



## **Facilities Role in Risk Management**

The general perception of the Facilities function at community centers is that this very important group keeps the lights burning, makes repairs, and fixes your problems. That is true and vital to your services and operations. But the perception is incomplete, even with the people who work in Facilities. They are, in addition to all their other duties, the first line of defense from risk, whatever its source. Whenever something needs repair or replacement, you call Facilities and they respond with a fix, usually very quickly. This is because the item needing repair or replacement is important to the effective functioning of the center. The inability to function effectively is a huge risk as it impedes effective service to your clients and customers, can jeopardize revenues, create public relations problems, contribute to property losses, and endanger the health and safety of center clients.

Preventing, avoiding, or mitigating any of these risks is what risk management does. In the center setting, Facilities people are usually the first responders to risk. For example, one of the consistent risks centers face is an employee injury from falling downstairs. This risk is greatly enhanced by a lack of lighting in dark stairwells. Facilities usually replaces burned out lighting in stairwells very quickly. Until the lighting is repaired, the stairwell poses a continuous hazard to anyone using the stairs. Although many people who use the stairs often report the lighting issue, many people ignore it or assume that someone else has reported it to Facilities.

### **Priorities**

Life Safety is the number one priority for any fix or repair. If the absence of a part or inability to repair or “fix” a problem imposes the risk of someone being killed or seriously injured then that function, premises, or service must be curtailed until the fix or repair is made. The possibility of serious injury or death poses much more cost than any temporary reduction in service.

In many cases the operation or service can be re-routed to others who do the same thing or alternate facilities that can “take the load.” There may be some cost to doing this, but it is much less than dealing with the costs that a loss of life or serious injury imposes on the center.

Several years ago, the Fund investigated a work fatality. A young man was killed when he did not lock out a machine he was repairing. Someone else, not realizing that a repair was being done came along and started up the machine. The young man was severely crushed and died a couple of days later. When all the medical costs and loss of product were tallied up the company figured it lost about \$200,000, a significant cost. However, when all of the time costs, loss of income, plant shut down, and debriefing of staff and other soft costs were added the loss totaled over \$3,000,000. This possibility exists for any major workplace injury as the number of staff, managers, and executives get involved

with training, getting the plant operational again, and dealing with the press, law enforcement, and regulators.

A second related level of priority is any event or disruption that could cause multiple injuries or property damage to clients or customers. Nearby exposure to concentrations of people or property enhance the possibility of multiple casualties or serious property damage. Schools, shopping centers, hotels, neighborhoods, and churches are sources of exposure. The center's own property and people also fall into this category. This is one reason we recommend raising umbrella limits from \$1,000,000 to sometimes several million depending on the proximity and potential cost of the nearby properties that concentrate people or values that could be at risk.

What do Facilities staff do to reduce these risks? Measures include:

- Recognition of risk in any situation requiring Facilities services.
- Development of effective strategies and methods to reduce risk in any repair or replacement that could impact safety, revenue, or reputation.
- Consider how your operations might impact other departments, people, or processes.
- Have sufficient staff to make the repairs safely.
- Stage the repair to sequentially acquire parts, notify staff in the repair area, implement safety precautions, and do the work efficiently.
- Make sure that people who use the new part or repair know how to do it safely and effectively.
- Keep records of the work and people or department involved.
- Do not hesitate to get professional help if the repair is beyond Facilities technical ability to do the work. Generally, the money spent to get an expert winds up being less than unsuccessful attempts to do the work yourself.
- The same caution goes for renting or borrowing equipment to do the job safely.
- Communicate time and money cost to management and enlist their support in dealing with complaints from other managers.

### **Time and Money**

There is always pressure from management to do things as quickly as possible with the smallest cost. Both of these factors can put pressure on technicians to take short cuts that could affect risk. Staff should have the latitude to delay procedures when time, money, or availability of replacement parts impact the job. This is not to say people should ignore these constraints, instead implement ways to prevent ignoring best practices or safe processes.

Understanding complicated processes that extend the time necessary to complete work can help prevent rushed work. Pressure to reduce cost or settle for inferior replacement parts can also cost more eventually than doing something right in the first place. Experienced and qualified technicians can prevent these situations through the planning process that communicates the considerations that go into the job.

This also implies that supervisors and managers trust their staff or can provide the necessary guidance to make sure jobs are completed safely, efficiently, and in budget.

The top level of this commitment is executive support. This factor is the antidote to pushy, self-important managers or directors that think their minor repair should take precedence over anything else Facilities is doing. Certainly, you do your best to accommodate all of the demands but there are priorities like the lighting in the stairwell over replacing one bulb in someone's office. Polite and respectful explanation usually replaces arrogant insistence with understanding why the stairwell lighting is more important. And in worst case scenarios, this is when executive or management level support can help.

The Fund's Risk Services Consultants work closely with center Facilities staff almost every day they are on site. They understand the pressures on your staff and can help with safety and efficiency concerns. They have seen many of the processes and procedures at other centers and can make recommendations to help. This introduction to Facilities and Risk will be further developed with workshops or webinars in 2026.