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Testimony to the School Safety Subcommittee of the Sandy Hook Advisory Panel
January 25, 2013

The Connecticut Police Chiefs Association represents the interests of all of Connecticut's municipal and university police chiefs. The following testimony is presented for consideration of the Committee.

Local police chiefs around the state have been called upon throughout the years to collaborate with local school officials on issues of school security. The security of a school facility is generally reviewed in several phases; traditional target-hardening crime prevention considerations, such as, lighting, locks and alarm systems; Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) methods that include; natural surveillance, territorial control and access management; and finally, facility policy review along with staff and student training review.

School facilities are used for a wide range of functions. During the school day the facility is used for the education of children, however, as the school day ends the same facility often becomes a general use facility for a number of community activities including religious education, boy scouts, girl scouts, parent-teacher groups and school-sponsored sports programs as well as town-sponsored sports programs and activities.

When reviewing the safety and security of school facilities it is important to take into consideration all of the building uses in order to provide the highest level of security and lessen the building's vulnerabilities.

TRADITIONAL, TARGET-HARDENING CRIME PREVENTION
Traditional crime prevention methods generally review the installation of exterior facility locks, the type of locking device and the ability of the lock to truly protect the facility from intrusion.

Locks
Exterior locks can be traditional key locks, modern proximity scan electronic locks or an electronic key pad or any combination of such locking devices. It is important to employ an effective key control policy in order that all issued keys are tracked and lost keys reported in order to have maximum control over facility access.

Electronic proximity scanners provide the benefit of creating an electronic log of who has entered a facility and allows lost key-cards to be electronically disabled. Consideration should be given to how emergency responders are going to access the building during a lockdown situation. This should be discussed with the local law enforcement leader.
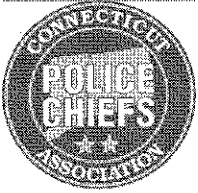
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Interior locks are important in that they control access throughout the inside of the facility. Lock hardware on classroom doors should allow the classroom and other rooms to be locked from the inside. This allows a user to quickly lock the door during a crisis without exposing himself and students to hallway hazards.

Lighting

Exterior lighting is important as it aids in the detection of intruders during low-light periods. School facilities are often open before sunrise and remain open long after sunset. Effective exterior lighting allows users to see what is happening outside the building as they approach and as they exit the facility. Intruders are more likely to be detected and users are going to feel safer when lighting is bright and abundant. Additionally, emergency responders are better able to monitor the exterior security of a facility if the area is well lit.

Alarm Systems

The use of an electronic intrusion detection system is important in maintaining the integrity of a building's exterior locking system. Alarm systems can be used during hours when a facility is closed to detect any breach of the building's exterior doors or windows. Additionally, alarms can also be used when the facility is in use to detect the improper use of exit doors. This can help in monitoring doors to ensure they are not propped open by staff or students during the school day thus allowing for unauthorized building access.

Panic Alarms

The use of panic alarms throughout a school facility is worthy of consideration. The use of such alarms would allow staff or students to trigger an alert from multiple locations within a facility. The alert may be directed to an outside monitoring company, the police, key staff locations or a combination of locations.

The installation and use of any alarm system must also be accompanied by proper training and a sound policy on how and when the alarm system is used. Additionally, the issue of false alarms must be addressed in order to minimize the number of unnecessary responses by emergency personnel.

Video Surveillance

The use of electronic video surveillance is important in the early detection of suspicious activity. Employees should be properly trained in the proper and effective use of any installed video surveillance system. Such system should also provide a recording of all monitoring points. This will assist in the later investigation of any suspicious or criminal incidents. Many modern surveillance systems allow the video to be viewed from off-sight locations.

CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN (CPTED)

CPTED is defined as the proper design and effective use of the built environment leading to a reduction in the incidence and fear of crime. During a CPTED review of a facility consideration is given to three primary concepts; Access Control, Natural Surveillance and Territorial Concern.

Access Control

Access control concerns the methods by which a user accesses the school's property. This includes a review of driveway access and parking lot flow as well as how points of entry to the building are marked and controlled. Some facilities control access to their driveway and parking lot through the use of electronic gates or parking monitors. Monitors are able to see who is coming onto the school premises, provide directions as to where to park and also, to act as a first alert should someone suspicious come onto the property.

Permitted parking areas should be clearly marked as should no-parking areas. Signs should clearly direct visitors to the proper entrance point. Entrance to the facility should then be controlled by an access control alert system. Such system should allow an employee inside the facility to see and hear who is asking for access to the facility. A proper policy and procedure should be in place to provide clear guidance to the employee charged with granting access.

Once visitors are granted access to the facility, signs should be clearly posted guiding the visitor to a screening area. This is where the visitor's business is explained and where they sign in and out of the facility. Visitors should be clearly identified so both staff and students know that the person is an authorized visitor.

It is also important that all employees have an identification card and that such card is worn visible at all times when on the school premises. This allows other staff and students to discern between employees and visitors. This is an important element of access control. Policy should require that anyone in the school facility not displaying an employee or visitor identification badge be challenged and directed to the school office. Additionally, during a time of crisis when emergency responders are called to the scene, it is vital that they be able to determine who is a staff member and who is not.

