

Lesson Overview

Planning for school violence has been near the top of all school administrators' and faculty concerns for several years. Incidents such as those that occurred in Columbine, Colorado, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and in other schools across the country underscore the importance of emergency planning to protect students and school employees and to help them recover from a traumatic event.

This lesson presents information on preparing for school violence, including terrorism. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- List the primary terrorist threats, and emergency response actions for each.
 - Describe special factors that need to be considered when preparing for a violent attack.
 - Explain the responsibilities of school personnel during incidents of school violence.
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The New Reality

There are many new threats that school personnel face based on recent terrorist attacks in New York City and at the Pentagon.

The threat of terrorism using weapons of mass destruction—or WMD—presents school personnel with a new dimension in planning for emergencies.

Terrorist Threats

Many of the same issues will arise following a terrorist incident as arise with acts of school violence—but school officials should expect these issues to be magnified greatly.

The next screens provide basic information on terrorist threats and emergency response actions.

Conventional Explosives

Fact: Conventional explosives are used in more than 70% of all terrorist attacks.

Indicators: Look for improvised explosive devices (pipe bombs, suspicious packages, or abandoned vehicles).

Explosion: Emergency Actions**If you suspect that there is a threat from a bomb:**

- DO NOT touch, cover, or move any type of device! **Do not use your cell phone or radio.**
 - During the initial attack, you should seek cover under desks or tables. If these items are not readily available, move against an interior wall and protect your head with your arms. Move away from windows and balconies.
 - Do not use elevators and don't be surprised if sprinkler systems or alarms are activated.
 - If you are able, immediately evacuate the area and move to a safe location. Leave search and rescue activities to responding authorities. Know where the emergency exits are located.
 - During evacuation procedures, immediately move away from the targeted location and seek shelter inside a secure area.
 - If you are outdoors near the targeted location during the initial attack, duck behind an item that will provide you cover, such as a tree or doorway, and get down as low as possible.
 - Consider the possibility of additional attacks or secondary explosions.
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Radiation Threat

Facts: A radiation threat or "dirty bomb" is the use of common explosives to spread radioactive materials over a targeted area. It is not a nuclear blast. The force of the explosion and radioactive contamination will be more localized.

Indicators: While the blast will be immediately obvious, the presence of radiation will not be clearly defined until trained personnel with specialized equipment are on the scene. As with any radiation, you want to try to limit exposure.

Radiological Threat: Emergency Actions

If you are exposed to a dirty bomb, limit your exposure. To limit the amount of radiation you are exposed to, think about shielding, distance, and time.

- **Shielding:** If you have a thick shield between yourself and the radioactive materials, more of the radiation will be absorbed, and you will be exposed to less.
 - **Distance:** The farther away you are away from the blast and the fallout, the lower your exposure.
 - **Time:** Minimizing time spent exposed will also reduce your risk.
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Nuclear Blast

Facts: A nuclear blast is an explosion with intense light and heat, a damaging pressure wave, and widespread radioactive material that can contaminate the air, water, and ground surfaces for miles around.

While experts may predict at this time that a nuclear attack is less likely than other types of threats, terrorism by its nature is unpredictable.

Nuclear Blast: Emergency Actions**If there is a nuclear blast:**

- Take cover immediately, below ground if possible, though any shield or shelter will help protect you from the immediate effects of the blast and the pressure wave.
 - Quickly assess the situation.
 - Consider if you can get out of the area or if it would be better to go inside a building and follow your plan to "shelter-in-place."
 - In order to limit the amount of radiation you are exposed to, think about shielding, distance, and time.
 - Use available information to assess the situation. If there is a significant radiation threat, health care authorities will advise you about taking potassium iodide.
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Biological Threat

Facts: Biological agents:

- Include bacteria, viruses, and toxins.
- Must be inhaled, ingested, or absorbed through broken skin.
- Are adversely affected by weather conditions such as sunlight.
- May be treatable if caught early.

Indicators:

- Most have no immediate effect.
 - Symptoms appear between a few hours to weeks.
 - Aerosols could be used to spread agents.
 - Often produce flu-like symptoms.
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Biological Threat: Emergency Actions

Biological agents may enter the body through:

- **Inhalation:** The body is most vulnerable to this route of exposure. From the lungs, the pathogen can travel to the lymph nodes, causing a systemic infection.
 - **Contact:** Biological agents can penetrate skin through open sores or rashes.
 - **Ingestion:** Biological agents can enter the digestive system by hand-mouth contact after touching contaminated areas or by swallowing particles lodged in the nose and throat.
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Chemical Threat**Facts:**

- Deliberate release of a toxic gas, liquid, or solid that can poison people and the environment.
- Ingredients are found in common cleaning products and pesticides.
- Quantities needed vary:
- Few grams of a nerve agent.
- Several 55-gallon drums of a blistering agent.

Indicators:

- Many people suffering from watery eyes, twitching, choking, having trouble breathing, or losing coordination.
 - Many sick or dead birds, fish, or small animals are also cause for suspicion.
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Chemical Agents: Emergency Actions**If You See Signs of Chemical Attack**

- Quickly try to define the impacted area and **take immediate action to get away**.
- If the chemical is inside a building, get out of the building without passing through the contaminated area.
- If exiting is not possible, shelter-in-place away from the release area. Close doors and turn off ventilation systems (if possible).
- If you are outside, take the fastest escape route **UPWIND** from the chemical threat.

