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Ask the Expert (Response Plans)

What Is the Difference Between Emergency Response and Pre-Incident Plan?

By Len Karson | September 1st, 2017

Emergency situations come in many forms. While some are predictable (such as hurricanes and severe winter storms), others (such as tornadoes, active shooters, biohazard incidents) happen with little or no warning. In any of those cases, excellent emergency response is critical to saving lives and property.

We are often asked, or find ourselves needing to clarify, the difference between an emergency response plan and a pre-incident plan. An emergency response plan defines the roles, responsibilities and procedures that need to go into effect during an emergency. It should include evacuation and lock-down procedures, as well as focus on communications processes both internally and with external parties. Regularly scheduled drills also are essential for optimum preparation.

The pre-incident plan (or pre-plan) is a tool that centralizes all critical building and property information required by first responders so they can act with knowledge. This should include site plans, floor plans, hazardous material details, locations of utility shut-offs and fire hydrants, geographical maps and other critical building and infrastructure details. Hosted either by property management or a municipal fire department, an up-to-date plan is essential to reduce the risk to occupants, responders and the property.

A digital pre-plan makes the information highly shareable between property management, first responders and mutual aid stations. This is critical if there are occupants with special needs, such as students with cognitive or developmental disabilities. Your pre-plan should supplement and complement any emergency response plan.

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