SHATTERED INNOCENCE

"Preparing for the Unthinkable"

BY ARTHUR F. BLINCI
Tragic events fill the headlines: senseless acts of random violence in the workplace, restaurants, and shopping malls claim the lives of dozens of innocent victims. For many years, we thought schools and churches were immune to such acts of evil. But since that tragic April morning on the campus of Columbine High School in 1999, the security of school campuses has been shattered. From the halls of Virginia Tech University and Sandy Hook Elementary School to even a one-room Amish schoolhouse, tragedy has struck unexpectedly. Schools have experienced the unthinkable horror of innocent students and teachers being murdered indiscriminately on campus. Adventist campuses and institutions are not immune from such acts of violence. In recent years we, too, have suffered unthinkable acts of violence that have taken the life of a university employee who was shot and killed on campus and a principal who was murdered in her classroom.

Violence is the leading cause of death on K-12 school campuses in the United States. A total of 279 homicides were caused by students on U.S. school campuses from 1992 to 2010 (this does not include attacks by outsiders or victims injured but not killed)\(^1\).

School security is very challenging. Unfortunately, it is often an overlooked aspect of emergency and safety planning. All school administrators and employees must be prepared to handle the unthinkable. Because the subject is so vast and complex, it is impossible to cover all aspects of school safety and security preparedness in a single article. There are numerous types of potential hazards and incidents that will require an instant, informed response by faculty and students. This article will focus on how to address the risk of campus violence.

### School Risk Assessment and Emergency Planning

Each Adventist school must have an Emergency Response Plan for its campus. This requirement is outlined in General Conference Working Policy 560 70—Risk Management and Safety Plans\(^2\) (see the sidebar on page 24). The purpose of these plans is to ensure that administrators, faculty, and students are prepared when the unthinkable occurs. Adventist Risk Management recommends that all school administrators should obtain a copy of the Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Plans,\(^3\) which was developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Department of Education to use as a road map in developing an emergency plan for your school. This free resource and others available online at ready.gov provides helpful templates to guide you through the planning process.

### Risk Assessment

Campus violence can take many forms, including fights between students, armed robberies and rapes, bomb threats, and various active shooter situations. In each case, school administrators must be prepared to take action immediately to protect students and faculty from harm. Conducting a thorough risk assessment of the school’s facilities, campus access points, and the surrounding community is your first step of preparing an emergency response plan. Evaluate each of the following elements:

- **Community Impact** – Obtain the local crime statistics of the neighborhood that surrounds your campus. This will provide an indication of the external criminal risk potential. Conduct meetings with local law enforcement officials and first responders to help you assess these risks and estimate community response times in the event of an incident.

- **Human Impact** – Who are the individuals at risk for harm? Identify each specific type of individual and the most likely types of incidents that could occur, along with the potential severity of injury. For example, plans for dealing with preschool children will be different from those for older children and adults.

- **Psychological Impact** – How will the trauma of an incident affect individuals and the public associated with your school? Be specific in considering the impact on students, faculty, parents, church constituents, and the school’s reputation in the community. Identify specific resources that will be required to deal with these psychological issues.

- **Functional/Physical Impact** – What security practices need to be implemented or capital improvements made on your campus to improve safety and security?

- **Economic Impact** – Determine the potential cost of each element evaluated. Be specific in order to obtain a complete financial picture. Remember to include the potential costs of losing the use of school buildings or tuition income if the school cannot reopen immediately after an incident occurs on campus. Once identified, prioritize each item on the list and prepare an action plan for its accomplishment.

Risk assessment is not an easy process. It requires time and detailed analysis of each area listed above. Adventist Risk Management recommends that each school board appoint a campus safety committee and designate a safety officer/chairperson. Conducting the school’s risk assessment, preparing an emergency plan, and implementing it should be assigned to the safety committee. Throughout the process of developing the emergency plan, the school’s administrators and board should be kept informed of progress made, and then approve the final implementation strategy.
Being Prepared

Even in the best of circumstances, school administrators must understand that when the unthinkable occurs, they will be on their own until the first emergency responders arrive on campus. The best emergency response time will range from three to five minutes in urban areas. In rural areas, it can be 20 minutes or more before help arrives. During these initial minutes, your school staff must be prepared to take appropriate actions to protect the students, themselves, and others from harm. Often a violent act will have ended less than five minutes after it began and before first responders even arrive on scene.

