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Employees pour out of the Gateway Building during Tuesday's fire drill. The evacuation was accomplished in less than 20 minutes.



PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD

Emergency Evacuation is 'Smoothest Thus Far' at Gateway

By SHANTAY IOSIA

(Sept. 15, 2004) Almost 1,800 Metro employees evacuated the Gateway building in less than 20 minutes, Tuesday, making it one of the smoothest drills thus far, says Brian Soto, director of General Services.

The alarm was scheduled around 10 a.m. and Metro Security completed the building sweep by 10:30 a.m.

"That's a good amount of time considering that all the people have to walk from the 25th floor to the ground level and then across the street," says Bob Skarseth, Facilities Maintenance supervisor.

Sheriff's Lt. Michael Herek, who is responsible for security, agrees and attributes the success to increased resources, improved cooperation and immediate communication. It was the first time the agency involved other organizations in an emergency drill.

In Case of an Emergency:

- Leave behind all belongings, including cell phones and laptops
- Notify a Floor Warden if you are unable to go down the stairs
- Women should have shoes appropriate for emergency evacuations
- Use the center stairwell and exit as quickly as possible

General Services oversaw the evacuation as Metro Security cleared the building. The Sheriff's Department restricted roadways, shepherding hundreds to the bus layover zone on the corner of Vignes and Caesar Chavez.

Fire Department observer

Metro's high-rise inspector, James Stewart of the LA City Fire Department, observed the process and commented on the efficiency of the emergency exercise.

During the drill, all communication was coordinated from the Incident Command Post, located in the Denny's parking lot. A representative from each agency reported to the Command Post, where they had access to all emergency radio frequencies.

"There was a lot of cooperation," Herek says. This was the first time we did a multi-agency combination and I am really pleased."

Phyllis Meng, General Services supervisor, says she tries to emulate a true emergency by making the drill a surprise. Despite efforts to keep the drill spontaneous, rumors of the evacuation cleared many of the upper floors before the alarms sounded.

"The purpose is to train all building occupants get out of the building as quickly and safely as possible in case of a potential terrorist attack or other emergency," she says.



Holding hands, the children from the Child Care Center joined in the emergency exercise.



A Sheriff's deputy holds back traffic as Gateway employees cross Cesar Chavez Boulevard.



Division 7 Operator David Terrell distributed bottles of water to employees gathered for a head-count.



Marking the progress of the emergency drill at the Incident Command Post are Sheriff's deputies Britta Kjellstrand, James Johnson and Justin Diez. Supervising are Sheriff's Sgt. Sandy Nitz and Metro Security Sgt. French Stewart.

