Safety & Security for Places of Worship

Churches, mosques and other places of worship have a unique challenge when it comes to crime prevention, security and safety. They want to be open and welcoming to the community outside while also protecting the people and property inside. With some awareness and thoughtful planning it is possible to be both hospitable and careful. Below are some tips to help you improve safety and security at your place of worship.

Awareness

It is important to be aware of the wide variety of risk factors that are present in any place of worship:

- illness/medical emergency
- accident or injury
- domestic conflict
- incident with youth
- violence (shooting, bomb)
- weather emergency
- utility failure
- fire/water damage
- theft or fraud
- vandalism
- threat/disruption
- lawsuit
- off-site incident (on a trip)

*What are some risk factors specific to your worship community?* Think about staff, volunteers and visitors; events, programs and activities; buildings, rooms and spaces; even the parking lot and overall location. *How would your community be able to respond to potential problems?* Find out by conducting an assessment.

Assessment

A security & safety assessment begins with a few basic steps:

1. Review event calendars from the past year to create a list of all on- and off-site activities
2. List the "5 Ps" relevant to each activity: the people, places, property, programs and processes
3. Create an inventory of items at risk for loss or damage (appliances, furniture, equipment, decor)
4. Identify concerns, ask "what if" questions and create a list of scenarios
5. Document reasonable responses, procedures and plans for each activity/scenario and make recommendations

Do these assessments throughout the year, at different days and times. Be sure to follow-up on problems, changes and recommendations. When assessing your place of worship, try to keep the "big picture" in mind:
Prevention

Assessment results will likely lead to steps for incident prevention. Here are some basic prevention tips for all places of worship:

- Keep all valuables secure all the time and have procedures in place for money handling
- Limit unlocked doors and checked locked doors regularly
- Develop a phone or text network to alert others of incidents or suspicious situations
- Regularly check utilities, appliances and equipment for proper functioning
- Make sure ushers, greeters and other lead roles are aware of security and emergency response plans
- Assign a safety liaison to every scheduled event or meeting (often the person hosting the event)
- Take extra precautions in high-risk programs such as children/youth and counseling
- Hold safety briefings before all off-site activities and don’t forget about transportation safety

Some incidents you cannot prevent, such as a weather emergency. However, in that case you can try to mitigate further problems by ensuring that people know how to respond and take appropriate action.

Planning

Smaller places of worship may find that the first three steps mentioned above - awareness, assessment and prevention meet their needs. However because crime prevention, safety and security are ongoing concerns, many larger communities choose to form a Safety & Security committee to oversee plans and actions.

A thorough safety and security program consists of five components:

- **Safety and Security Committee** to oversee and coordinate all related activities; with
  - **Security Response Team** trained for specific roles and functions in major incidents
  - **Emergency Medical Response Team** to provide assistance in minor situations
- **Safety and Security Assessments** to survey and assess all aspects of the place
- **Procedures and Plans** for prevention and response, as well as training about them
- **Safety and Security Manual** containing all related policies, procedures, and other documentation
- **Ongoing Education** to keep everyone mindful and prepared

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This material is based on the Worship without Worry program developed by Tina Lewis Rowe: [finalewisrowe.com](http://finalewisrowe.com)

Stearns County Sheriff’s Office
co.stearns.mn.us
sheriff@co.stearns.mn.us