

## Emergency procedures apparently in place at Echelon I, expert says

By **Shonda Novak**

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Published: 10:41 p.m. Friday, Feb. 19, 2010

Chris Toliver was at a conference in Las Vegas when a small plane crashed into an Austin office building Thursday. He watched CNN footage of the smoke and flames shooting from the building.

Toliver leads the disaster preparedness committee of the Building Owners and Managers Association of Austin, which holds seminars for its members on best practices for disaster, emergency and safety measures in commercial buildings.

Toliver said it seemed obvious that emergency evacuation plans were in place at the Echelon I building and that tenants were familiar with them, enabling them to "get out quickly and safely."

"It appears they didn't hesitate at all," Toliver said Friday. "They did what they were supposed to do immediately."

KVA Inc., the leasing agent and property manager for the Echelon I building, is an association member, Toliver said.

Kevin Kimball from the leasing company did not return calls or e-mails Friday, and no one from the limited partnership that owns the building could be reached.

According to Austin Fire Department records, the building was last inspected Jan. 22, 2008, with one violation noted, said Michelle DeCrane, a department spokeswoman. That violation was corrected when inspectors followed up three days later, after a master-key box for firefighters was added at the entry, she said.

DeCrane said the building's sprinkler system was working. However, Thursday's fire was so intense that it caused the air conditioning unit to fall through the second-floor ceiling, rendering part of the sprinkler system inoperable.

The building was severely damaged by the fire, which took several hours to control.

Public safety authorities have said the incident was a criminal act.

Jerry Hagins, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Insurance, said that the damage from such an incident might be covered under a standard commercial policy.

"There are many facets that would be considered, however, depending on the type of policy," Hagins said. "Multiple scenarios could play out, and we wouldn't want to speculate" about this case.

Congress Holdings Group, which owns two other buildings in the Echelon complex, said neither of those buildings appeared to have been damaged.

However, if they had been, "we would have had insurance to cover the property loss as well as lost rents," said Joel Sher, president of Congress Holdings.