

State capitols go on alert

Some states declared an emergency, some sent personnel home, and most beefed up security after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

BY LESLIE SCOTT and LISA COLLINS

In the immediate aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., the National Association of State Personnel Executives placed an emergency conference call to state personnel offices to gauge how state governments were responding to the tragic events and evaluating the safety of state employees.

In a coordinated effort with the National Association of State Facilities Administrators, NASPE members and staff began collecting information from each state regarding building security and employee leave. The security precautions taken by the states were immediately posted on NASPE's Web site. Governors' offices across the country monitored this information as decisions were made about implementing security precautions and deciding whether or not state employees should be sent home. While states had emergency management plans in place, state leaders wanted to be sure the precautions they were taking were consistent with those of their peers.

Building security

While most of the nation's 2 million state employees remained at work Sept. 11, they worked under much tighter security than usual. Without exception, states



The National Association of State Personnel Executives and the National Association of State Facilities Administrators, both affiliates of CSG, surveyed each state's reaction Sept. 11 and posted the information on the NASPE Web site. State leaders consulted the site in making decisions about whether to increase security or send employees home.

beefed up security in and around all state buildings and strictly monitored access. Six states — California, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York and Oklahoma — closed all state buildings with only essential personnel remaining on duty. Florida, Illinois, Texas, West

Virginia and Wisconsin closed their capitol buildings. A bomb-sniffing dog was sent around the Montana Capitol, and trucks temporarily blocked the entrances to Nevada's Capitol.

Parking lots, garages and tunnels were an immediate security concern.

Michigan shut down its extensive underground parking facilities, and Oregon's underground Capitol garage was cleared. Georgia locked down all its underground parking, allowing only those with ID cards to enter and exit. Parking lots at state facilities in Kansas were blocked. Maryland restricted access to garages to employees only, and vehicles were prohibited from parking around state buildings. Montana moved employees' cars and garbage containers away from state office buildings. A tunnel connecting North Dakota state buildings was closed.

Employee safety

Employees sent home because of office closures were generally placed on administrative paid leave, and no leave was charged to accrued leave balances. For the most part, states that did not send employees home did request that supervisors exhibit leniency in allowing employees to leave if they felt it was necessary. For example, each Texas agency was given the discretion of allowing employees to go home on administrative leave, and some did.

Emergency operations centers

Two states directly affected by the attacks opened their emergency operations centers. New York's emergency operations center was in full operation for the first time since the Y2K scare on Jan. 1, 2000. The center, built to withstand a nuclear attack, is housed in an underground bunker beneath the W. Averell Harriman Office Campus in Albany. State police checked credentials of anyone entering the facility.

A state of emergency was declared in Virginia due to the state's close proximity to the attack on the Pentagon. The emergency operations center in Virginia was activated, and all agencies were instructed to advise the operations center if any of their employees were at the World Trade Center or Pentagon at the time of the attacks.

Ongoing security measures

As a result of the terrorist attacks, the nation's state workers and visitors should

expect heightened security in and around state buildings. Ron Wright, with the Illinois Capital Development Board, said that in his state side doors of buildings will be locked and tunnels will be closed. Donald Biedenback, commander of Maryland's Department of General Services Police, said immediate security measures enacted on Sept. 11 will continue with only minor modifications. Employees and visitors to Maryland's state buildings should expect strict checks of IDs, packages and briefcases before access is granted. Kentucky is working to obtain electronic-access controls in most of its state buildings, and Vermont is obtaining funding to develop and enhance existing security systems and hire a security director.

Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating has created a task force to review safety and security for state workers. The task force is directed to assess current security measures for state workers, recommend further emergency plans and offer possible statewide strategy and comprehensive

action — encouraging all the functions of government to work closely together to develop a plan for a time of crisis.

"While it is imperative that the hard-working men and women of state government be safe, the people of Oklahoma should and must expect responsive and accessible government agencies," Keating said.

"It will be a challenge to make sure that both goals are reached, but I have full confidence that the task force will be thoughtful and thorough in its review."

Information submitted by members of NASPE and NASFA can be viewed on the associations' Web sites at www.naspe.net and www.nasfa.net. ★

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Virginia Gov. Jim Gilmore declared a state of emergency Sept. 11 after terrorists flew hijacked jets into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, located in Arlington. The state's emergency operations center was activated, and all agencies were instructed to advise it if any of their employees were at either site at the time of the attacks. The Virginia Capitol is pictured.