

# Newsday

## Suffolk Finalizing Plan to Reduce Business Loss in a Crisis

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BY ELLEN YAN

**A** plan designed to reduce business losses during emergencies is being finalized between Suffolk County and a nonprofit crisis management group.

Under the Corporate Emergency Access System, companies that want to participate would have to decide in advance which key employees should get access cards to cross police lines.

If it's safe -- say an entire street is blocked off because one building is on fire but the others are not - police would scan the cards and allow only these key workers through to save food, shut down power, retrieve paperwork or do other critical tasks.

"It saves time and enhances security," County Executive Steve Levy said. "We're very happy to see this plan come to fruition. This is an example of good, pre-emptive planning that can help avoid chaos in a frantic emergency situation."

The program was developed by Business Network Emergency Resources, a nonprofit in Manhattan, and was adopted by Nassau in 2006 and New York City in 2004. New York City activated the system last July when a steam pipe exploded in midtown Manhattan.

The cards would be hard to counterfeit and simplify police officers' jobs during emergencies, said Dr. Robert Leviton, president of the nonprofit and also director of the emergency department at Our Lady of Mercy Medical Center in the Bronx.

"The system gives a very easy method for the officers at the front gate, so to speak, to say 'Yes, you can come in,' 'No you can't,'" Leviton said. "What's important about all that is it's described ahead of time so there's no discomfort by people."

In Nassau, several large firms have joined the program, including Bethpage Federal Credit Union, supermarkets and colleges. But word and details have not spread much beyond businesses and organizations that meet regularly with county emergency planners.

James Callahan, commissioner of Nassau's Office of Emergency Management, said, "We've gotten some of the big players, but we're not getting the medium players," he said. "You get that combination of word not getting out and people getting complacent because, knock on wood, around here we haven't had anything major in a while."

Callahan said Sept. 11, 2001, is a prime example of why businesses should sign up. "Basically everything was closed from 14th Street on down. There were buildings that were very safe in that area, but those people were not allowed in."