Also, by employing and enforcing an ID badge policy, staff members are subtly forced into a security mindset and an understanding of the secure nature of the school facility.

Natural Surveillance

Natural surveillance is the concept of making a facility and its surrounding grounds easy to see. The people inside the facility and those casual passersby outside the facility are important to preventing crime and alerting emergency personnel in the event of crisis.
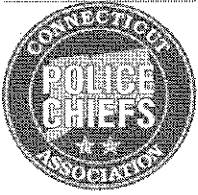
Natural surveillance encourages the use of plantings, as well as tree and shrub maintenance in order to allow for a relatively unobstructed view of the premises. Users inside the facility should be able to see what is happening outside the facility. For example, a playground or recreation area next to a school that is shrouded in overgrown trees and shrubs is likely to "hide" unsafe activity from sight. Removing or trimming trees and shrubs allow for better monitoring of activity.

Enabling passersby to see activity on the property provides additional opportunities for someone to alert emergency personnel in the event suspicious activity is occuring. Theoretically, a person intending to commit a crime wants to avoid detection. Controlling tree and shrub growth lessens the opportunity for a person to hide and increases the chance for early detection.

Territorial Concern
The final CPTED concept is territorial concern. This concept pertains to the overall appearance and maintenance of a facility and its surrounding property. The theory is that well cared for property is less apt to be an area where crime is committed. An intruder or person with criminal intentions may feel that detection is more likely in an area that is well maintained. A well maintained property creates the feeling that the property is being watched, that someone is concerned about the property.

Parking lots should be in good condition, lines should be clean, pot holes should be filled, and curbs should be in good condition. Graffiti should be immediately removed, damaged signs should be immediately repaired, and play ground equipment should be kept in good condition.

Property that is rundown, lacks consistent maintenance and is covered with graffiti is likely to be an area that fosters crime.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
The following is a list of other considerations regarding school safety.

Collaboration
Police and schools must work in cooperation in training school staff and police on how to respond to school emergencies. School staff must be trained in the actions they should take when the school is in crisis. They should also be trained to know what to expect when the police arrive at the scene. Police should be encouraged to engage in simulated incidents with school staff personnel present.
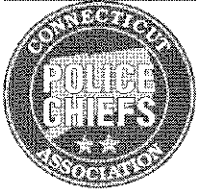
Directed School Patrols
Local police should engage in daily school patrols. Such patrols should include walking around inside the school facility. This accomplishes two goals; first, the more frequently officers engage in this type of patrol the more "normal" it will be to have a police officer on the school premises; secondly, the officer has an opportunity to learn the interior of the building. School interiors are often confusing and provide many hiding areas for intruders. Encouraging officers to walk the halls of the building will give them a tactical advantage should they be called to respond to an emergency at the school.

Often times the radio systems used by emergency responders don't work effectively inside the brick and mortar of a school. Encourage local emergency personnel visit local schools and test their communications abilities throughout the school building.

School Resource Officers
The School Resource Officer (SRO) program has been in existence for many years. The program places a uniformed, armed police officer into the school on a full-time basis. The officer role is one of teacher, mentor, coach and general resource for school staff, students and parents. The goal of the program is to introduce police role models into the school community and enhance the relationship between schools and police and students and police. The goal of the program was not intended to be school security, although that has become a convenient advantage to having an officer in the school.

Armed Security Guards
The use of private, armed security guards is a local decision that should be explored with great caution. The mission and daily responsibilities must be clearly outlined and coordination with police response considered. This may be an attractive short-term solution to calm the fears and anxiety in the wake of a violent incident, but not necessarily an effective, long-term solution.

Communication
Communication is a key element of any crime prevention and school security plan. School staff should have a communications system in place that allows them to speak to each other throughout the building and on the adjacent grounds. This radio frequency may be compatible with the local police radio system thus allowing police to add the frequency to their radios.

Training
School staff should engage in safety and security training on several occasions during the school year. This not only enhances their knowledge of emergency procedures but also keeps them in a safety and security mindset. Staff members also want to feel safe and a strong security posture by school administrators will demonstrate to staff, students and families that school safety is a priority.

There is no single quick-fix to issues of school security. The local police department, board of education and local schools must adopt and frequently review policies, response plans and training curriculum that combine to foster a comprehensive security posture. School security is a specialized task. Local police officials may not necessarily be trained in the evaluation of school emergency response and disaster planning, school security best-practices or other school facility planning concepts. Schools should not hesitate to bring in outside consultants to review existing response and security plans to ensure all areas have been appropriately addressed.

END

This testimony was prepared by Chief Matthew Reed of the South Windsor Police Department. Chief Reed has been a police officer for twenty-five years and appointed chief in 2010. Since 1993, Chief Reed has served as his department's primary crime prevention coordinator. In 2005 he drafted and implemented South Windsor's Safe Schools Initiative and has worked closely with school district staff to improve the district's overall security posture. Chief Reed also serves as co-chair of CPCA's legislative committee.