide initiative to encourage Americans to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses and schools. The threat of emergencies can be reduced through prevention, early detection, notification, effective evaluation or relocation measures. Begin your preparedness planning now. Here are some guidelines to help you get started or to augment an already existing plan:

1. Review your building's emergency preparedness plan - have you put together a preparedness team to deal with emergency issues when they arise?
2. Have your preparedness team take part in "what if" exercises, in which team members propose responses to a number of emergency scenarios.
3. Develop a multi-layered crisis communication plan that creates a fast and effective line of communication with tenants, local authorities and agencies, and the media.
4. Determine how your company's leave and salary policies will apply in emergency situations, such as a pandemic flu outbreak, when a significant portion of your workforce may not be able to come to work.
5. Identify essential personnel and consider cross training personnel to provide those critical services.
6. Identify building elements that may warrant special attention in the event of a natural disaster, such as roofing materials, flashing and coping materials, roof vents and air intakes, awnings, gutters and downspouts, roof-mounted, post-mounted or suspended signage, free-standing equipment and siding materials.
7. Review local evacuation procedures and identify the agency that will issue evacuation orders.
8. Determine how the evacuation order will be communicated and where evacuation routes and shelters are located
9. Make certain all of your tenants are aware of the building evacuation procedures, and encourage tenants to participate in evacuation drills
10. Appoint a re-entry team to access building damage after the disaster.
11. Include a list of primary, secondary and out of region suppliers to ensure an organization's ability to rebound from a catastrophe is not hindered by a lack of resources.
12. Consider identifying off-site work facilities or telecommuting capabilities to ensure business continuity in the event of a disaster.

"Preparedness is paramount to protecting lives and business operation in the event of an

emergency," said BOMA International chairman and CEO Brenna Walraven, RPA, CPM, executive managing director, National Property Management, USAA Real Estate Company. "A well-planned, regularly reviewed and practiced emergency preparedness plan is more crucial than ever and is a property professional's best defense when disaster strikes."

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