

Guarding Aon's tall tower

It's big and has seen big changes since Sept. 11

BY D. MARIE STESHETZ

Prior to Sept. 11, tenant life at the Aon Center was all about amenities, like its amazing views and its location right off Lake Michigan.

Not anymore.

At 83 stories above ground (and five below ground), the tower is Chicago's second-tallest building after the Sears Tower, and the 14th-tallest in the world.

Jarrold Agen, spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security in Washington D.C., admits Aon Center has all the makings of a terrorist target.

The tower has five banks of elevators, for 50 elevators in total. The building has 15 retail stores in the lower lobby and an underground pedway system with direct links to the CTA and Metra lines, the Daley Center, City Hall and the Fairmont Chicago hotel. Most of the tenants at the Aon Center are big financial and legal firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and Kirk-

land & Ellis LLP. The biggest tenant is Aon Corp., which takes up 515,083 square feet, or about 21% of the building. "We look at all those factors when evaluating risk," Mr. Agen says.

At the time of the attacks, the Aon Center was owned by the New York-based Blackstone Group, which responded to tenant apprehension with e-mails and newsletters. Building management kept tenants informed of the communication between the building and city departments and instructions in the event of emergencies.

Blackstone also installed iVisitor, a Web-based visitor management system that allows tenants to pre-register guests, receive real-time notifications of their arrival and print unique bar code badges.

Tenants can also place people such as disgruntled ex-employees into a "barred individuals" database, so they can't get past security.

The most noticeable change after Sept. 11 was increased lobby security, says Gary Dunlap, senior vice-president with Edelman, a PR firm that's been at Aon for six years. Be-

fore the attacks, tenants were largely responsible for protecting their own space, while lobby guards did little more than direct visitors to the elevators.

In May 2003, Blackstone sold the building to Atlanta-based Wells Real Estate, and Jones Lang LaSalle Inc. took over building management. Jones Lang Leasing Director Steve Smith and General Manager Paul Schloff met with tenants to address their security concerns.

Jones Lang also consulted with the Department of Homeland Security and other local and federal emergency agencies to develop a new emergency preparedness plan. In addition, the company hired Chicago-based System Development Integration, an engineering adviser, to create and maintain building data, tenant information and procedures to comply with city emergency codes.

So is Aon Center safer?

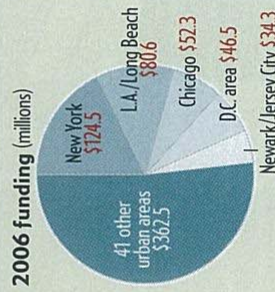
Building management says it is now prepared to respond to 50 different threats, including natural disasters and terrorism. That has added to the sense of security tenants like Mr. Dunlap feel.

"Since 9/11, security here is one of the best in terms of accessibility, security and the peace of mind it provides," he says.



GETTING GOVERNMENTAL HELP

Nearly half of the funding from the Department of Homeland Security's Urban Area Security Initiative goes to five urban areas.



Source: Department of Homeland Security

Different tenants had different opinions about the security at Aon Center after changes were made in the wake of Sept. 11, says Paul Schloff of Jones Lang LaSalle. "As an owner, you have to do your own assessment and you have to make a decision."