

School Committee Security and Safety Update 2016

During this past fiscal year, a comprehensive top down review and analysis was conducted of the school department's safety and security procedures with an overall goal of enhancing and strengthening the district's overall security posture.

We have made great strides in accomplishing these ambitious goals with our eyes forward to continue improving and refining our security procedures to meet the challenges of ever evolving threats. The actions taken in the initial minutes of an emergency are critical to saving lives. Details of the various improvements are as follows.

Implementation of the Standard Response Protocols

(SRP). The Shrewsbury Public School District following extensive research, discussions with various first responders to include Shrewsbury Police Department and Fire Department, community members, implementation of best practices, and alignment with current Homeland Security Guidelines, deployed the SPR throughout the district to each and every school site location. The deployment phase consisted of providing training to all staff, tabletop exercises with school administrators, and first responders, distribution of SRP classroom materials, and the conduct of associated drills.

Emergency Radio Communications: Emergency

Communication is probably one of the least talked about aspects of emergency preparedness, but in my opinion, it plays a vital role in insuring your survival during any type of disaster, and is something that you can't afford to overlook. During an incident, it's very likely that some or most communication channels will go down. Hopefully this will only be temporary, but either way you need to plan for the worst-case scenario and have multiple options and levels of redundancy available.

Disaster after disaster has shown us how crucial communication can be during a time of crisis. From dispatching first responders into affected areas, to coordinating with loved ones during times of crisis, our communications infrastructure is vitally important to our safety. A call

for help to public emergency services that provides full and accurate information will help the dispatcher send the right responders and equipment.

As of early February, emergency hand held radio and base stations with their own dedicated frequency have been installed at each school site location. These radios are monitored by police dispatch at all times. This allows the schools direct contact with the Police Department in case of an emergency. It also allows for redundancy for emergency contact by schools in case the telephones were disabled. Training for utilization has been provided to school staff and routine testing is conducted to ensure operability.

Two-way radios: A two-way radio is a radio that can both transmit and receive. It's ironic two-way radio communication may seem like a thing of the past with smart phones and the availability of more advanced technology. However, with the recent frequency of natural disasters, storms, and other emergency situations, more attention is being paid to radios as a reliable form of communication and a possible back-up communication option. With this in mind, we consulted with local communication professionals and subsequently identified two viable VHF model radio options currently deployed to staff while still viable for our needs and allows for the police department personnel the option to "dial" in to the schools radio frequency and effectively communicate directly with staff members during an emergency situation. Standardization of radio and communication equipment is an essential element of an effective communication plan.

Radio Site Surveys: One of the key factors in determining the success of our handheld radio deployment and potential future enhancements is the conduct of a site survey. Before deploying or expanding our handheld radio capability we had to understand the needs of the school's staff and administrators at each school site. By performing a site survey, we were able to identify the appropriate technologies to apply; obstacles to avoid, eliminate, or work around; coverage patterns to adopt; and amount of capacity needed. This allowed the School Department to identify; field test, and put in place a concrete plan for improving and or expanding our handheld radio

platforms in the future. And truly only purchasing what we really need to operate effectively and efficiently. Proposals are drafted regarding these improvements and ready to implement once funding becomes available.

Emergency Management Table Top Exercises (TTX's):

Tabletop Exercises (TTX's) generally involve key personnel discussing simulated scenarios in an informal setting. This type of exercise can be used to assess plans, policies, and procedures or to assess the protocols and systems needed to guide the prevention of, response to, and recovery from a defined incident. Participants are encouraged to discuss issues in depth and to develop decisions through slow-paced problem solving, rather than the rapid, spontaneous decision making that occurs under actual or simulated emergency conditions. The effectiveness of a TTX is derived from the energetic involvement of participants and their assessment of recommended revisions to current policies, procedures, and plans.

During the interim January/February 2016, the School Department in conjunction Shrewsbury Police Department conducted three separate TTX's. The first scenario centered around a hostile and potentially volatile exchange between a school administrator and parent within a school site location, followed by a second scenario involving a reported fire in the kitchen area of a school. The third scenario involved a terrorist threat/incident occurring along the east coast and the how both the school and town would prepare in anticipation of a possible second attack closer to home in the Massachusetts area.

