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LESSON LEARNED

Incident Site Safety: Radio Evacuation Signals

SUMMARY

Radio evacuation signals must be identifiable and unambiguous.

DESCRIPTION

During the initial 24 hours after the September 11, 2001 attack, the Pentagon was evacuated on four separate occasions. The first evacuation occurred after fire department officials warned of an imminent structural collapse. The three subsequent evacuations were issued following reports of hijacked aircraft heading toward the Pentagon.

On each occasion, evacuation signals were transmitted to emergency response personnel inside the Pentagon via radio. Unfortunately, these signals were not sufficiently clear. Emergency responders had difficulty distinguishing between three short bursts and one long burst amid noise from the burning building.

On-site radio evacuation signals must be clear and unmistakable. The inability of response personnel to hear and understand evacuation instructions is a life-threatening deficiency. If necessary, signaling procedures can be modified so that a single sound signals evacuation, with voice notification used for "all clear." The *Arlington County After-Action Report* recommends that supporting agencies should adopt Incident Command System signaling procedures once they arrive at the incident site.

CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Arlington County After-Action Report on the Response to the September 11 Terrorist Attack on the Pentagon*. May 30, 2002.
(http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/fire/edu/about/docs/after_report.pdf)

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