

PROTECTING YOURSELF AT WORK IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS OR DISASTER

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ABSTRACT

This special session will address the issue of protecting yourself in the workplace in the event of a crisis or disaster. The Oklahoma City bombings, events of 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina have catapulted crisis and disaster planning and preparedness into the forefront of many disciplines. Based on the author's extensive empirical research on the topic of crisis and disaster preparedness in the workplace, evidence suggests that businesses, universities, and other types of organizations are not prepared to deal with a likely crisis or disaster. The success stories generated on 9/11 garner their own support for the value of being prepared. The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center spurred the Board of Trade and some other firms in and around the Twin Towers to better protect their employees and data. For example, for Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, the World Trade Center's largest tenant, with 3700 employees, sticking with the evacuation plan was critical to saving lives. Even though someone on the South Tower's public address system informed workers it was safe to return to their offices, Morgan's Security Officer kept employees moving down dozens of flights of stairs. All but six employees escaped. Everyone knew about the contingency plan. Oft-repeated drills saved others as well. Employees of the Japanese firm Mizuho had emergency kits with burn cream, smoke hoods, and glow sticks strapped to the backs of their chairs. While it may not be practical to provide all U.S. employees with chemical gas masks, it is economical to supply standard painter's masks to protect from soot and smoke. There exists a vast database of information on how to help protect yourself and your colleagues in your workplace, but most employees have ignored the research. In the event of a crisis or disaster it is likely to be your colleague who helps you first, not an emergency responder. Having an appropriate and well thought out survival plan can help save your life and the lives of others. This special session will provide specific and detailed information on how you can help prepare yourself and your organization for surviving a crisis or disaster.