If You Think You Have Been Exposed to a Chemical

- Remove all clothing by cutting or ripping it away. **Never remove clothing that has become contaminated by pulling items over the head.**
 - Look for a hose, fountain, or any source of **COLD** water, and wash with soap if possible, being sure not to scrub the chemical into your skin.
 - Seek emergency medical attention.
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The Similarities and Differences

Terrorism is violence against civilians to further political or social objectives.

When it comes to being prepared for school violence or terrorism, the planning process is the same. However, in any violent attack, you may have to consider the following additional factors:

- Widespread fear and/or panic.
- Multiple casualties (deaths or injuries).
- Law enforcement involvement.
- Long-term sheltering need.
- A crime scene to protect.

The next screens explore each of these issues further.

Widespread Fear and/or Panic

Students, faculty, and staff may experience fear and, in some cases, panic during any emergency.

School personnel can expect a much stronger fear response during an emergency involving an intruder than during other types of emergencies.

It is critical that school staff be prepared not to panic.

Multiple Casualties

Increased emphasis has been placed on identifying those who are at high risk of committing school violence before they act.

However, history has shown that, when perpetrators have not been identified, multiple deaths and/or injuries are probable. The presence of multiple casualties adds a new dimension to an already traumatic situation.

Long-Term Sheltering

Depending on the damage to the infrastructure in the community surrounding the school, there may be a need to shelter students—and community members—for an extended period.

Law Enforcement Involvement

During and after any incident involving school violence, law enforcement personnel will be at the scene.

Law enforcement agencies will bring firearms and perhaps a SWAT unit, negotiators, and others on site. Their presence on campus may cause strong reactions that are much different than those stirred by the arrival of other first responders.

A Crime Scene To Protect

The area around the incident—perhaps the entire building or school property—will be a crime scene.

Safety for all persons in the area is of first concern, but care must be taken to protect evidence.

Leave all items alone unless moving something is absolutely necessary for life safety.

School Personnel Responsibilities (Screen 1 of 2)

School personnel have several key responsibilities related to incidents involving school violence. These responsibilities include:

- **Identification of at-risk persons.** Identification of at-risk persons is the prevention aspect of emergency management. Students are not the only persons who may be at risk of violence in schools.
 - **Student and staff safety.** The safety of all those who are in the vicinity of the incident is paramount.
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School Personnel Responsibilities (Screen 2 of 2)

Additional responsibilities include:

- **Notification of law enforcement personnel.** Procedures need to be developed and practiced to ensure rapid notification of the police. School staff or administrators should be able to implement notification procedures regardless of where the incident takes place.
- **Long-term recovery.** School personnel will play an integral part in the long-term recovery of the students and staff following an incident in your community or elsewhere in the country.

By incorporating programs such as critical incident stress debriefing and/or grief counseling, those affected by the incident can resume their normal lives more quickly.

Preparation Steps

There are several steps that you can take to prepare for a terrorist incident.

- **Tap Local Expertise.** Work with local first responders and the local Emergency Manager to help ensure that you have included all feasible emergency response procedures.
 - **Incorporate Terrorist Incidents Into Your Emergency Operations Plan.** Use your procedures for other emergencies, such as flooding, winter storms, earthquakes, or hazardous materials incidents to create or expand procedures to cover terrorist incidents. Do **not** create a separate plan!
 - **Use Lessons Learned.** Practice your procedures, get feedback on what works and what does not, and revise your procedures accordingly.
 - **Be informed.** Maintain awareness of the potential threats facing your community.
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Following a Terrorist Incident

Following a terrorist incident, the role of schools in the emergency response and recovery process may expand in scope.

You may be asked to open schools as shelters, feeding stations, casualty collection points, or temporary morgues, or for other purposes that you had not considered for other types of emergencies. While others will manage these operations, school personnel have an ultimate responsibility for the facilities—especially if the children are also in the buildings.

Web Resources

- Ready.gov provides practical information on preparedness actions for terrorist incidents. <http://www.ready.gov/>
- The Department of Homeland Security provides information on threats and protective measures. www.dhs.gov
- The American Academy of Pediatrics provides information about considering children's needs in terrorism and disaster planning and response efforts. <http://www.aap.org/terrorism/index.html>
- The California Anti-Terrorism Information Center provides law enforcement with statewide intelligence support to combat terrorism. <http://caag.state.ca.us/programs.htm>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Bioterrorism Website provides current information on bioterrorism threats and protective measures. <http://www.bt.cdc.gov>
- Los Angeles County Office of Education's Safe Schools Center addresses a broad range of school safety issues. <http://www.lacoe.edu/lacoeweb/orgs/158/index.cfm>
- Washington State's "It's Our School" offers guidance on developing plans to prevent school violence and respond to crises. <http://www.wa.gov/ago/ourschool/home.htm>

Summary

This lesson presented information on terrorist threats and the actions that schools can take to prepare for potential terrorist incidents.

Many of these actions are the same steps that schools should take to reduce risk from natural disasters, school violence, or other human-caused threats.
