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Planning is the key - How R.E. and facility mgmt. industries can comply with Local Law 26 of 2004

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the next two years and beyond. A summary of provisions can be found on the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) website at www.boma.org.

The sooner the infrastructure is in place, the longer a building owner will have to comply, which has potential financial and operational benefits.

Even though 14 years to reach compliance seems like ample time, there can be significant cost and business disruption issues with which to contend. Building owners who lease space to tenants will be able to perform the required sprinkler work as the floors turn over, eliminating some of these issues and keeping the cost down. However, the situation may be different in owner occupied buildings where there is no intention of relocating current occupants. Both scenarios lend themselves to addressing the sprinkler infrastructure in the near term with a phased approach to floor-by-floor sprinkling as vacancies come up. While it is significantly less expensive to sprinkler an empty floor as compared to one that is occupied, that option might not exist in every case, especially in the owner occupied situation. This emphasizes the potential need for swing

space within the facility or even temporary space external. It is therefore necessary to have a "real estate" strategy to coincide with a technical one.

In order to comply with the law, it is imperative that the building owner has a solid plan of action. The first step is to know the law and/or work with appropriate consultants who know the law. Towards that end, WB Engineers has been working over the past year with a number of clients with portfolios totaling over ten million square feet. The exercise starts with a full building assessment, concentrating on existing infrastructure and then summarizing the scope of work required per floor to reach full compliance. The infrastructure would include equipment such as stand pipes, vertical risers, gravity water tanks and automatic or manual fire pumps. The sprinkler infrastructure occurs, in large part, in mechanical areas and/or on the roof and as such could proceed with minimal disruption to current building operations. The sooner the infrastructure is in place, the longer a building owner will have to comply, which has potential financial and operational benefits.

Once the scope of work is defined, coordination occurs with the owner's portfolio/space planners to establish the most feasible implementation strategy. For example, coordinating the future sprinkling of floors with lease expirations or with occupant turnover if possible is the least cost scenario. In fact, in

most cases, new tenants would pick up the cost of the horizontal sprinkler system. Otherwise, an evaluation should be conducted comparing whether or not it is more cost and business effective to relocate occupants temporarily or permanently as opposed to paying overtime expenses to sprinkler the space while occupied.

Other issues to consider are:

- Are there any areas for which it would be appropriate to request an exemption to the law, such as mission critical areas that would be damaged by water?
- If you have systems in place that meet the previous standards such as stair pressurization systems, how long do you have to maintain those systems?
- If your insurance carrier requires sprinkling, what is the additional expense if you wait to comply?

A real benefit of combining the technical, financial, organizational and scheduling implications into one plan is that it facilitates clear and concise discussions with the various stakeholders.

As you can see, the best approach is to be proactive and thorough in establishing your implementation strategy for Local Law 26 predicting the impact to your buildings, managing the process and getting the most for your money.

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