

RJA Develops Emergency Evacuation Plan for Residential High Rise

Challenge. Following 9/11, cities around the country have developed and implemented various forms of evacuation plan ordinances that require certain types of buildings and occupancies to create and submit evacuation plans to the fire departments. These requirements have assisted fire departments in creating a standard format for documents they will utilize in emergencies. The process of developing evacuation plans for these cities is slightly easier due to the predetermined formats and requirements.

When The Bernardin Apartments in Chicago, a 26-story residential high rise, needed an emergency evacuation plan, its management hired Rolf Jensen & Associates (RJA). The Bernardin, which has two levels of retail space and a five-story public parking structure in addition to its residential floors for a total building height of 265 feet, is classified as a Category 4 Mixed-Use Building.

Due to the size and nature of the building and its occupancy, The Bernardin was not required to submit an emergency evacuation plan to the City of Chicago. Building management, however, wanted its plan to be developed in compliance with the Chicago High-Rise Emergency Response Ordinance, as well as national standards. In doing so, management would be ready if The Bernardin needed to file a plan at a later date.

Solution. To create a plan that met the requirements of the Chicago High-Rise Ordinance, RJA first had to understand the requirements and plan formatting. To do this, RJA identified staff to be certified as Fire Safety Directors recognized by the City of Chicago. This process required RJA staff to review, comprehend and demonstrate their knowledge of the ordinance requirements through a certification process monitored and implemented by the Chicago Fire Department.

RJA's comprehensive emergency plan for The Bernardin included response procedures and evacuation strategies for various emergencies, including fire, bomb threats, severe weather and building systems failures. In addition, RJA developed a training program for key management team members. RJA presented emergency response strategies in a classroom setting and walked the team through a potential emergency to test their response.

For The Bernardin's emergency evacuation plan, RJA prepared several crucial components: staff and tenant evacuation procedures; emergency evacuation team roles and responsibilities, which included when and how staff shall evacuate various areas, floors or the entire building; an occupant handbook; evacuation maps to be included in the building evacuation manual and occupant handbook; and a building emergency evacuation manual to be located at the front desk on the main level.

Result. RJA took a proactive approach to developing The Bernardin's evacuation plans in accordance with best practices as well as recognized evacuation plan development guidelines. By coordinating with the local authorities, RJA ensured that the evacuation plans provide the most comprehensive response strategies.

RJA's plans for The Bernardin provide the building management and staff with response strategies that could be implemented until the arrival of the local authorities. Furthermore, residents of the building have a guide that offers basic information on what to do, and not do, during an emergency.



■ Emergency Response Planning



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