

Liability

Security Response Plans for Churches

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Question

My insured is a large church that wants to know what guidelines they should follow regarding implementation of a security team during Sundays when the building is full. They want to be prepared for an intruder or a violent behavioral outburst.

Response

The Engineering & Safety Business Link Report BL-20-07, *Religious Organizations* and the E&S Crime Prevention Report, CP-93-25, *Security for Houses of Worship*, address security for churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship. The challenges for houses of worship and how security professionals respond is different in many ways from a business environment. The physical structure should be designed with security in mind, and physical security monitoring should be considered along with security awareness training, establishing a security committee, and fostering relationships with local law enforcement.

The formation of a security committee dedicated to preparing for and protecting against threats is a good first step. Members of the committee should include those with specialized experience, such as law enforcement security industry, military, or emergency management personnel. The team may complete a risk assessment including the identification of threats and vulnerabilities during Sunday services. The assessment should be shared with church leaders and local law enforcement. Local law enforcement could provide feedback and intelligence that enrich the team's efforts. The committee can implement a layered security approach in response to the findings.

Also, a security team should have formal training that includes roles and responsibilities, dealing with disruptive or impaired individuals, dealing with violent persons (with or without a weapon), pastoral protection, lockdown and/or evacuation procedures, equipment needs, and communication. Communication is required among security team members and with the congregation. Security training programs are available for houses of worship through the National Organization of Church Security & Safety Management.

Conversations with local law enforcement should include training for addressing threats or confrontations at the church. There is no one, definitive response for how a security team responds to an intruder. The response must be developed using the skills and talents of the security team. While basic security principles apply across the board equally, how they are going to be implemented is going to be dependent on the church itself.

For more on security for houses of worship, see ASIS International *Houses of Worship, Security Resource Guide*, a listing of resources for security professionals available at: http://www.asisonline.org/councils/documents/HOWS_resourceguide.pdf.

[Report Title]

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