

From: Realty Advisory Board on Labor Relations
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RAB ADVISES COMMERCIAL BUILDING OWNERS TO PREPARE IN THE EVENT OF A COMMERCIAL BUILDING SERVICE WORKER STRIKE

New York, NY (November 30, 2011) – The Realty Advisory Board on Labor Relations (RAB) today advised its members to take the necessary steps to prepare for the possibility of a strike by SEIU Local 32BJ, the union representing commercial building service workers, after the Commercial Building Agreement's expiration. As part of that preparation, the RAB today distributed to its members a comprehensive Preparedness Manual with information on how to minimize operational disruptions should a strike occur.

The current labor agreement, which was negotiated in December 2007 and is set to expire at midnight on December 31, covers more than 20,000 commercial building service workers, including office cleaners and maintenance workers in more than 1,000 commercial buildings throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island. The union representing the workers, Local 32BJ, is scheduled to hold a strike vote on Thursday, December 1.

"Only the union can say with certainty whether or not there will be a strike, but regardless, we are advising our members to take the necessary actions to ensure building operation continuity for their tenants," said Howard Rothschild, president of the RAB. "In 2007, we came to the table and negotiated a contract with the union that provided generous wage and benefit increases for our workers. Our commercial building service workers are the highest paid in the country – and we are not asking to change that – but continued wage increases that ignore the grim economic realities facing our city and country can't continue. We want to reach a labor agreement with the union that will lay the groundwork to spur more private sector activity, encourage growth in the real estate industry and create more jobs for unions like Local 32BJ. We look forward to working with Local 32BJ to negotiate a fair and realistic labor agreement."

The RAB represents and negotiates on behalf of owners and operators of commercial buildings as well as the majority of the cleaning contractors in the City. There are currently more than 4,000 members of the RAB. New York's real estate industry is one of the most unionized job sectors in the city and Local 32BJ members are the highest paid building service workers in the country.

There has not been a strike in the commercial sector since January 1996. Through advanced preparation, commercial building owners were able to successfully weather the month-long strike and negotiate a fair labor agreement. Since 1996, subsequent commercial building service worker labor agreements were amicably settled without strikes. Since 1933, there have been only strikes of commercial building service workers, in 1934, 1936, 1945 and 1996.

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The RAB Preparedness Manual provides the following guidance to help minimize operational burdens if a strike should occur:

- Contractors and repair workers might not cross union picket lines; therefore owners should conduct a comprehensive check of building systems now. Oil burners, elevators, water pumps, roof tanks, and HVAC systems should be inspected and necessary repairs made well before January 1st.
- Rubbish haulers may also honor picket lines, so alternatives arrangements should be made, including a supply of additional containers, if possible.
- Security is of paramount importance during a strike, and all security, fire alarm and communication systems should be tested immediately and repaired, if necessary. In addition, the fire and evacuation plans should be reviewed with management personnel.
- Insurance policies should be reviewed to determine what coverage is available during a strike, and possible additional insurance coverage should be considered.
- Building machinery and equipment rooms should be secured at least 24 hours before the strike deadline to prevent unauthorized persons from entering those areas.
- If Local 32BJ members are operating critical building equipment, including manual and freight elevators, suitable replacements must be found in the event of a strike. Arrangements for hiring and training a qualified person should be made well before the strike deadline. Candidates can be found through managing agents, service vendors, and/or trade organizations.
- It is critical to make arrangements now for security guards if there is a strike. Owners of buildings with lobby attendants should replace them with alternate security personnel. Security Guards who are covered by the current Commercial Building Agreement or by the Security Officers Owners Agreement with Local 32BJ will continue to work for 90-days following the expiration of the Commercial Building Agreement.
- Fuel deliveries may be disrupted, therefore owners should arrange for deliveries just prior to the strike deadline. Potential delivery disruptions during a strike should be discussed with suppliers, including the possibility of delivering fuel during off-hours.
- Alternate means of providing cleaning and rubbish removal should be made with cleaning contractors who will operate during a strike.
- Open communication between owners and tenants is essential. Before the contract expires, tenants should be notified of the possibility of a strike. As the expiration date approaches, the RAB recommends that members send a letter updating tenants of the situation, assuring them the essential services will be provided, and advising them of any modifications regarding cleaning, deliveries, and safety.

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