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Baltimore urging downtown businesses to prepare for disaster

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Daniel J. Sernovitz](#) Staff

Baltimore City launched an emergency preparedness program that will enable downtown employees to get into their evacuated offices in the event of a disaster such as the Lombard Street water main break that closed off large portions of the city last April.

The city's new Corporate Emergency Access System will let business designate key personnel to get into their buildings to retrieve documents, shut down or turn off essential programs in the event of an emergency.

The city has struck a deal with the Business Network of Emergency Resources to register businesses and issue identification cards to selected employees. The cards start at \$50 and are valid for two years.

Those employees will then be able to show their credentials to emergency crews to get into their offices once their buildings are safe to enter.

Emergency crews evacuated at least two buildings during last spring's Lombard Street water main break. Employees were prohibited from entering certain buildings while that work went on. Workers were also urged to stay keep out of downtown for days while work crews tried to repair the damage and reopen roadways flooded because of the accident.

"Before this, there was no way for people to get access to their buildings," said Laura Ponzo, emergency planner for the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management.

Ponzo said the city has been working on starting an emergency access program for about a year and selected BNet because of its experience running programs in other cities such as New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

"There is an integral relationship between business continuity and overall emergency preparedness," BNET Executive Director Peter Picarillo said. "Baltimore City's recognition of the CEAS will greatly enhance the resiliency of the region by ensuring its vital lifelines will survive a disaster."

There is no cost to the city, nor will it get a portion of the money collected by BNET to administer the program.