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SECURITY

SOLUTIONS FOR ENABLING AND ASSURING BUSINESS

The Global Coronavirus and Your Response

Complacency with the Coronavirus kills, says this industry expert



Bo Mitchell, president of 911 Consulting



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“My scuba instructor told me dive accidents and fatalities are unusual among new divers,” says Bo Mitchell, president of 911 Consulting and a nationally recognized expert in emergency management and preparation.

“It’s the old pros who feel they can bend the safety rules. They get complacent. Too many challenges the laws of physics and risk a range of medical consequences, including paralysis and drowning.”

That’s what Mitchell believes is happening with the 2019 novel coronavirus, which at the time of this publication, has killed 3,085 people, which is higher than the 774 who died during the 2002-2003 SARS epidemic. There are a total of 90,306 cases – 101 of those are in the U.S.

“It’s tempting to think, ‘SARS was nothing to us. Coronavirus isn’t a threat either,’” Mitchell says.

A study published in the medical journal *JAMA* found that 41 percent of the first 138 patients diagnosed at one hospital in Wuhan, China, were presumed to be infected in that hospital. That means that nearly half of the initial infections in this hospital appear to have been spread within the hospital itself, or what’s called nosocomial transmission. Even more, most spread doesn’t appear to have been the result of a “super-spreader event,” where a single patient transmits infection to many other people.

The virus appears to be very infectious, healthcare workers especially are at high risk and we need more information about just how infectious the virus is. The virus might well be impossible to contain – just as the common cold and influenza can’t be stopped, but the health and societal impacts hopefully can be blunted.

Other professionals involved in this issue don’t agree, arguing that the U.S. has done a great job in helping to control the spread and to treat infected people, and that the risk to the U.S. is very low.

“That is nonsense,” Mitchell says. “When the pandemic starts, no one knows where this goes. Employers don’t get to gamble using odds of risk. Senior management answers to directors, customers and employees. This is not a blackjack table. If the Department of Health closes all the schools, the employer’s excuse for not planning, training and exercising can’t be, ‘Gee, it won’t be that bad.’ This is a symptom of deep denial that will be punished in front of directors, customers and employees, and potentially, a jury.”

Annual tabletop exercises (TTX) are one way for enterprise security to be prepared for this type of situation, versus relying solely on government resources, Mitchell suggests. “When a pandemic or an emergency strikes, you’re on your own,” he notes. “During a pandemic, the government will not be your

savior or your mentor. The government will be your task master, ordering the employer to do or not do a list of things that are important to the employer. What if local governments or the Department of Health closes commuter buses and trains? Or it orders all your employees be vaccinated? That has happened in past pandemics. The government acts as if the employer has a plan and, given government's orders, now knows what to do."

Mitchell suggests that an outside, independent, FEMA-certified facilitator may be helpful for a TTX as they "will not be stymied by inside politics and command influence. If a plan needs exercise, then use the outsider as heavy weights, not the insider using dumbbells."

"A plan without exercise has no muscle," Mitchell adds. "Annual TTXs for pandemic are recommended. Annual TTXs for Emergency Action Plans are required by federal law. TTXs are defined by FEMA standard, which says that the first goal of any/all exercises is to test your plan. Thus, the plan's response procedures are the script and agenda of the TTX. Certainly, you should include the chain of command, how communications systems work and test the mettle of the Commanders. Not everyone is built to do this. Do not be soft and pliable. Push managers just as the crisis or emergency will."

Each day, millions of employees, vendors and visitors walk through your enterprise, interacting with people. They may be infected with the coronavirus, but may not yet be showing symptoms, as the virus reportedly takes two weeks to incubate. Have you conducted a tabletop exercise? Are you prepared? I'd like to know. Email me at ritcheyd@bnpmedia.com

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