

Disaster ID card eyed for city firms

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By Kevin Joy, Globe Correspondent, 2/28/2004

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, days went by before business owners or employees were allowed past barricades in Lower Manhattan to retrieve important documents or valuables. Hoping to avoid a similar problem in Boston if disaster strikes, Mayor Thomas M. Menino yesterday said the city will begin issuing special identification that would allow select employees to enter restricted areas of the city.

The Corporate Emergency Assessment System identification cards are intended to allow critical employees access to business documents, computer equipment, or valuable items left behind in an emergency, Menino said.

In addition, the identification cards could be required during certain "special events," though Menino yesterday insisted they won't be used during July's Democratic National Convention.

"We're not doing this because of the DNC," Menino said. "I am proud that our city will now have an added layer of security."

Under terms of the program, the mayor would approve designated employees; companies would pay \$25 per card annually to Business Network of Emergency Resources, Inc., a New York nonprofit that issues the cards.

In the event of an emergency, the mayor would decide when and where the identification would be required. First responders, hospital workers, and members of the media would be exempt.

A similar system operates in Buffalo, N.Y., and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg is considering the program, said Stephen A. Morash, deputy director of the Boston Emergency Management Agency. The agency's New York counterpart devised a makeshift system to issue daily temporary IDs to building workers following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11.

Menino's announcement could draw criticism from area companies, many of whom already have emergency plans in place and don't want to pay to gain entry to their property.

But Morash said the ID program is voluntary and is only intended for a few select individuals from any company, depending on its size, "from the mom and pop shops to the Fleets, Fidelities, and Gillettes."

"Unfortunately we don't have the luxury of letting someone who says 'I work in that building' to go in anymore," Morash said. "It's a public safety issue."

CEAS plans to hold a meeting March 12 to initiate the program. Officials from Cambridge Trust, Berklee

College of Music, and the Boston Stock Exchange have indicated a commitment to the program, Morash said.

Carol Rose, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, said she wanted to learn more about the program, but didn't see any major problems after viewing preliminary details.

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