

# Always Be Prepared.

This online program can train tenants for emergency situations.

by **Stephanie Bell**

**W**hen a fire broke out in a Southern California commercial property last October, the tenants were able to evacuate so smoothly that the fire department commended them for doing such a good job. In turn, the fire department was able to do its job effectively. How did the property owner help his tenants do this? By implementing a Web-based, interactive training program called BSSonline from Building Safety Solutions, the property owner armed his tenants with life-saving knowledge. Everyone was able to evacuate the building injury free.

Greg Prather, building manager of the LaSalle Bank Building in Chicago, wasn't as lucky. In early December 2004, a large fire encompassed the building. Shortly after this fire, Prather heard about BSSonline and implemented the program. He now feels confident that if another fire broke out, his tenants will be well informed.

## **Making Buildings Safer**

BSS specializes in building-safety and architectural-engineering assessment services. Using a combination of building structure knowledge and technology, the company created BSSonline to help property owners prepare their tenants for disaster and emergency situations. The interactive program can be accessed from any computer, is fully digitized with integrated 3-D graphics, and uses simulation and voice narration as teaching tools.

More than 50 clients currently use BSSonline, according to Hector Gomez, BSS chief executive officer in Pasadena, Calif. "Through this program [we] want

to empower people with the knowledge to save themselves," he says.

Effective disaster management training also benefits property owners. "It creates value and minimizes liability," Gomez says. BSSonline reduces property owners' liability allowing them to maximize safety compliance and obtain more favorable insurance premiums. The online digital program also enhances a property's internal operations with its interactive training program that effectively conveys information to employees.

## **Tenant Safety**

Ray Rosales, coordinator of corporate security for the Nestle building in Glendale, Calif., implemented BSSonline three years ago. While the Nestle building has not had a reason to evacuate, Rosales hopes that the training will be effective and tenants will follow directions. The interactive features are important because they provide a proactive way for tenants to learn the system, he finds.

For example, the program trains tenants to evacuate smoothly so that everyone isn't heading for the same exit or stairwell, avoiding stampedes or accidents. It also saves employers money by eliminating the need for costly off-site training sessions, reducing hours spent out of the office.

The program is, "pretty basic stuff," Rosales says. "There is a floor warden program and an emergency response team program to help remind forgetful employees of what they need to be doing during an emergency," he says.

Tenants also can take an online virtual tour to familiarize themselves with the

building, Prather explains. The program is divided into three-five minute modules based on the specific emergency or disaster and each video highlights items important to tenant safety.

After viewing these presentations, tenants must take a test on what they learned about the building's safety procedures. Prather takes the process one step further by linking the test results to employees' identification cards. "If you don't pass the test, you don't get an identification card," he says. Even visitors to the building have to take and pass the tests.

The program can be customized to specific floor plans and designs. For example, "We changed the names of the stairwells from north, west, and northeast to A, B, and C and also color-coded them," Prather says. This helps people who may be confused as to which staircase is which, one of the problems during the LaSalle Bank fire.

No commercial property owner or building manager wants to be faced with a life-threatening emergency situation. However, property owners increasingly are realizing that tenants should be prepared for all types of emergencies and disasters, both natural and man-made. As Gomez notes, knowledge learned through training is power, and this power is what leads people to make rational decisions in emergency situations. ■

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