

The Municipal RISK MANAGER

FALL 2008

A Publication of the Maine Municipal Association

Managing Public Buildings for Life Safety Part I- Exits and Building Egress

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A few minutes before closing time on Friday, October 17, 2003 a fire broke out in a storage closet on the 12th floor of the Cook County Administration Building in Chicago. During the emergency evacuation, six employees became trapped in one of the building's exit stairways and perished from smoke inhalation. Investigation revealed that among the many factors contributing to the deaths was: 1. failure to properly maintain the stairway's smoke removal system, 2. failure of security personnel to unlock stairway doors after the alarm sounded so that occupants could seek "safe haven" on a floor if the stairway became impassable, and 3. an overall lack of training for building employees in emergency procedures, including evacuation plans.

National fire statistics tell us that the fatality rate, per event, from fires in public buildings is only about half that of events in private homes. However, the annual fire deaths in public buildings tend to occur in a few spectacular and tragic events each year, as opposed to several hundred thousand home fires annually. The injury rate from fires in public buildings, per event, is over twice that of fires occurring in residential buildings.

Maine does not have any 37 story governmental buildings like the Cook County Administration Building, but nonetheless employees, customers, and visitors have an expectation that any public facility they enter is safe, and that they will be able to exit in the event of an emergency. Mu-

nicipalities clearly strive to maintain safety. However, life safety deficiencies in buildings are still encountered by RMS Loss Control Consultants during the course of their inspections, and are encountered frequently enough to cause serious concern. The problems that are noted range from exit sign lights burned out or inoperative emergency lights to very dangerous situations like blocked/inoperative exits, building modifications that result in inadequate exits, potential rapid fire spread, or sleeping spaces in buildings that lack the proper fire protection and life safety controls needed for this occupancy.

Safety of the public from fire in municipally owned/operated facilities is the jurisdiction of the Office of State Fire Marshal, Department of Public Safety, which enforces the "NFPA 101 Life Safety Code, 2006 edition", as adopted by Maine. The safety of public sector employees in these buildings

is under the jurisdiction of the Maine Bureau of Labor Standards, Public Sector Enforcement Program. They enforce the provisions of Federal OSHA Part 1910 Subpart E standards adopted by Maine. These are based on versions of the Life Safety Code and, as a general rule, compliance with the current Life Safety Code satisfies the requirements of Subpart E.

The Life Safety Code sets minimum standards for exits, fire protection, building materials, and fire detection/alarm for both new and existing buildings. Requirements are based on a building's "occupancy". For example, the most stringent requirements that apply to typical municipal facilities are for the occupancies of "Assembly", such as an auditorium, community hall or library, "Educational" for schools, and "Dormitory" for fire stations with sleeping quarters. Less stringent requirements exist for "Storage" occupancies such

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Annual Motor Vehicle Checks

Does your organization currently check motor vehicle records before you hire an employee who will operate municipal vehicles? Is an annual check done of all employees who operate municipal vehicles?

Prudent risk management practice dictates that all governmental entities check motor vehicle records of any individual who will operate municipal vehicles. An additional check should

be performed annually to review the driving records of all employees and volunteers who might be required to drive a government vehicle. Such records may be obtained at no cost to municipalities by subscribing to on-line services through Information Resource of Maine (Informe) at (207) 621-2600 or <http://www.informe.org/subscribe/subscribe.html>.

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LIFE SAFETY (cont'd)

as public works garages. The "Business" occupancy that applies to most typical town offices falls somewhere between the two extremes. There are provisions for buildings with "mixed", "multiple", or "separated" occupancies.

The Life Safety Code is not based on conference room assumptions about how fast a fire will spread, or how long it will take occupants to get out. Rather, it is grounded in over a century of tragic experience in what fire can do, and what people really do when faced with a fire emergency. Over the years the code has had major updates, usually due to new lessons learned from tragedy. For example a major hotel tragedy in the 1980s showed the need for major changes in the code due to the increased toxicity of burning synthetic building materials. Also significant changes were made to the code after several tragic school fires revealed inadequate assumptions about how long students must be kept "safe" in order to successfully exit.

