

Church/House of Worship Security

Although there is a natural desire to view religious facilities as sanctuaries from crime, houses of worship (churches, synagogues, mosques) have the same potential to be criminally victimized as other elements of society. Those who would commit criminal acts do not exclude houses of worship and their occupants from potential prey.

Reasons Houses of Worship are Vulnerable

- Houses of worship are usually not perceived as a serious crime risk, thus, security measures are frequently minimal and inadequate.
- House of worship buildings are rarely designed with security issues as an important feature. Subsequently, by their very design they are often vulnerable.
- Key control and access management in houses of worship is often weak.
- Houses of worship are often located in the residential part of a community and, as a result, exterior lighting is often inadequate.
- Houses of worship are often left unlocked for extended periods of times for members to come and go as they please.
- Houses of worship with day-care facilities or schools have the additional threat of stranger or parental kidnapping.
- Houses of worship may have the mission of ministering to the homeless, illegal drug users, gang members, etc. Some of these persons may pose a threat to the well-being of the house of worship.
- Simply by virtue of their religious beliefs, houses of worship may be the victims of hate crimes.
- Houses of worship often contain items and equipment of significant value.

Ten tips to consider

1. Conduct an all hazards risk assessment of your church by a qualified Security expert
2. Develop a site specific emergency plan and ensure it is periodically practiced and revised.
3. Train volunteers, staff members on how to identify suspicious activities and ensure that anything suspicious should be reported to church authorities and law enforcement.
4. Control access points. Use only entrances and exits as necessary. “Necessary” is the key word and should not be replaced with the word “convenient”.

5. Conduct background checks (criminal, employment and references) and interviews for all paid staff and volunteers who are placed in positions of responsibility or trust, this includes the custodian who is often the sole person inside a place of worship containing valuable assets.
6. Never allow staff or volunteers to work alone especially at night.
7. Conduct opening and closing inspections to ensure that entry and exiting is secure and nothing has been placed in bags or container that you are unfamiliar to you.
8. Make sure outside lighting is sufficient and shrubbery is properly maintained and there are no hiding places for assailants.
9. Makes sure all doors and windows are secured when departing facility and control these access points even when people are present.
10. Ensure that the inside of the facility is properly lighted while in use and while not in use and fire exits marked. If your budget allows, install back-up lighting in case of power failure.

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