

KNOWTHE DRILL

Supply employees with the basic knowledge to protect themselves and guests from fire at your hotel.

John Fannin

Although most hotel managers and risk management staff have some training in safety implementation, the basic assumption remains that simply complying with local codes and ordinances or hotel franchise recommendations is adequate. However, local safety measures cannot fully address all the issues that need to be considered.

An effective fire protection program encompasses three key components: people, processes and technology. Hotel staffs must be fully trained to respond to emergencies. There must be written processes and procedures in place that staff can learn and understand. And, hotels must have the proper technologies that detect, contain or suppress a fire and notify occupants. Fire alarms, smoke detectors and sprinkler systems are necessities in any responsibly managed facility.

Hotel Fire Prevention

Most fire protection strategies are designed to slow or divert the movement of smoke and fire, not stop it. You and your employees should be concerned with whether, where and how to move occupants out of your building if a fire does occur.

First, building design principles must include:

- Two ways out from any location
- Adequate numbers, sizes and spacing of exits in accordance with the applicable provisions of the life safety code
- Protection for escape routes:
 - Clearly marked, lighted exit paths
 - Enclosed stairways
 - Barriers to prevent fire spread
 - Smoke control methods to protect exit path environments
 - Escape routes to the outside or to protected spaces where occupants may safely remain
 - Clear exit areas

Staff Training

You must have a written emergency action plan and review it carefully you're your employees, allowing them to have ready access to it. Specific training must include:

- Individual roles and responsibilities
 - * Delineation by department
 - * Delineation of alternate management teams, including employee responsibilities, should anything happen to the primary management team
- Notification, warning and communications procedures
 - * Have a defined list of

emergency service contacts (police, fire, medical)

- * Have an alternate telephone list of staff cell phone numbers for intra-office communications in case of a landline outage
- Means for locating and evacuating physically challenged guests
- Location and use of common emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers, hose cabinets, etc.
- Regular staff fire drills
 - * Include evacuation procedures, knowledge of exit routes, location of fire exits
 - * Staff knowledge of location of all fire exits in order to assist in guest evacuations
 - * Ensure that all exits are not locked or cluttered
 - * Staff personnel should know how to unlock doors in the dark, in case of a power outage or during a smoke-filled condition
 - * Knowledge of procedures in case evacuation is not possible

If a Fire Breaks Out

Employees should attempt to escape — not investigate! Few people have experienced a hostile fire. They have no idea how fast a fire can grow or how bad it can get. They are not familiar with the phenomenon known as flashover. People cannot spend time confirming that there is a fire or gathering up valuables.

Even if a building is designed and constructed for safe evacuation, employees must be educated and rehearsed in safe escape behaviors. Employees should know:

- C Whether to escape and where to go (stay in place, go to a safe refuge, or get outside)
- C Two ways out
- C They must get out fast
- C To call 911 from a safely located phone. As much information as possible should be given to the dispatcher. Employees should not assume that someone else has already notified authorities
- C If smoke is present keep low to the floor. Take short breaths to avoid inhaling any more smoke than necessary
- C Don't open the windows, unless they are having trouble breathing.
- C Seal cracks around the door with wet towels, tape, bed clothing or similar items to keep out the smoke
- C If trapped, hang a sheet, jacket, shirt or other object out the window that will attract attention. Shout for help,

and call the police on the phone and tell them you are unable to get out of the room. The police will be in direct radio contact with officers at the fire. Anyone trapped should remain calm until firefighters reach them.

- C After exiting the building, employees should direct guests away from the building to an attended location and not allow guests to congregate around the building exits.

Improved Business Performance

The demand for increased safety (and security) accountability is here to stay. Ultimately, it will change things for the better and lead to safer hotels. Responsible hotel professionals have the power to engender public goodwill and help rejuvenate the travel and hospitality economy by embracing safety and security initiatives. **ALB**

John Fannin is the President/ CEO of SafePlace Corp., which offers the SafePlace® Lodging Facility Accreditation Program. For more information about SafePlace® Accreditation go to www.safeplace.com or call (302) 479-9000.