The first thing to remember when managing a building for life safety is that buildings are generally not designed with "extra" or "unnecessary" exits or features of fire protection.



The Municipal Risk Manager

The Municipal Risk Manager is published seasonally to inform you of developments in municipal risk management which may be of interest to you in your daily business activities. The information in these articles is general in nature and should not be considered advice for any specific risk management or legal question; you should consult with legal counsel or other qualified professional of your own choice.

Publisher: Risk Management Services


Editor: Marcus Ballou

Layout Designer: Jaime G. Clark

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Doors, corridors, and emergency equipment cannot simply be abandoned or modified without careful consideration of the Life Safety Code. In fact, any modification of a public building those impacts any life safety features requires a construction permit from the Plans Review Division of the Fire Marshall's Office.

Something as simple as installing the wrong hardware on a door or installing interior finish that does not meet the proper flame spread rating can seriously degrade the safety of the facility.

Please see the next edition of the Risk Manager for the second installment of Exit and Building Egress 

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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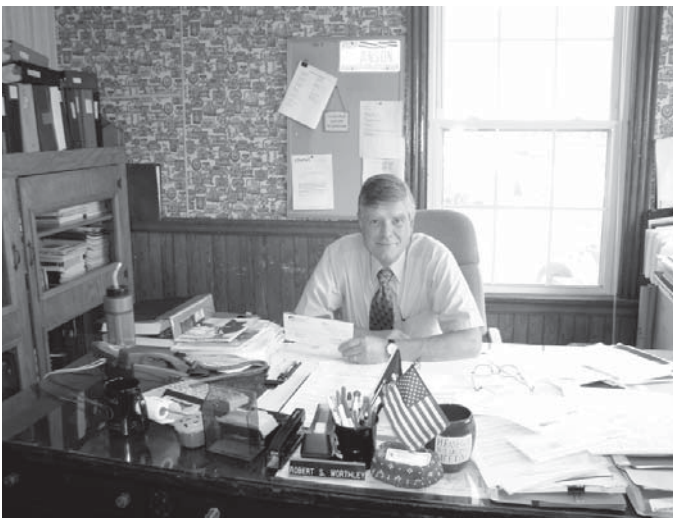


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Due to sound management, underwriting and favorable loss histories, the Property & Casualty Pool, Workers Compensation Fund and the Unemployment Compensation Fund distributed a record number of dividends to its Members. Risk Management Services awarded \$1, 568,000 to its membership in 2008



The Unemployment Compensation Fund distributed \$719,695 in Dividends to 78% of its Members.



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All of us at MMA Risk Management Services would like to take this moment to recognize the efforts of our Membership. Together we are making a difference that pays.

To qualify for a dividend the Member must be a current participant of the Workers Compensation Fund, Property & Casualty Pool or the Unemployment Compensation Fund and must have been a participant for three full consecutive years. If a member participates in both the Workers Compensation Fund and the Property & Casualty Pool, they earn an additional 1% dividend in each program. Dividends are not guaranteed from year to year, and their award depends not only on the claims experience of the individual member but also on the overall claims experience of the Pool and the Fund(s).

MOTOR VEHICLE CHECKS *(cont'd)*

Informe waives the annual subscription fee for municipalities.

It is important to note that Police Departments have access to driving records for law enforcement purposes only and are not permitted to perform administrative driver license checks. Municipalities are encouraged to adopt a brief written policy which establishes actions to be taken in the event of repeated speeding, OUI or other motor vehicle infractions. This action will help your organization apply sanctions uniformly. For more information go to http://www.memun.org/RMS/LC/bestprac/fleet_safety.pdf 🏠

WWW.MEMUN.ORG

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30 ONLINE SAFETY & HUMAN RESOURCE TRAINING COURSES ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT MMA'S RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES WEBSITE:

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- *Fire and Explosion Hazards
- Fire Prevention
- Forklift Safety
- General Ergonomics
- Hand and Power Tool Safety
- Hazard Communication
- Hearing Conservation
- *Laboratory Safety, General
- *Ladder and Scaffolding Safety
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- Personal Protective Equipment
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Step 2: Choose *Online Safety Training* and follow the easy instructions.