

28 February 2005 – LAWFUEL – The Law News Network. If a disaster hit while you were at work, would you know what to do? In a joint effort to say “Yes”, nearly 300 people attended a recent kick-off for the Downtown St. Louis Emergency Preparedness (DSTEP) organization. A public/private collaboration of first responders, building owners and large tenants of downtown businesses, the group has succeeded in linking those who provide information and help during emergencies with those who urgently need it. Feb. 10 was the group’s official unveiling and invitation for others to join. “Like most downtowns, St. Louis is an area where one incident can impact everyone because we are so condensed,” said Bonnie Wedel, facilities manager for Bryan Cave, LLP and DSTEP’s volunteer executive director. “With DSTEP, all of the people who need to be involved in making decisions know what’s going on and can communicate quickly and efficiently. For instance, if there’s a gas leak downtown I need to know as quickly as possible if it’s best for my people to shelter in place or evacuate the building. And if we evacuate, I need to know which exits to use so they aren’t sent out the doors closest to the leak.” It was Wedel and Cindy Noory, general manager of Kestrel Management who first began discussing the need for a cohesive disaster preparedness plan and got other downtown businesspeople to pay attention. Kestrel is the property manager for the Millennium Building, where Bryan Cave’s IT personnel have their offices, so keeping area employees safe is a shared goal for both businesswomen. DSTEP now includes active participation by the St. Louis Fire Department, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, City Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, FBI, U.S. Postal Service, AmerenUE, Laclede Gas, SBC Missouri, the Metro/Bi-State Development Agency, Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), the Downtown St. Louis Partnership and numerous other downtown businesses. The group’s first two initiatives were ambitious: to create a Web site with information about emergency preparedness, including specifics for downtown St. Louis, and the establishment of a dedicated radio communication network to connect all participating downtown office buildings with first responders. The radio network, DSTEP’s cornerstone, today is fully functional. In the event of any emergency – be it natural or manmade – the network will provide immediate, real-time notification of emergencies, inform those potentially affected and give instructions to protect safety while assuring business continuity. Most DSTEP participants will be hooked up via a one-frequency system, which provides warnings and information from emergency agencies in the case of a major downtown disaster. Some larger businesses will be offered participation in a two-frequency system, which will give the same warning and related information plus the capacity for two-way communication with emergency agencies in the event of disaster. DSTEP has gained notice locally and nationally. Its kick-off meeting was covered by regional media, and Charles Coyle, St. Louis Fire Department fire marshal and DSTEP vice chairman said his counterparts in other large cities have shown good interest. “It’s exciting to see how people have taken hold (of the program),” Coyle told the St. Louis Business Journal. Future initiatives for DSTEP include opening enrollment to the area’s fastest growing demographic – downtown residents. DSTEP also plans a mock drill for participants and AED (automated external defibrillators) training through the St. Louis Fire Department Lifesaving Foundation. To help ease confusion after an emergency, DSTEP’s members also are working with the St. Louis Police Department to develop an appropriate approval process for re-entering buildings. The protocol will be one all business owners and facilities managers know and follow. “DSTEP brings together all of the key players necessary to make our downtown safer,” Wedel said. “It’s an organization that benefits everyone, but none of us could do this alone. We all have a role to play.” Ned Fryer, Bryan Cave partner and licensed paramedic, also was of key help in organizing DSTEP. He served as a liaison with the St. Louis Fire Department and is today a DSTEP board member. In addition Dennis Corcoran, Bryan Cave’s Web initiatives manager, spearheaded creation of the DSTEP Web site.

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