School administrators should network with local law enforcement and emergency first responders to understand what actions these individuals will take if a violent act is reported on campus. Their first responsibility is assessing the situation—upon arrival, law enforcement will evaluate the scene to determine whether the facility is secure, after which they will admit other emergency responders. Law-enforcement personnel are not there to provide medical attention to the wounded or to assist with evacuation/"shelter-in-place" procedures. Removing the threat and securing the facility are their first priority. Once these are achieved, lifesaving rescue measures can safely begin. The time you spend working and networking with first responders to ensure that they know your facilities and you understand their procedures can make a life-or-death difference in times of emergency.

Securing Buildings and Campus Access

The typical Adventist school campus provides easy access for strangers to enter. Campus security must be carefully evaluated and plans made to determine what constitutes appropriate access to the campus and specific buildings. Measures to consider include the following:

• Installing perimeter security lighting that will illuminate parking areas and other outdoor areas of campus during nighttime hours.
• Monitoring parking areas during evening activities and escorting individuals from school buildings to their vehicles when warranted or requested.
• Having a central entrance where all campus guests enter, sign in with school personnel, and receive identification badges.
• Instituting a closed campus where students are required to enter/leave only at specific times. This may include a sign-in/check-out procedure using their student ID cards.
• Installing electronic badge readers in key locations to allow access to authorized individuals only.
• Using closed-circuit cameras to remotely scan given areas.
• Monitoring all areas of campus by arranging for patrols throughout the day. This can be assigned to school staff members, volunteers, or security officers. All types of suspicious activities should be immediately reported to school administration.
• Training all staff members to be alert regarding suspicious items left unattended and unauthorized individuals on campus, reporting them immediately to school administration.

These security measures may require some expenditure of capital funds to make improvements. Even if a school cannot adopt all measures immediately, every school administration should appropriate adequate funds to ensure adequate campus security.

Training and Practice Drills

No school emergency plan is complete without specific training and practice drills for both students and staff members. Training and practice are essential elements before a random act of violence or another emergency occurs on campus. Key elements to consider in planning:

1. Identify the type of response that will be required for each type of incident:
   a. Evacuation procedures
   b. Shelter in place
   c. Campus lockdown
   d. Safe area/meeting place—roll-call procedures
   e. School policy on student release to parents in the event of an emergency

Plans must be made for each type of response and for implementation. Working with local law enforcement and emergency responders is critical as you design the school’s emergency-response procedures.

2. Schedule staff training for each part of the school’s emergency plan. Every school administrator, teacher, ancillary school staff, and volunteer should be required to complete this training. All school personnel must know how to respond if an incident occurs—the procedures to be followed and how to collaborate to ensure the safety of all involved. They should be taught how to act independently, if necessary, in making appropriate decisions. This training should be practiced and reviewed regularly to test each element of the school’s emergency plan.

3. Training of students—It is critical for all students to be trained in an age-appropriate manner to follow school emergency procedures. They need to understand (a) the different types of emergency situations that could occur; (b) the types of notification that will be given; (c) the appropriate response to each type of emergency (e.g., the difference between procedures for evacuation and shelter in place) and to directions given by a police officer or firefighter in an emergency; and (d) the proper actions to take if they find themselves alone or with other students. Emergency practice drills should be included throughout the school year in addition to fire drills so students comprehend the different types of situations that can occur and how to respond.

Communication

1. Intracampus communication—Every school needs a communication plan that is simple and clearly understood. Alarm systems are typically used in situations involving fires or storm-related emergencies on campus. However, a variety of different alert systems should be considered for other types of
Because even in the best of circumstances, when the unthinkable occurs, school administrators will be on their own until the first emergency responders arrive on campus.

Now is the time to build your emergency plan so that you are ready in case the unexpected happens.

