

Businesses must plan well ahead for pandemic: speaker

• from ARE YOU on page A1 and disrupt supply chains. There will likely be school, mall and church closings, the shutdown of transit systems, event cancellations and even quarantines.

"A fortress mentality may prevail," said Mr. Dunham.

As strange as its sounds, participants were also told that a pandemic might actually create an environment for new business opportunities, especially in concert with the expected surge in phone/Internet commerce. After all, Mr. Dunham continued, with face-to-face sales calls curtailed for example, other methodologies must be facilitated.

Businesses will also be well advised to engage in succession planning. In other words, from CEOs to filing clerks, the skills that every employee can bring to bear in others' absence must be detailed well in advance of a pandemic.

After all, he continued, past planning has been geared for sudden events like storms but a pandemic will require businesses to think long-term and ensure plans are "resilient." Mr. Dunham couldn't reinforce these last points enough.

Likewise, he stressed a comprehensive communications plan that considers all stakeholders from employees and business partners to the public, one that builds trust and com-

bats fear. Communicate early, said Mr. Dunham, be transparent and truthful, monitor the media and plan your messages carefully.

Other preparedness elements businesses must take into account range from backups to key personnel, work-at-home programs and hygiene education to the establishment of sick/family leave policies and worker compensation claims. Do sick employees get paid? Do workers filling in for sick peers get paid overtime? Is your supply chain ready? These and many other questions must be answered, said Mr. Dunham.

Jay Rosenblatt, partner, Simpson Wigle LLP, Barristers and Solicitors, also did his best to convince forum participants that company directors and C-levels are at "tremendous personal risk" but that due diligence is a legal defense. Although Mr. Rosenblatt made the point of saying that attendees should worry, there's immediate action that can be taken to positively impact them and their businesses.

He went on to explain that everyone from employees and shareholders to suppliers and customers could be at risk from director/officer liability, civil liability such as breach of contract, regulatory non-compliance such as occupational health and safety and even

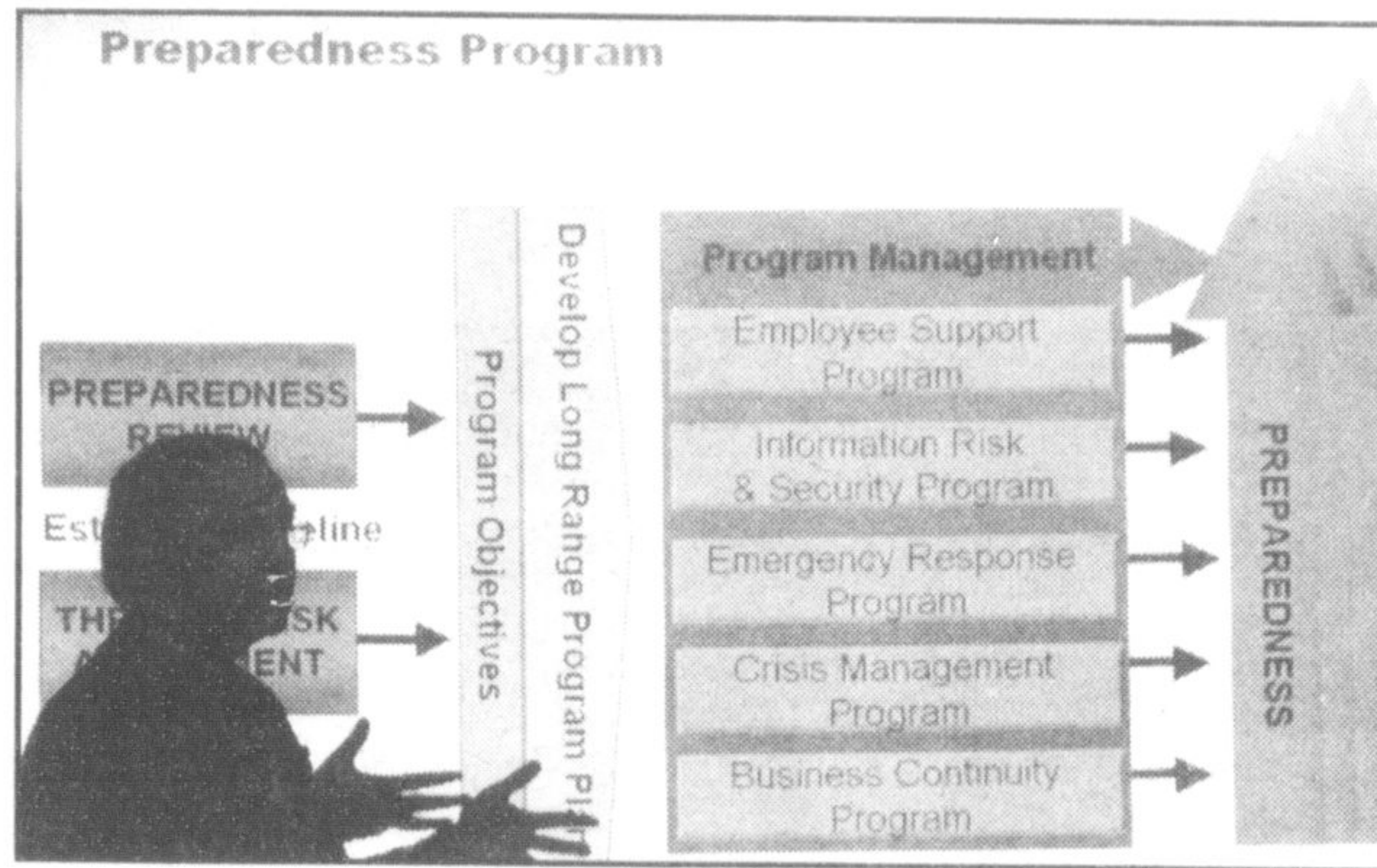


Photo by BARRIE ERSKINE

Ralph Dunham speaks at the information session.
 criminal charges. "Tell your CEO that inaction is a decision," said Mr. Rosenblatt. "Inaction is an act of negligence." Class actions could also be

launched against governments (as evidenced by Hurricane Katrina and SARS), hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, pharmacies and more.

In short, said Mr. Rosenblatt,

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be aware of your obligations and the consequences and do something about it. "Legal due diligence is just good corporate governance."

To reinforce these messages, Halton Region Emergency Planning Co-ordinator Wayne Gould offered these sobering statistics: Of five businesses that experience a disaster or an extended outage, two will never re-open and one will re-

open but go out of business within two years.

"Timely recovery and restoration of normal business operations following an emergency is crucial," Mr. Gould said. "Both the community and businesses need an integrated and effective emergency management program."

Rest assured, he continued, the Region is taking great pains to plan for a pandemic.

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