

What Adventist Colleges Are Doing to Ensure Campus Safety

BY ELLEN POIRIER

Recently, the issue of campus safety has become of growing interest within Adventist schools. How safe are our students?

If a threat were issued on an Adventist campus, would the faculty and staff be prepared to handle the crisis? What steps are presently being taken to ensure that students are safe, and how can those steps be improved? With the news of unfortunate events occurring on college campuses—both public and private colleges as well as Seventh-day Adventist schools—these and many other additional questions have been raised.

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, a crisis is defined as “an unstable condition, as in political, social, or economic affairs, involving an impeding abrupt or decisive change.”¹ As our world continues to see an increase in violence, crime, and terrorism, Adventist schools need to be prepared for anything that may come their way.

This article focuses on North American Adventist colleges but includes principles that can be adopted by K-12 schools and higher education institutions outside North America. It’s important to review what exactly our schools are doing in regard to the issue of campus safety, and what needs to be done for the future. By looking at what campuses have experienced and



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analyzing the policies that are currently in place, the future of Adventist campus safety becomes much easier to predict and to prepare for. Margaret Spellings, the former United States Secretary of Education, said this of crisis management:

“Knowing how to respond quickly and efficiently in a crisis is critical to ensuring the safety of our schools and students. The midst of a crisis is not the time to start figuring out who ought to do what. At that moment, everyone involved—from top to bottom—should know the drill and know each other.”²²

Crisis management is an extremely critical issue for our education system. Our schools need to be prepared—for anything.

Protecting Students on Campus

In the past few years, Adventist colleges have faced some difficult challenges. Some of the better known incidents include a fire at Southern Adventist University’s Thatcher Hall (the women’s dormitory) and an assault on a professor at Andrews University. Both schools had excellent safety policies and procedures in place before these tragic events happened, yet the incidents still occurred. Because of incidents like these, it is imperative to determine exactly what policies and procedures Adventist schools already have in place, how those procedures can be improved, and how fre-

quently they are updated, in order to protect everyone on campus.

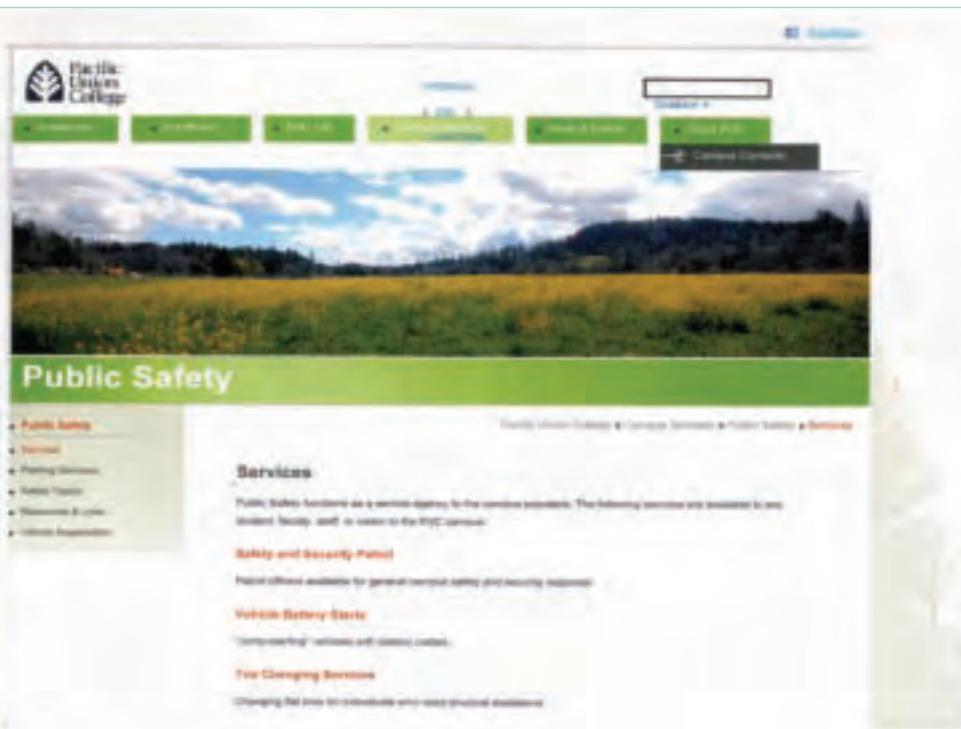
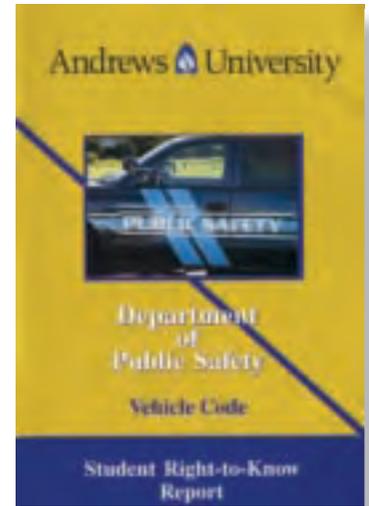
Making sure administrators, teachers/staff, and students all are aware of the current safety procedures is crucial in the event of a crisis. Without already established policies and a process for actively updating them, campus safety cannot be ensured.