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emergencies, including random acts of violence. These may include:

a. Public-address system in all rooms and outdoor campus areas;

b. Automated emergency text/e-mail alert system for students, staff members, and parents;

c. Flashing strobe lights to alert people in outdoor or remote areas that an incident has occurred so staff and older students can call in for instructions;

d. Intercoms between the school office and classrooms;

e. Portable radios to provide communication between school staff members.

Avoid the use of codes such as “Code Red in Zone 4” in times of emergency because not everyone will comprehend their meaning. A clear, concise announcement of the emergency should be given, along with the type of response that is required. For example: “There is an active shooter in the gymnasium. Immediately lockdown and shelter in place, and await further instruction.” By using this type of clear, understandable message, all parties including visitors and business vendors know the nature of the emergency and can respond immediately.

2. Communicating with the media—When a violent incident occurs, you can expect the news media to cover the event, so school administrators must be ready to handle the resulting challenges. Consideration should be given to the following areas:

a. Train school personnel—Be sure that all school staff and volunteers understand that any media requests are to be immediately directed to the appointed spokesperson for official comment. Teachers and administrators should not give interviews to news reporters, especially while a situation is still developing and/or law enforcement is conducting an investigation.

b. Select and train a spokesperson—This should be done before the start of each school year. The designated person should receive specific training by the conference/union communication department.

c. Be prepared—Prepare an information packet containing information about your school and its emergency response plans that is ready to release when an emergency occurs.

d. Respect the privacy of individuals involved—it is always best to let law enforcement authorities handle the release of public information on the names of victims and alleged perpetrator(s) of a violent act.

e. Obtain counsel on how to respond to media request—Consult with local authorities and legal counsel on how to handle news conferences and what to say in press releases about the incident.

f. Designated press areas and schedule—Establish a location where the news media can gather or where news conferences will be given. Be prepared for these events, and keep on schedule to the best of your ability.

g. Build relationship—Get to know the local news media in your community throughout the school year. Invite them to cover special events on campus. Nurturing a positive relationship outside of a crisis is likely to prove to be a real asset during the emergency.

3. Communicating with parents—In its registration package, the school should provide all parents/guardians with a written summary of the school’s efforts and interest in making the safety of students a high priority in all situations will help to build strong parental trust and good will.

School Security Services

Schools may need to consider em-
ploying or contracting for on-campus security officers. This decision requires careful study to determine the type of security services required. The decision must include whether security officers will be allowed to carry weapons. Consideration must also be given to the supervision of these individuals, and the level of experience or professional training that will be required of the security officer. All decisions to hire security officers or outsource for contracted security services should be approved by the school board.

In 2011, a new organization, Professional Adventists for Safety and Security, was created by security employees serving at denominational institutions throughout the world. The mission of these professionals is to help the church develop standards and best practices for safety and security in church facilities. We in Adventist Risk Management encourage you to contact these security professionals for assistance and to solicit their ideas on developing an effective campus-emergency plan. For more information on PASS, visit their Website: http://adventistsecurity.gcnetaventist.org/.

Teamwork

In today’s violent society, we cannot afford to be apathetic or to assume that “it could never happen at our school.” Adventist institutions must be prepared at all times for the unthinkable! Remember, the lives of your students and staff members are at risk. But planning must be a group effort. The principal or administrator cannot create an effective school emergency plan by himself or herself. Solomon reminds us: “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14, NKJV). It takes a team effort, with school staff, parents, and local first responders working together to develop and implement a school emergency plan.

The security and safety of students, faculty and campus guests must always be our highest priority. Watchfulness and preparedness for the unexpected are part of the job description of today’s school administrator. Benjamin Franklin reminds us “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” This must not be the case at any Adventist school! Developing and implementing a school emergency plan will help you be prepared if, God forbid, the unthinkable occurs on your campus.

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Online Resources Guide

A number of excellent online resources are available to help guide you in developing a risk assessment for your school and preparing an emergency plan for your campus. Listed below are several that will guide you through this process and assist in the training of staff and students:

- “Run, Hide, Fight” (2012): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0

This article was reviewed by Adventist Risk Management (ARM) president and attorney Bob Kyte and William Chunestudy, Ph.D., in the ARM Risk Control education department.

REFERENCES

2. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2012.
4. Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.