Building Assessment Team (BAT) Security Survey - A

major goal of the BAT which is comprised of members from the School Department, Shrewsbury Police Department, Shrewsbury Fire Department, and Town Buildings Department is to provide enhanced protection for students and staff by pinpointing high-risk areas in school buildings where potential problems or emergency situations might occur. This may also be known as Target hardening. Target hardening refers to strengthening the security of a building and in this

case the various schools, so that it is difficult for an individual(s) to attack. The goal is to increase the time and effort (creating a “time Barrier”) needed to compromise a school facility to the point where a perpetrator will move on to a softer target. The BAT accomplishes this through a “Physical Security Survey” and walk through of each school site location. The survey is an annual comprehensive, detailed, technical on-site inspection and analysis of the current security and physical protection conditions. As a result numerous improvements were deployed to include the following sampling:

- Expanded and/or enhanced Public Address Systems deployed in the Paton, Parker Road, High School, and Oak Middle Schools.

- Improved and more efficient fire egress routes established in the Sherwood Middle School and High School—elimination of “bottle necks” in observed highly congested areas during evacuation of the school

- Identified potential HAZMAT situation at High School during Chemical Lab Inspection of the acid neutralization tanks (not working properly). The tanks were repaired and placed on a semi annual inspection and routine maintenance schedule.

- Created an additional entry/exit means in a previously vulnerable classroom (“Fish Bowl Room”) located within the Sherwood Middle School. This enhancement allows for students an alternative viable option to exit from a potential dangerous situation to a safe area.

- Provided Magnet Door Locks to numerous school locations in order to expedite the securing of classrooms during an emergency situation.

- Added expanded Public Address broadcast locations in Paton and Parker Road in order to announce emergency warnings from various locations within the schools.

- Enhanced door locking mechanisms at Beal, Coolidge, and Oak Middle Schools.

Training: The School Department in conjunction with the Shrewsbury Police Department during December and April 2016 conducted Active Shooter Training and classroom instruction at the High School during winter school break. Because there is no way of knowing which police department employees might be the first to arrive at the scene of an active shooter event, the thought process behind the training was to train all officers in the skills that would be needed to perform critical tasks. These skills and tasks include immediate assessment of an active shooter scene, room entry techniques, building clearing, building formalization and victim rescue. Active shooter incidents are fundamentally different from hostage situations and other critical incidents, because of the extreme pressure on police to respond as quickly as possible to stop the killing and wounding of victims. Active shooter training is built around the reality that even a one-minute delay in responding may result in multiple additional fatalities.

Additional training and drills pertaining to other emergency type scenarios were conducted to include Lockout, Shelter, Evacuation, and Fire.

The Future of Security and Safety in the School

Department: Again, with our eyes focused forward the School Department through the year will continue to build upon, improve and refine our security and safety procedures to meet the challenges of ever evolving threats. Standardization and institutionalizing our emergency response protocols, communications and equipment, along with training will remain the cornerstones of this program. The School Department will maintain our vigilance and evolve our procedures to counter the ever-increasing bomb threats, which continue to plague numerous school districts. Enhancement and leveraging technology surrounding the existing school video surveillance systems and capabilities is critical for several reasons. School security cameras help maintain safety around our campus, they also discourage misbehavior, and act as a deterrent. Conspicuously placed school surveillance cameras have been shown to reduce threats of violence and vandalism drastically. Additionally, school security cameras at entrance doors can assist administrative staff in the monitoring of visitors and ensure they

are properly signed in, while still allowing students and staff to move freely around the campus.

Lastly and most importantly, continue to work with school administrators in support of a robust High School Student Support Team (SST), which consists of school administrators, guidance counselors, psychologists, and students to help proactively prevent violence and or inappropriate behavior in the schools. The efforts of the SST, which meets on a weekly basis, can go a long way toward mitigating the threat of such occurrences. Although not an exact science for predicting school setting violence or adverse behavior, students and staff can take certain actions to reduce these incidents. First, it is critical to understand that these types of behavior do not just happen at random or “out of the blue.” Rather, perpetrators usually display some behaviors of concern. Thus, awareness of these indicators and the subsequent implementation of an action plan to de-escalate potentially violent situations and/or unwanted behavioral issues form essential components of school violence prevention program. As a side note, this program through it’ proactive efforts was credited with identifying and successfully resolving a recent potential threat posed to the High School.