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SAFETY & SECURITY

By Jim O'Neil, Northeast Security

A property manager's guide to surviving the 2004 Democratic National Convention

When the Democratic National Convention opens in downtown Boston on July 26, 2004, local property managers should expect the event to dramatically affect their property, their employees and their tenants. The effects of the DNC may be as simple as traffic delays, disruption of public transportation service, or the rerouting of normal building access ways. However, there is a possibility that Boston property man-



ers may be affected in more serious ways. Vehicular access may not be permitted into or around certain buildings and public areas may spontaneously be closed off, affecting normal building egresses. There also exists the possibility that civil disorder could erupt as a result of demonstrations or terrorist threats.

All of the briefings with governmental agencies to date have revealed two glaring realities: First, policies and procedures put forward at this time may change at any moment; and secondly, for security reasons, much of the information disclosed will be am-

biguous. In light of this and the number of possible issues that can emerge from the convention's downtown location, property managers must remain flexible and be ready to react at a moment's notice.

Overall security is being coordinated under the direction of the U.S. Secret Service in concert with city and state emergency responders as well as law enforcement agencies. All these agencies have been exhaustive in their planning and preparations and the security zone surrounding the Fleet Center will be impeccable in terms of emergency response and safety.

In preparing for the Democratic National Convention, property managers should assess what potential issues may arise, what areas they have control over and what is totally out of their hands. Once these issues have been identified and addressed, property managers need to educate their tenants and employees as to what is going to take place and how to prepare for potential problems.

Educating tenants and employees is a key component of mitigating potential problems. A proactive information dissemination program initiated by building management will

ease the impact of the convention on tenants and reinforce an image of management as being professional, committed, far-sighted and competent. Information delivered to tenants and employees should fall into two categories: updates of external information (road closures, MBTA restrictions) and recommendations for easing the impact of the convention on their employees.

There are a number of sources of information for property managers to turn to for keeping tenants and employees up to date. First and foremost are organizations such as BOMA and ASIS that routinely disseminate important convention related information. In addition, the New England Emergency Disaster Recovery Information Xchange (NEDRIX) has emerged as a clearinghouse for information relative to the business community and the Democratic National Convention. Property managers would be well advised to become a member. One of the major benefits of enrolling in NEDRIX is that they regularly send members e-mails announcing potentially critical situations such as snowstorms, environmental accidents, etc.

The Boston Police have made it clear that it would be highly beneficial for companies to advocate employee vacations during the convention or early closings (not later than 3 p.m.). Probably the two most disruptive elements of the security plan for the Boston business community will be the temporary closures of I-93 and the extended closure of North Station. Imparting this information to tenants may significantly impact how they choose to do business and minimize the negative impact of the convention. Property managers can schedule periodic briefings to update tenants or they can use other means (e-mail, fax, etc.) to accomplish this.

Many property managers may believe that since their building is not within the Fleet Center Security Zone, the extreme security measures will not apply to them. This may not necessarily be the case as some tenants may have close ties to the highest levels of the Democratic Party and may host parties for conventioners or specific dignitaries. This

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raises the issue of executive protection and coordination with either governmental or private protective agencies. In order to plan accordingly, property managers should talk with tenants to determine which of them may be taking an active

role in the convention.

Aside from keeping tenants and employees well informed, property managers must also focus on how they control their buildings. Policies and procedures to deal with emergency situations have been drawn up for nearly every building in

downtown Boston, most recently in advance of Y2K and post 9/11. Although the entire Y2K experience may seem a little surreal in its existence as a "non-event," many building managers did a lot of good work establishing protocols to mitigate potential problems. It may be time to take some of those binders off the shelf, dust them off and adapt them to the current situation. The bottom line is that property managers need to review emergency procedures, make sure they are adequate and make sure their staff knows the procedures and how to respond to them.

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