

School Safety & Security Quarterly Newsletter

The Human Element: Preventing Attacks Through Awareness



On May 22nd the world witnessed yet another horrific terrorist incident, this time in Manchester, England. The attacker in Manchester laid in wait outside of a concert venue and detonated a suicide bomb as patrons exited, killing 22 and injuring 59. This seemingly unpreventable incident may have actually ended differently if the witnesses that noticed a suspicious man in baggy clothes lurking outside the concert had reported what they saw sooner. No one can say for sure, but if police had intervened before the attack took place, the casualty count most likely would have been lower.

It's an unfortunate fact that our world is changing. Homegrown terrorists or "Lone Wolf" attackers pose a viable threat to school safety. In fact, foreign terrorist organizations openly promote attacks on Western educational institutions knowing that this will strike at our core and instill terror in our hearts. Fencing, cameras and sign-in policies are all important pieces of the security matrix but they will not prevent an attack. That requires a human element. It has never been more important to develop a keen sense of situational awareness and a culture of awareness with staff and students.

Below are four ways that you can promote the human element and increase safety at your district:

1. Situational Awareness

'The perception of environmental elements and events with respect to time or space, the comprehension of their meaning'

Educate staff and students on how to recognize people and things that don't belong. In the Manchester England bombing on May 22, 2017, observant citizens noticed a man that looked out of place, dressed in a way that didn't seem normal. In retrospect, the man was lying in wait and was wearing bulky clothing to conceal a bomb. The citizens' gut instinct was spot on.

Prior to almost every attack, there are indicators that a trained observer can pick up on. These actions may include, but not be limited to:

- Trying to enter through locked gates at rear of the site
- Climbing perimeter fences to gain access to the site
- Lurking around the site perimeter
- Trying locked doors
- Leaving bags or backpacks unattended
- Observing or noting staff behaviors and practices

2. If You See Something, Say Something

The fear of being wrong or wrongfully accusing someone may prevent someone from speaking up. It's natural to feel apprehensive about reporting someone or something based solely on your personal suspicion. This is especially true if it is a person that is a peer or is known

to you. Remember, approximately 75% of the time, active killers have some type of connection to the location or people they attack; so there is a good chance that you will know them. The biggest mistake you can make is letting your fear of being wrong stop you from trusting your gut instinct. You can apologize for being wrong but you can't undo the repercussions of being right and not saying something.

Districts are encouraged to provide as many reporting conduits as possible for staff, students, and visitors. These conduits should promote situational awareness and support prudent reporting of suspicious situations or persons. When managed properly, social media can be a great tool for this since nearly every student participates in some type of social media. Anonymous reporting programs such as WeTip can also be very effective, as they offer a way for staff and students to report things without fear of reprisal.

One of the biggest keys to creating a successful reporting system for your district is educating staff and students on how to observe and report. Make sure they know what options are available to them and teach them how to discern between profiling a situation versus observing actual, articulable details when they perceive a potentially dangerous situation.

3. Visual Weapons Screening

Provide staff with visual weapons screening training to help them identify subjects who pose an increased security risk. Indicators include, but are not limited to:

- Bulky clothing
- Inappropriate clothing for conditions
- Bulges in waistbands, pockets, pant legs, etc.
- Heavy items in pockets, backpacks, etc.
- Touching shifting adjusting under clothing
- Unusual gait, limping, lack of flexibility
- Palming areas of concealment
- Suspicious protrusions from clothing, bags, etc.

Training will also instill a level of confidence in them that makes them feel more comfortable about coming forward with information. There are a lot of videos available on this topic. There are also experts that provide live trainings on this topic. Districts are encouraged to explore the possibilities of providing direct training to staff and students on this topic.

4. Red Flag Indicators



In nearly every mass casualty incident, the attacker made statements or actions that telegraphed his/her intentions. These types of things include, but are not limited to:

- Causing disturbances
- Increased absenteeism
- Aggression toward others
- Depression or withdrawal
- Decline in appearance/hygiene
- Poor decision-making
- Lack of coping skills
- Increased use of alcohol/drugs
- Easily frustrated
- Anger management issues
- Changes in personality/behavior
- Written or verbal threats
- Social network threats
- Violent drawings/depictions

This ties back into "See something, Say something." The Nice, Paris attacker, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, was overheard by a neighbor saying, "One day, you'll hear about me." His statement was originally dismissed as an angry "rant" and wasn't actually reported until after the horrific attack occurred. In the Columbine incident, there were many verbal and social media threats from the attackers prior to the actual incident. Remember, red flag indicators alone may or may not be a sign that something is wrong; however, when layered with your other observations, red flag indicators can be a good indicator of nefarious activity.

Districts should consider providing their staff with training in recognizing red flag indicators.

There are many pieces to the puzzle when it comes to keeping a district safe in today's world. We don't know what to expect in the future, but we do know beyond any doubt, that this is not the era we grew up in. We can no longer take school safety for granted. As terrorist organizations continue to openly publish their hatred of the West and encourage attacks on Western education we have to remain diligent and proactive. We must empower staff and students with the knowledge and tools they need to remain safe. Districts should consider consulting with a school security professional to identify existing shortfalls in their existing safety plans and to develop an overall strategy for addressing identified issues.

Spotlight on Technology



Schools across the United States are increasingly utilizing electronic locking/access control systems. The ability to lock down an entire school site with the push of a button is a huge advantage and could potentially save countless lives in an active shooter or emergency lockdown situation. One example of a successful electronic locking system that we recently came across and observed at various school sites is a system created by Vanderbilt Industries. It is a fully integrated system that allows teachers to lock their doors from the inside with the push of a button. Additionally, it gives administrators the ability to lock all classroom doors instantaneously. The system also includes the option of a visitor management system that allows

school sites to control and record visitors entering/exiting campus.

There are many commercial access control options available to school districts. Electronic systems offer many advantages such as the ability to control individual access, eliminating issues associated with lost or stolen master keys: however, as with any system, there are disadvantages too. These include initial implementation cost, existing infrastructure issues, battery life issues, etc. Districts should consult with a licensed contractor and weigh all advantages and disadvantages before choosing an electronic access control system. www.vanderbiltindustries.com

The Spotlight on Technology section is not intended as an endorsement of or recommendation for any product. This is simply to alert the reader of available security products in the marketplace.

Keenan's Loss Control services promote safety awareness, and assist in the identification of conditions which may pose a risk of injury. We do not suggest that following our recommendations will eliminate all risk of injury or will result in improved loss experience.