

PROTECTING YOUR HOUSE OF WORSHIP- SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS

All organizations that are open to the public need to consider the security of their staff and visitors while on the premises. Even though faith-based properties are safe sanctuaries, they are not immune to the same security issues that affect society in general.



ASSESSING THE RISK

Completing a security vulnerability assessment is the first step in addressing your safety and security exposures. It is essential to have an understanding of the threats and hazards typically faced by your surrounding community, including other businesses and houses of worship in your area. Develop a team of staff and

volunteers and begin to identify their common concerns related to safety/security for the programs and ministries you provide on a regular basis. Keep in mind that safety and security needs will vary. For example, an annual carnival event will require different safety precautions than a bi-weekly food pantry or soup kitchen. A homeless shelter will have different security risks than a youth-group gathering.

Evaluating security risks involves understanding the probability that the specific threat or hazard will occur; the effects the threat or hazard will likely have, including its severity; the time the house of worship will have to warn occupants about the threat or hazard; and how long the threat or hazard may last. Local emergency management and police organizations should be able to provide information on the threats and hazards identified for the surrounding community. Invite them to meet with your

“DEVELOP A TEAM OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS”

leadership team or council, tour your facility and grounds and make recommendations based on their experience. This will enable the planning team to focus its assessment efforts on threats and hazards unique to religious organizations, as well as the particular vulnerabilities of the buildings and their occupants.

A site assessment examines the safety, accessibility and emergency preparedness of the house of

worship’s buildings and grounds. This assessment includes, but is not limited to, a review of building access, visibility around the exterior of buildings, structural integrity of buildings, compliance with applicable architectural standards for individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs and emergency vehicle access. The planning team may also identify additional threats and hazards through the site assessment process.

DEVELOPING A PLAN

The development of a written safety/security plan is the next step. The safety/security plan should address items such as:

- Designation of a safety/security coordinator and team members
- Coordinator and team responsibilities
- Role of contracted security, if applicable
- Procedures for securing building(s) and limiting access for the safety/security of staff
- Regular review of security camera footage, if applicable
- Emergency Procedures for medical, weather, fire, and security incidents
- Intruder/active shooter emergency plans
- Policies regarding weapons on the premises
- How to activate each plan, communicate internally, and notify local emergency responders
- Floor plans, and evacuation routes for all buildings and annexes
- Documentation of safety/security incidents and threats against the organization, and procedures for immediate follow up and review at Leadership meetings
- Documentation of periodic safety and security drills
- **Routine testing of any emergency communication devices, such as panic alarms or walkie-talkies**

Training Staff, Volunteers and Congregation

Once you have developed a plan, it is critical that everyone within the church community receive training on emergency procedures. Conduct emergency training at initial orientation and anytime there is turnover in staff, greeters/ushers and other volunteers. Perform periodic safety/security drills to assure that everyone knows the proper procedures to follow when an emergency arises. You may consider starting a Security Ministry to oversee these activities.

Conclusion

Many people turn to their houses of worship in times of need and depend on them for safety and security. Unfortunately, in today's society, houses of worship are a soft target for acts of violence and are not immune to the dangers faced by all of society. It is imperative that religious organizations take every precaution to protect their congregations, staff, and volunteers. Additionally, they must be prepared to respond to an emergency. Emergency preparedness requires the involvement of not just the organization, but of the surrounding community. Consider these minimum safety recommendations. You may also visit the following sites for additional information and guidance on protecting your house of worship.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FEMA | www.fema.gov/faith-resources

US Department of Homeland Security | www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness

Ready.gov | www.ready.gov/active-shooter

Glatfelter Ministry Care | www.glatfelterministrycare.com/Safety-Central