

How S.F. businesses can survive quakes

City's 31,000 merchants should follow easy steps, expert says

PLEASE SEE BUSINESS, PAGE 17



Protect your company from earthquakes

BY DAN THOMSON

Special to The Examiner

If Hurricane Katrina delivered one lesson about natural disasters to San Francisco's 31,000 business owners, it was: Be prepared, be very prepared.



Thomson

Earthquakes are the main culprits in this region. They can damage your buildings, trigger natural-gas leaks and spark fires, in the process throwing you out of business, either temporarily or permanently.

The good news is you can brace yourself — literally — to prevent or minimize damage incurred

from earthquakes. Think of it as an essential long-term investment, because proper planning can spell the difference between destruction or mere distraction.

Our company, Affiliated FM, understands how Mother Nature can wreak havoc on businesses. Our extensive engineering experience and research has yielded an array of effective methods to best protect your facilities.

Here are five basic (and proven) precautions to take:

- Put together a comprehensive emergency action plan.
- Form, then train, your own emergency response team.
- Bolt production equipment and utilities (boilers, generators, transformers) to the floor or an adjacent wall. Use restraining devices to prevent shelved items from falling.
- To prevent fire, install seismic gas shutoff valves (a relatively inexpensive purchase) on the main

service lines to each building, automatic shutoff valves for flammable liquid and gas distribution systems and flexibility for piping that spans joints or buildings.

- Stockpile emergency supplies such as fire extinguishers and on-site fire hoses with heavy water pressure.

After an earthquake, there is still much to be done. Most importantly, stick to your action plan. Survey your facility for combustible materials and repair any damaged fire protection systems. If necessary, turn off gas and electrical services. Take inventory of any damage and salvage items.

By following these guidelines, you'll give yourself an edge over your competitors.

Dan Thomson heads the San Francisco office of Affiliated FM (<http://www.affiliatedfm.com>), a commercial property insurer.