

## FIRE SAFETY IN YOUR HIGH-RISE BUILDING

Questions you should ask about the level of fire safety in your building if you work or live in an existing high-rise building.

- Is the building fire sprinklered throughout? Even if the building was constructed before codes required sprinklers, many older high-rise buildings have been retrofitted to include sprinklers. Ask your building management why they have not yet installed sprinklers. In Minnesota, legislation has come up several times and even passed once (it was vetoed by the Governor) to require fire sprinklers in all high-rise buildings, both new and existing. History has shown that fire sprinklers are one of the best investments in building fire safety.
- Ask about other fire safety features such as smoke control systems, fire rated construction, enclosed stairways, voice evacuation/alerting systems and alarm systems.
- Find out in advance what message will be sent when there is a fire emergency in the building. Who will receive the message (what floors versus the entire building)? Who is responsible for fire safety in your building – is there a 24-hour fire safety professional or is this simply another duty for part time security personnel? A number of serious high-rise fires have resulted from delayed alarms reaching the fire department due to security investigating the alarm instead. Insist that security notify the fire department immediately on every alarm. What is the training level for the person making the decisions about your safety in the first few minutes of an incident before the fire department arrives? Who will be making the evacuation announcements for the building and how will they be made?
- Looking at the difference in the World Trade Center evacuation times between the 1993 bombing and the 2001 attacks clearly demonstrates the importance of taking fire safety seriously. What made the difference in reducing the evacuation times between 1993 and 2001? (1) Training and practicing fire drills so you know where the exits are the entire way down, (2) emergency lighting throughout the exits, (3) reflective markings on the doors and stairs to show the way out, (4) trained fire wardens on each floor or for each office, and (5) preparation – people planned for what they would do and how to treat difficult situations such as disabled occupants.
- Make sure that all doors and stairways from where you are to the outside of the building are under your control. There should be no locked doors between you in your office or apartment and the street outside. If you cannot walk that distance now, how will you be able to do it in an emergency? Make plans now.

As expected, each building, person and situation is unique, so it is necessary to discuss your particular circumstance with a licensed fire protection engineer, fire marshal, or other competent fire safety professional.