So what *are* Adventist college campuses doing to protect employees and students?

1. Every North American Adventist college campus has an existing campus safety department. Each department has a director who is in charge of developing new procedures and following through on each safety procedure. The safety department is responsible for protecting the people on campus from a variety of dangers.
2. Each campus safety department provides a 24-hour safety patrol to ensure that the campus is always being watched for suspicious activity.
3. The campus safety departments provide, upon request, an escort to any location on campus.
4. Most of the college safety departments have a section on their school’s Website that provides helpful safety tips, explaining what is and what is not correct safety protocol. Students and employees can access useful information that will help keep them safe, both on and off campus.

Guidelines for Dealing With Crime and Violence

Many schools already have specific guidelines for handling crime or violence. For those that do not, protocols must be set up so the staff and students will know what to do when a crisis happens. These guidelines must be easily accessible to dormitory residents. For example, on its Website,³ La Sierra University in Riverside, California, provides a section titled “Student Rights to Know,” an excellent resource for its students and faculty that clearly explains the campus policies and



Andrews University

**In Case of
EMERGENCY
911 or x3321**

Public Safety Anonymous Email
<http://www.andrews.edu/safety/anonymous.htm>

Public Safety Anonymous Tip Line
269-471-3338



Reporters gather for a briefing after the dormitory fire at Southern Adventist University.

procedures in detail. The covered policies include:

- Security and Access to Campus Facilities
- Policy of Firearms, Explosives, and Other Weapons
- Sexual Assault Policy and Educational Program
- Alcohol and Drug-Free Work Site Policy and Educational Program
- Reporting a Crime
- Reporting a Crime or Emergency
- Crime Prevention and Educational Programs

According to the policy statement, the university's crime prevention program "provides students and employees with the goal to eliminate or minimize criminal activity, whenever possible, and encourages the university community to be responsible for their own safety and the safety of others."⁴

Notifying Students of an Emergency

Although schools have policies currently in place to prevent crime and violence, there are times when a crisis may still occur. How does a campus filled with hundreds, and in some cases, thousands, of students, faculty, and staff successfully warn each resident of a possible threat? Because of the size of most schools, it is difficult to ensure that everyone is made aware of emergency situations.

The quickest and most convenient way to contact students and staff is through technology. Many schools use e-mail or text messages to communicate with the people on campus. Campus-wide notification systems are described in more detail in the article by Ehren Ngo and Rick Williams on page 40.

Many Adventist schools have created sections on their Websites that announce possible threats or potential crime. Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, has created a Webpage entitled "Early Warning" located in the safety department section of their Website.⁵ "Early Warning" allows the campus safety department to communicate with people on campus and to announce to students, faculty, and staff anything that might threaten their safety on campus. If a crisis does occur in spite of all reasonable precautions, it is listed on the site along with a description of what to do until the danger has passed.

On the Website of Southern Adventist University in Col-

legedale, Tennessee, the campus safety department⁶ issues warnings about recently occurring events and crises on campus to alert the student body, faculty, and staff. For example, if a student's backpack was recently stolen, the Website would post warning the students and staff to be extra careful with their belongings.

While technology plays a major role in notifying the students and faculty on a campus; they need to be reminded to regularly check the appropriate Websites for current information.

A Campus on Lockdown

In some cases, the threat is too severe to allow students to leave the buildings until the crisis is resolved. When this happens, the administration orders a lockdown. According to the January 2007 edition of *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities*, lockdowns should occur "when a crisis occurs outside of the school and an evacuation would be dangerous [or] when there is a crisis inside and movement within the school will put students in jeopardy. All exterior doors are locked and students and staff stay in their classrooms. Windows may need to be covered."⁷ This guidebook provides a useful visual aid adapted from one created by the San Diego school district showing the various options for a lockdown.

Working with law enforcement is another key element in lockdown planning for school and the overall protection of the students and staff. Gary Hile, the Associate Director of Risk Control for Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM), explains that ARM "encourage[s] school personnel to work with local law enforcement in developing a plan that works for them."⁸ Since every school is different, there is a need for flexibility in planning.

