

Behind the Red Door | Infrastructure & Emergency Preparedness

A look into Emergency Preparedness Planning.

Proven during Hurricanes Sandy & Harvey. Originally Published in ESA's Security Nation.

REDUNDANCY • INFRASTRUCTURE • PERSONNEL PLANNING

BEHIND THE RED DOOR

Are You Prepared?

By Andria Morgan

At Affiliated Monitoring's two secure monitoring facilities in Houston, Texas and Northern New Jersey, there are large rooms behind thick, red, steel, fireproof doors that only a select few have ever seen — and even fewer have entered. These doors conceal access to rooms that hold Affiliated's secrets to addressing life's most likely and unlikely of emergencies.

Founded in 1977, in the bustling metropolis that is New York City, ESA Member Affiliated Monitoring, is one of the largest monitoring services companies in North America. Millions of people across the country — both in residential and commercial settings — rely upon Affiliated and its security dealer partners for security and life safety monitoring.

With the lives and property of its customers on the line, continuity of operations in the face of an emergency event is something that a dedicated team of more than 500 employees; that consists of engineers, managers, and planners; are tasked with preparing for. All of Affiliated's facilities are hardened against any potential weather event, and all critical systems used by the monitoring centers are fully redundant.

"We pride ourselves on doing the hard, and at times unglamorous, work of being prepared for as many situations as we can," said Mike Zydor, the Managing Director of Affiliated Monitoring. "While our world class facilities are second to none, what people don't see is the tremendous work done on our buildings' infrastructure and the planning that goes into making sure that we can continue to operate in the face of disaster."

The company has an emergency operations steering committee that is tasked with maintaining and fine tuning emergency operations plans, which guide managers through situations as mundane as a snowstorm, as harrowing as a tornado, and as unlikely — hopefully — as civil unrest. Some have even said that behind the red door, Affiliated holds plans that would make them ready for a zombie attack.

SO, WHAT IS BEHIND THE RED DOOR?

We can't divulge the full scope of what is contained behind these red doors, and as security professionals, you understand clearance and security protocols. But here's what we can share with you.

Affiliated Monitoring's emergency plan includes automated dual generators and a supply of diesel fuel at both locations that is expected to last 16 days.

In 2012, during Hurricane Sandy in New Jersey, local power was out for a full eight days, but the center maintained full operations. Of course, they took that opportunity to fine tune the plan some more and the Affiliated team decided to do a few updates to the emergency plan — updates that were monumental in keeping their Houston facility running during the devastation of Hurricane Harvey last year.

"Preparation is more than just making sure our buildings are ready — there is also a huge human element that we as a team have chosen to consider," Zydor says. "We monitor millions of people in homes and businesses across the country who need to know that when they need help our monitoring agents are ready to help them no matter what is going on outside our Houston or New Jersey buildings."

Affiliated ensures that both their Texas and New Jersey facilities are well stocked so that they can continue to operate in even the most trying of circumstances. The resources to achieve this ultimate preparedness can be found behind both red doors in what the company calls their EPR (emergency preparedness rooms).

Affiliated's EPR can only be opened by a director of the company or by forcefully shattering the glass pane that protects the emergency door release.

More Than Just Preparation



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This room is only to be opened in the event of an emergency — those that are likely and those that are not — emergencies, like a city-wide blackout, a massive hurricane, an extreme snow storm, even the Walking Dead becoming a reality, and the world being faced with a zombie apocalypse.

Behind these red doors contains methods of approaching these emergencies, how to keep the monitoring center up and running during them, and how to continue providing income for all employees in the event of these happenings.

On rare occasions specific personnel enter through the red doors to audit and verify inventory and to refresh any perishable items that are stocked in the room. Keeping their staff well cared for in an emergency, when team members may not be able to safely reach the facility, or leave once they are there, is paramount to making sure that operations can continue despite the circumstances.

The EPR contains an extended supply of shelf stable food, drinking water, cots, bedding, toiletries and even some extra clothing. The room also contains a complete set of tools including electrical, low voltage, plumbing and automotive toolsets as well as spare parts to do any necessary repairs on building systems.

These rooms hold a supply of cash in small denominations to use to support company operations, specifically during a blackout when ATMs and credit card processing are not functioning.

Fortunately for all of us, in over 40 years of serving the industry, Affiliated has only experienced a handful of these emergency situations.

If you're ever down south in Houston or up on the east coast in New Jersey, and you know someone who knows someone, maybe you just might get to see the secrets behind the infamous red door. ♦