TOP 5 SECURITY MISTAKES

1 Failure to understand the threats you face

The first mistake most schools and childcares, large and small, make is failure to understand the source and nature of the threats they face. The factors that determine your threats are numerous and include what services you perform and how you perform them, your physical location, the size of your staff, your student body community, your client families, and your public image, to name a few. It is imperative to determine what threats are possible and focus any planning and training efforts in those areas. Some threats are universal, and all organization should plan for these. They include fire, medical emergencies, and natural disasters. However, even universal threats can impact a school. If you are located in California, you have a risk of wildfires in some areas. If you are located in Ohio, for example, that threat is far less likely. If you don't allow members of the general public into your facility, the nature of any active violence threat is different from that of a school who does. SEC recommends every school or childcare take time to assess their threats by utilizing the following process.

    a. Determine the full scope of all risks you could face.
    b. Determine the likelihood of each risk.
    c. Determine the impact each risk could have on your organization.
    d. Establish plans for mitigating or planning for each risk and its impacts.

2 Failure to assess gaps and weaknesses

Every school has gaps or weaknesses in its security, emergency planning, and training program. The goal should be to reduce and mitigate the gaps and weaknesses as much as possible. When doing this, it is critical to ensure you do not damage the nature and success or your operations. For example, if you are operating a childcare center but you don't allow family members into classrooms for fear of a security incident, you may lose trust, which impedes business. Therefore, it is critical to acknowledge that some risks can only be mitigated, not eliminated, when determining your gaps and weaknesses. SEC recommends evaluating the risks identified in Mistake #1 against the following criteria when creating a plan to address them.

    a. Operational Necessity
        • Weigh each safety and security risk against its impact to your ability to operate.
        • Consider how the desired changes would impact the needs and experience of your client families, student body, student family community, and visitors.

    b. Culture
        • Evaluate your desired changes against impact to culture, both short- and long-term.
        • Ask parents and students for their input so you have additional perspective.
        • Be honest about whether the primary focus is safety and security or brand and reputation.

    c. Budget
        • Priorities should be established within legitimate budget constraints.
        • The safety of human life should always be prioritized, even if it may not be as exciting as other investment options.

    d. Resources
        • Determine if you have the expertise to fix these issues or whether assistance is needed.
        • Make training a consistent and long-term priority to sustain ongoing impact.

3 Focusing solely on physical security

Safety and security occur in layers. When there is an incident at a school, many layers of the safety and security program are implemented in order to respond to and recover from the incident. These layers include physical security, planning, training, supplies and recovery efforts. The issue discovered in many of our school and childcare security assessments is that the client has used most of the school's emergency preparation resources on physical security. This often includes the purchase and installation of security items, such as cameras, that often do not prevent nor assist in responding to a threat. For example, security cameras provide the greatest value when they are monitored in real time. Security cameras that are not monitored, and are used only for video evidential purposes, provide limited impact on security. It is recommended that schools and childcare facilities ensure they have created multiple layers in their safety and security program, as opposed to relying on a single security element. The most common missing element in these layers is training. SEC recommends action taken across the following layers to achieve maximum impact. Having a professional security consultant assist with prioritizing resources is the best method to ensure a good outcome. Be careful using a consultant that sells security components. Consultants who sell products will almost always find a need for their product in your facility. The following guidelines will help you determine which physical security elements make the most impact.

   a. Determine if your threats are internal or external or a mixture. External security features don't work on internal threats.
   b. Make selections based on the greatest impact to safety. Cameras may not be as important as an alert system for instance.
   c. Ensure you develop a process or procedure for any physical security. If you have cameras you should have a camera policy for example.
   d. Ensure all staff are trained on the process and operation of any security features selected.

4 Incomplete planning and supplies

The drafting and training of emergency procedures requires extensive experience and expertise. Often, schools do not have this expertise in house, so they utilize internal resources that are ill equipped to take on this task. SEC has assessed emergency procedures in schools across the country and internationally. The number of plans that are not within best practice is troubling. We often find outdated and incorrect information in plans. We find procedures that do not even match the environment for which they were written. We find boilerplate plans that large childcare or school systems use across their footprint even when the operations, facilities, and locations are varied. Emergency plans should be written by professionals and should be custom to the location for which they are written. The following information should be included as custom elements in emergency plans.

   a. Command and Control – Determine who is in control and how communication will be accomplished.
   b. Relocation Sites – Select locations to gather following an evacuation.
   c. Alerts – Determine how alerting everyone in the school will be accomplished.

Emergencies and critical incidents are rapidly evolving situations, and each is unique. Therefore, it is important to keep plans concept based as opposed to making a series of hard to follow steps. Consider using primary protocols as the basis for your plan and referring to those within each individual emergency. Please contact SEC for more information on the primary response protocols and planning resources.

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Next, the failure to properly equip yourself to respond to emergencies causes significant issues with response and recover. Many learned during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic that ensuring you have appropriate emergency supplies available is critical. The items needed will vary based on your operations. Please contact SEC for further information on emergency supplies.

5 Failure to train

The Navy Seals have a saying that, in moments of stress, human beings don't rise to the occasion but instead sink to the level of their training. The biggest mistake schools make is failing to take the time to train regularly on emergency response. In an emergency, most individuals will not take the time to find the emergency plan and read it. They will either respond with hardwired responses (Fight, Flight, Freeze) or they will respond as they have been trained. School administrators should consider responsible and reasonable multi-hazard training. While specific active shooter training is very in vogue, it is more beneficial to train staff on concepts that apply to a variety of emergencies including active shooter response concepts. Be careful of focusing your valuable training time on only one type of emergency. Training should be best practice, engaging and should be done on a responsible basis. Training is perishable. That means, if you train on something only once and never revisit those concepts, you are likely to forget them. However, if you train regularly, even if the training is informal, you are more likely to successfully navigate an incident. We recommend the following regarding training.

a. Training should be multi-hazard and not limited to only active shooter response. It should also include primary response protocols, physiology, and decision-making processes.
b. Training should be given to everyone within the school or childcare, not just top line staff or selected staff. Online training options make this possible and convenient.
c. Training should be custom to your school and operations. Therefore, training should always follow an assessment. A security consultant who does not know your operations or environment can't possibly tell you how to respond to an emergency in that environment.
d. Training is perishable and should be executed regularly if possible.