Because a college campus is much larger than that of average elementary or secondary school, successfully carrying out a lockdown can be an extremely difficult task, since each student has a different class schedule, and a va-

riety of other people are on campus, such as farm employees, repairmen, visiting professors, high school band clinic participants, retirees doing research at the library, accreditation teams, church administrators and members attending the university board meeting, newspaper reporters, delivery persons, and so on. Due to these complications, in most cases, colleges must find creative ways to notify everyone on campus and protect them as best they can with the help of local law enforcement.

Fire Safety

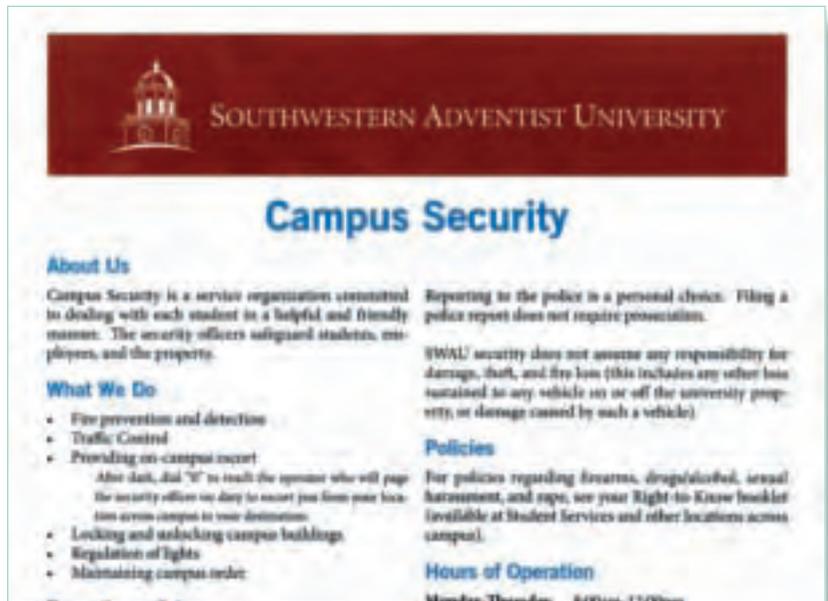
On April 26, 2005, Southern Adventist University experienced a traumatic event—a day that was “the most difficult day of my presidency,” said Gordon Bietz, the president of the university.⁹ A fire broke out early that Tuesday morning in the women’s residence hall, resulting in the death of one of the residents and other injuries.

Ever since that unfortunate event, Southern Adventist University has rededicated itself to fire safety procedures and systems. Although the university had a code-compliant, proactive safety program at the time of the incident, they carefully reviewed their plan after the fire. The university’s Website includes a list of key fire safety elements:

1. Maps are posted around campus and within the dormitories to show evacuation routes and the reassembly point.
2. When the alarm is activated, a university officer is dispatched to the scene to assess the situation, secure the area in question, and aid in evacuating the occupants of the facility.
3. Fire extinguishers are strategically located throughout campus buildings.
4. On the back of each men’s and women’s residence hall room door, emergency procedures are posted.
5. Fire drills are conducted each semester.
6. Monthly inspections occur to ensure that the buildings are in compliance with the National Fire Protection Association codes.
7. No candles, incense, oil lamps, or other open flames are allowed in the residence halls or other university buildings.
8. Additional fire safety tips are posted on the Website.¹⁰

Unexpected Threat

In 2007, Andrews University experienced a different type of safety incident. According to the school’s official statement, early on the morning of April 16, a Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary student attacked a seminary professor. Hearing his cries for help, the professor’s office staff called the campus safety department and the local law enforcement. The student attacked both the police and the paramedics who responded. When the student was finally under control, he was taken into custody by the local law enforcement. Fortunately, the professor did not have life-



threatening injuries and was able to return to his classroom later that afternoon.

With this sudden attention focused on its campus safety department, Andrews University immediately began to discuss and refine its procedures. Niels-Erik Andreasen, university president, assured the entire campus that Andrews did indeed have “clearly defined procedures and processes and trained, responsible individuals tasked to carry out those procedures in case of emergency. The Andrews University staff has not lost sight of emergency protocol. They are constantly working to review, revise, and renew those processes, reflecting responsible care and concern for the precious human resources on [their] campus.”¹¹ Since that time, the Andrews has assembled a University Student Intervention Team.¹²

The Media

When a school is faced with a situation similar to what Southern Adventist University or Andrews University experienced, it is normal to expect the media to become involved. Rather than taking an adversarial or defensive stance, the school can view the media as crucial to the development of the school’s campus safety department and as providing insight into how the community views the school. However, most schools are unaware of how to correctly use the media, and in some cases, may suffer long-term damage from negative reporting.

The Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities provides helpful tips on how schools can use the media to their advantage.¹³

Tips for Working With the Media

1. Make it a priority to work with the media so they are well acquainted with your school and its needs *before* something happens. Invite them to campus for a press conference describing your disaster preparedness planning. It will also be reassuring to the families of the students and to the fac-

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ulty and staff to know that there is a plan already in effect.

2. Appoint one person to deal with the media. He or she should typically be in an administrative position—someone who is well informed about campus policy making and is able to clearly articulate information to the media. This person is assigned to alert the media when a crisis occurs, and to issue follow-up statements as needed.

3. Make it clear that only the appointed person will make announcements to the media regarding the incident. This will make it easier to communicate with the media because they will already know who to contact for updates.

4. When dealing with a crisis, designate a site where all media announcements will be made. If possible, choose a site away from the students, faculty, and staff.

5. The campus staff should be alerted that when reporters ask for an interview or attempt to get pictures, they must be redirected to the designated media area. The media should get all their information from the designated person at the specified site, not from on-campus interviews with students and staff.

6. If the school coordinates one large press conference where both the emergency responders and the media are invited to attend, this gives the school more control over how much information is released and when it is given.

After the Crisis

Following an incident on a school campus, students, faculty, and staff may react in varying ways. Dealing with a crisis is extremely difficult and, in some cases, “crisis intervention” may be necessary. According to the previously mentioned crisis planning guide, crisis intervention involves a variety of “after the crisis” solutions and can be implemented by faculty, counselors, social workers, or even community service providers, depending on their training.

The three most widely recognized crisis-intervention programs are group crisis intervention, acute traumatic stress management, and individual counseling. (See the article by Ron Coffen on page 11.)

1. Group Crisis Intervention

The most common and successful type of crisis intervention is group crisis intervention (GCI). This is also the most convenient type for both the students and the institution because it involves group therapy, which is more affordable than individual treatment. The interested individuals (students or staff) meet together to discuss what happened and their various reactions to it. Together, they can share stories and provide support to everyone in the group session. However, if the supervisor finds that a participant needs more help than others in the group, individual counseling should be suggested (see **Individual Counseling** below).

2. Acute Traumatic Stress Management

The goal of Acute Traumatic Stress Management (ATSM)

is “to stimulate adaptive coping mechanisms and to stabilize more severe reactions among students.”¹⁴ There are 10 stages within the ATSM program:

- Assess the danger/safety for self and others.
- Consider the mechanism for injury.
- Evaluate the level of responsiveness.
- Address medical needs.
- Observe and identify at-risk individuals.
- Connect with these individuals.
- Ground the individual.
- Provide support.
- Normalize the response.
- Prepare for the future.

3. Individual Counseling

When particular students cannot seem to handle the sit-



Fire fighters, Thatcher Hall fire, Southern Adventist University, 2004.

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uation, individual counseling can be helpful. Though it is more expensive than group crisis intervention, it supplies more in-depth support that some individuals need following the traumatic experiences related to a crisis. Some common methods to individual counseling include art, talking, and drug therapies.

Conclusion

Adventist school administrators do understand that the safety of those on campus is crucial; yet as more and more safety issues develop on and around our campuses, it is important to be proactive about the future of Adventist campus safety. As outlined in this article, schools have developed a number of helpful policies that they are actively maintaining and reviewing each year. By refining old policies to ad-



dress current, changing situations and by setting up new guidelines that deal with safety protocols, Adventist schools can stay up to date on safety policy issues and consequently, increase campus safety.

One of the best-known ways to develop safety guidelines is simply to evaluate past events and to seek professional guidance. By focusing on what the school did right or wrong before, during, and after a crisis, the safety department can better prepare for future crises.

Campus safety is a matter of concern for many individuals—as it should be. Without the successful management of a crisis, the overall well-being of everyone on campus may be jeopardized and serious injury or loss of life may occur. By reviewing their policies, researching other universities' safety protocols, and cooperating with local and state officials, our schools can help ensure the safety of the individuals on their campuses. By taking steps to protect our campuses and putting our trust in God, we will be able to look forward with optimism to the future God has promised: “‘Because he loves me,’ . . . ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name’” (Psalm 91:14, NIV).¹⁵

This article has been reviewed and approved by Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



*At the time this article was written, **Ellen Poirier** was a Summer Intern at Adventist Risk Management, Inc., in Silver Spring, Maryland. She is currently a senior at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communications with an emphasis in graphic design.*

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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13. *Practical Information on Crisis Planning*, op cit.
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15. The Scripture text credited to NIV is from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.