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## SAFETY LAST

# Many businesses still lack adequate security plans

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**Mitchell**

People are the most important asset that companies possess.

That's why businesses, hospitals, schools and other organizations need to develop a plan to protect their workers from the unthinkable: workplace violence, terrorist attacks, fire or a chemical spill.

Yet, many businesses are not prepared to deal with such catastrophic events, those in the emergency preparedness industry say. In the aftermath of the Sept. 11 tragedy, many companies still delay in formulating an emergency strategy.

"Businesses are in denial," said Richard "Bo" Mitchell, founder of 911 Consulting LLC of Wilton. "They think it won't happen to me; it won't happen here; it won't happen now."

Mitchell, who started his company prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, said research shows budgets for security and safety are rising an average 4 to 6 percent a year.

Yet a recent survey of workers showed that just 18 percent had carried out corporate-sponsored evacuation drills — 82 percent didn't even know how to get out of the building in the event of an emergency, he said.

Critical industry sectors that should improve their emergency plans include banks, financial institutions, power plants, telecommunications, and water and transportation companies, Mitchell said.

Randy Feranec, 48, safety, health and environmental technician for Exxon Mobil Chemical in Stratford, said his company hired 911 Consulting to do a security assessment of the plant's site, which employs 180 people.

"They've done a fine job for us," he said. "We've always had a plan, but since (the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks) we wanted to make sure we were covering all our bases and have procedures and contingencies of that plan in place."

Part of Exxon Mobil's security plan addresses terrorism attacks, anthrax and hazardous materials, said Feranec, who lives in Shelton.

### Up to speed

Bonnie Stewart, legal counsel for the Connecticut Business & Industry Association, said she has seen an increase in businesses in Connecticut at least going back and looking at emergency plans.

"If they don't have one, they need to create an effective one," she said, "one where everyone is aware of their role."

Following the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration made emergency response a priority, Stewart said. The agency offers grants to educate companies to plan for emergencies.

CBIA used a \$173,000 OSHA grant to train 500 individuals in the state on emergency preparedness, Stewart said. The group held free programs this year to help businesses create emergency plans.

"You don't want a plan that is just sitting on the shelf," she said. "Today a lot more people in the workplace are bilingual. Another issue is how do you evacuate people with physical restrictions? You need to know who's responsible for checking the bathrooms in the event of a fire. Where should a meeting place be outside of the building?"

In the past, many businesses dealt with safety issues piecemeal, Stewart said. Companies are now spending more time to make sure whatever plans they have are effective.

### Workers come first

Mitchell, who has a background in marketing, served in the Army Reserves and was a Wilton police commissioner for

more than 15 years, said senior managers are big on protecting data.

"When I ask how much money they spend on their people there is a long pause," he said. "They say they don't know. They're basically clueless. That is epidemic and widespread."

In his business, Mitchell looks at issues such as perimeter security, access control, and how to get in and out of building.

"Do you use a key card? Do you have people trained in CPR or first aid?" he said. "If (companies) had an incident the first thing they'd say was that this was never supposed to happen to us"

Mitchell, 57, worked in professional marketing services for more than 30 years before retiring. He started his business, he said, because he saw a gap in the market. His goal is to identify threats and vulnerabilities in companies and fix them.

On 911 Consulting's Web page the company lists Tetley Tea, Marcus Dairy and Modem Media as clients.

When Mitchell assesses a company he goes over a checklist, including items such as whether the company has a defibrillator, whether there is a clear chain of command in the event of an emergency, and who has access to the building.

Mitchell is a member of the International Association of Professional Security Consultants.

David Aggleton, president of the association and president of his own security firm, Aggleton & Associates, said more businesses are becoming aware of the need to upgrade security.

"More people are including security and safety in their budget," Aggleton said. "In terms of 9/11, there were many people who had never been in a stairwell before. No one tried to find out what it takes to go down 20 flights of stairs. It's important there is an awareness."

*Brenda Marks is a freelance writer based in Waterbury.*