



About the Simcoe Place office tower

Simcoe Place sits at the corner of Front and Simcoe, a stone's throw from the CN Tower in the heart of Toronto's bustling downtown core.

The 33-floor skyscraper, which covers two downtown acres and reaches a height of 148 meters, is home to many major corporations, and receives thousands of people on a daily basis.

Flood at 100 meters

FirstOnSite's PREP program fills tall order at Toronto office tower

FirstOnSite Restoration is the largest independent disaster restoration company in Canada specializing in emergency response, restoration and reconstruction services. FirstOnSite provides 24/7 emergency service, and offers a wide range of services that remediate conditions caused by fires, floods, winds, mould, environmental hazards, accidents and other casualties at any type of facility. FirstOnSite has performed projects for insurance industry, residential, commercial and industrial customers.

With 42 locations across Canada, their national coverage ensures a diverse knowledge base with information sharing and expansive expertise. FirstOnSite has implemented the dataStor™ Enterprise Protection Server (EPS) with RDX removable disk technology to solve business interruption in a distributed environment.

The Challenge

During the 2012 Family Day weekend in Ontario, Simcoe Place was largely empty, except for security personnel and a cleaning crew. Sometime in the early morning, an exit line from a hot water tank above the 21st floor ruptured, sending water streaming through the ceiling tiles to the floors below. The tenant in this space had a unique set up, for their office floor has a raised steel cavity that housed electrical and communications systems. As the water pooled in each floor cavity, it leaked through tiny cracks in the concrete and soaked through the ceiling of the floor below. By the time the cleaning crew discovered the flood, it had made it from the 21st floor to the 17th.

The area affected on each floor amounted to between 1,500 and 1,800 square feet. As the water cascaded down it soaked a great deal of office furniture, electronics, and documents. Pools had formed on each floor – in some places, the water was an inch to and an inch and half deep. FirstOnSite estimated that water had been leaking for four to five hours, given the flow rate and the amount of standing water.

The Solution

Once security personnel were notified of the flood, FirstOnSite Restoration was called in. They are the preferred national disaster mitigation partner for Cadillac Fairview, owners of Simcoe Place. As part of this partnership, Simcoe Place was signed up for FirstOnSite's Priority Response Emergency Program (PREP).

This means that before FirstOnSite Project Manager Rory MacKinnon arrived on the scene, he knew what he was walking into and how to tackle the job.

In December of 2011, FirstOnSite managers, including MacKinnon, visited the site to understand its layout and infrastructure. This is standard for all clients enrolled in PREP. FirstOnSite meets with clients and performs walkthroughs of the property to develop a detailed plan that will get the operation up and running in the event of a disaster. This agreement is usually part of a client's larger disaster recovery plan. It also includes communication directives, contact information, and price/cost thresholds.

Flood Damage Mitigation Tip

Cleaning crews and other personnel are a great first-line of defense in flood situations. They can place large garbage cans under leaks, create barriers to protect important areas and begin general clean up until professional restoration crews with industrial-grade equipment arrive.



Because of this preparation, MacKinnon and his team were able to shave valuable time off their response. When they arrived on site, they knew where to park, how to work with security, and knew the general layout of the facility to facilitate bringing in equipment and extra personnel.

"Getting access to the building is paramount in a disaster situation," said MacKinnon. "We need an appropriate place to unload our equipment that does not interfere with emergency vehicles, and access to freight elevators in the building," said MacKinnon. "If this isn't arranged ahead of time it can cause a delay in response time, which means we lose time mitigating the disaster, and the severity of the loss is increased. It's just one of the many reasons PREP makes sense for businesses."

MacKinnon and a crew of 16 FirstOnSite responders arrived on site forty-five minutes after the call, and immediately began working with key personnel. The flooded floor cavities full of the electrical equipment made for a very dangerous situation, and the building's electrician was contacted to cut power to the affected areas. Safe zones where FirstOnSite could still plug in heavy equipment were laid out, and power was kept on in those areas. Without electricity running through the floors, MacKinnon's crew stopped the flow of water and began using industrial wet vacuums to remove standing water, assisted by the Simcoe Place cleaning crew that first discovered the flood.

In addition to having over 20 years of experience in the restoration business, Rory MacKinnon is trained in applied structural drying and is a microbial remediation technician. Many of his staff are formally trained by The Clean Trust, the industry authority on cleaning and restoration procedures.



Over the next several days, FirstOnSite removed any sections of the office space that had been damaged by the flood. Carpets were removed and dried, saving the cost of replacement. Ruined drywall was cut out. Papers from filing cabinets, drawers, and desks were dried to prevent mould and mildew from growing, which can present a health hazard without proper drying procedures.

On Monday the crew continued to monitor the drying process with infrared cameras, making sure the process was on schedule. On Tuesday the office workers were back on the job. A FirstOnSite health and safety expert was brought on site to identify any potential safety risks in the office environment so the crew could continue restoration efforts while the office staff went about its daily work. Extra care was taken to keep the disruption to the office workers to a minimum. The crew cordoned off all sections of the floor that were open to ensure complete drying of the electrical equipment inside. Electrical wires were hung from the walls and ceiling to keep them well out of the way of office workers. Noise from the work site was also a concern, and FirstOnSite personnel made sure it was kept to a minimum.

A small crew continued to monitor the drying process until Thursday, when restoration on all five floors was completed.

The Results

In the end, the flood at Simcoe Place was considered a large loss, but was contained and managed effectively so that the disruption to business operations at the tower was minimal.

“FirstOnSite made this disaster manageable,” said Don Harvey, Senior Manager of Operations at Cadillac Fairview Corporation. “The speed of the response, the thoroughness of their work, and the respect for the tenant’s space and operations were impressive. Most of all we appreciated the level of communication from the crew. They set our expectations properly, and let us know what was happening every step of the way.”

Upon completion of the project, FirstOnSite led two post-mortem debriefings, one with Cadillac Fairview and another with the tenant. Each was designed to analyze the response process, and identify successes and procedures that could be improved on.

“This is one of our main differentiators,” said John Stephenson, National Director of Property Management for FirstOnSite. “Through our PREP program, we are with the client before, during, and after an event. This allows us to develop a relationship with key people and to be sure that every disaster is dealt with swiftly and professionally.”



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