

Property Management Risk Insights

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Be Prepared for Unexpected Threats and Dangers

As a property manager, you are responsible for the safety of your tenants and the property itself. You need to be prepared for a host of unforeseen dangers that threaten that safety, including criminal activity, natural disasters and terrorist acts. Though these events may seem unlikely, they could have catastrophic consequences so it is imperative that you prepare.

Without prior planning, you leave your company open to financial disaster, especially if you are forced to evacuate or temporarily close down your buildings. You also may face lawsuits for being negligent in protecting your tenants.

Ensure Proper Security

One risk you need to be aware of and plan for is criminal activity, including vandalism, break-ins, theft and violence. Though not all security threats can be avoided, some situations can be prevented with appropriate preparation.

- Advise staff and residents to report any suspicious persons or activity in or around the facility.
- Establish and follow visitor control procedures when feasible. This may include assigned parking, sign-ins for use of public areas, escorts for tours of the property, etc.
- Survey locks, fences, exterior lights and other physical security devices to ensure that they are in place where needed and in proper operating condition. Establish a monthly inspection of your security perimeter and key protective features of your facility.
- Evaluate critical locations in your facility for proper security, including the electric, telephone and gas units, building entrances, transformers, outside storage units and computer rooms.
- Be sure each unit is equipped with appropriate locks and security features, and instruct residents to let management know if maintenance is needed or if their key is lost or stolen.
- If your facility has a security/fire alarm system, be sure it is operating properly and that key personnel know how to arm/disarm it.
- Make sure that fire suppression systems are regularly inspected and maintained. Also be sure that a sufficient number of trusted personnel know how to activate, operate and shut them down.
- Closed-circuit television can serve as an excellent crime deterrent, and when the system is equipped with a recorder it can help solve crimes.
- Review your procedures for issuing facility keys and access cards. Keep a list of all residents who have received keys (and how many were issued per unit).
- Discuss security with your local police department. Police departments are often very willing to provide information and support, which may include regular patrols through your complex or past your properties.
- Have your local fire department conduct a pre-planned visit to your building. While there, they can identify potential hazards and plan fire suppression priorities.

Disaster Planning

Though a more unlikely risk, you should always be prepared to use established strategies to mitigate the risk of disasters:

- Be sure to discuss terrorism and applicable natural disaster coverage with your insurance agent.
- Keep copies of insurance policies and other critical documents in a safe and accessible location (e.g. a fireproof safe).
- Evaluate which disasters are most likely to occur in your area, remembering to include the possibility for terrorist activity. Be sure you are prepared for all of the risks you identify.
- Develop a Disaster Recovery Plan. If you already have one make sure that it is up-to-date. This entails preparing for anything that disruption in essential systems, infrastructure or building functions.

- Have telephone call lists available (include cell phone and pager numbers) for all key personnel so required staff members can be contacted from any location in the event of a disaster.
 - Establish a system to communicate with tenants in the event of a disaster or other emergency situation. Educate tenants about this system and other disaster response plans that they should be aware of, including evacuation or building lock-down procedures.
 - Consider establishing an alternate method for your phone service if the switchboard becomes unusable (e.g. forwarding incoming calls to a cell phone or remote number).
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