

## **A Blueprint for a Successful Pandemic Preparation Plan**

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With flu season in full force, it is time to take stock in your emergency preparation plans. For many commercial property managers, addressing this threat has become a critical addition to their list of core responsibilities.

The current outbreak of the H1N1 virus places a new burden on property managers to ensure the safety of building occupants, visitors, and employees.

A survey in May 2009 by the consulting firm Mercer revealed that 41% of employers have no policy for responding to health-related emergencies. Since then, however, the commercial real estate industry has instituted stronger methods of monitoring and managing health-related risks. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration weighed in with a booklet of guidelines, "Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic."

### **Sanitizing Common Areas**

Frequently touched surfaces such as counters, doorknobs, light switches, elevator buttons, hand rails, railings, refrigerator door handles, sinks, coffee pots, vending equipment, computer keyboards and mice, and phones should be added to the routine cleaning schedule. Disinfection of touch points in high-traffic rooms and common areas should be increased to a minimum of three times daily. Disinfectant wipes and sprays should be used in office spaces such as desks and cubicles. Disinfectant "bombs" that set off a dry disinfectant meant to cover every surface in an enclosed room represent another option. Property managers should also offer disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizers to employees and tenants.

Janitorial workers should be trained on proper hand washing procedures and wear gloves while working. Encourage proper hand washing, respiratory etiquette and proper tissue and waste disposal among building occupants.

### **Establish a Service Provider Contingency Plan**

If a vendor, supplier, or contractor cannot provide needed facility support, consider the following options:

- **Alternate Suppliers.** Identify other third parties as an alternative provider of needed cleaning products or services.
- **Service Level Agreements.** Negotiate acceptable service levels that can be invoked. SLAs may include 24/7 emergency communications, service priority, and minimum response times.
- **Renegotiate Scope-of-Work Documents.** When renegotiating your cleaning contract, consider adding expanded cleaning procedures to your scope-of-work document costs. This will ensure that sanitation procedures are automatically stepped up as the identified threat increases.

### **Stockpile Supplies Early**

Such items as soap, tissue, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies typically are in short supply during peak season. Be sure these infection control supplies are accessible to your employees and tenants.

### **Employers should:**

- Post reminders about frequent hand washing
- Maintain policies that encourage ill employees to stay home.
- Display influenza preparation on the company website or in an easily accessible internal documents folder.

- Use resources that minimize personal interactions, including conference calls and videoconferencing, and telecommuting.
- Remind travelling employees to take precautions.

### **Communicate With Tenants**

In many instances, emergency planning is not only about protecting assets and minimizing liability, it is also about protecting, attracting and retaining tenants. Informing tenants about known risks and emergency information plans is critical to maintaining both good will and effective business operations.

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The key to a successful pandemic plan is educating and empowering employees and tenants. Having the latest information and emergency contact numbers is the most important—and most overlooked—step in the process. So don't forget to stay educated and share your plan with employees and tenants.

The best emergency plan is one that never gets used. It's like carrying an umbrella when there's a chance of showers: it might not rain, but it's good to have when the skies darken.