

Maine Emergency Management Agency
LESSONS LEARNED
HOSTAGE SITUATION IN STOCKTON SPRINGS
10/31/08

Situation Summary

On October 31, 2008, a man carrying a handgun entered the Stockton Springs Elementary School before classes began. He approached some boys in the gym and followed the fifth grade class into their classroom. The teacher was forced out at gunpoint and the gunman remained in the classroom with 11 children. Two girls were released when one became very upset. The school had gone into a lockdown mode. A bus driver began evacuating students to his bus and took them and staff to a pre-designated destination a few miles away. Concurrently, 911 was contacted and law enforcement converged on the scene. Within 17 minutes of the initial call, the gunman was in custody with no shots fired and no injuries. The school had developed and trained to an emergency plan. It worked. A series of meetings (After Action Reviews) were held including school administrators, public safety, emergency management officials and others to learn what went right, what could be improved and what were the lessons that could be shared with others. This list resulted from those efforts.

Preparedness & Planning

- Simplified checklists are needed.
- Have an unadvertised telephone line for emergency use.
- Training for substitutes and helpers include in exercises. Buddy up with experienced teacher or staff member.
- Floor plan inside school door – show doors swing directions.
- Floor plan and response plan/photos on CD filed by county, in hands of police and sheriffs.
- Planning process must include police and fire.
- Assess security issues before, during and after hours.
- Plan for off-site and transportation situations, as well.
- Can in-coming buses be diverted?
- Principal and staff should do initial planning work.
- Involve Superintendent as appropriate.
- Involve some parents, building commissioners.
- Ensure an informed School Board review is done.
- Put directional signs (compass points) on the floor in several locations.
- Practice reverse evacuation bringing kids in when they are outside
- Communications considerations:
 - Phones in classroom
 - Intercoms or PA system for both inside and outside areas.
 - Can school radio communications be linked to law enforcement agencies?
- Have public version and full version of plan with appropriate checklists.
- Plan review at end of school year – revise, have ready for new school year.
- Include plans for counseling and support for students and staff.
- Exercise plans more than twice a year.
- Master key in knox box or have electronic access by radio release by dispatcher. Also, locks keyed alike throughout school and key control.

- Pre-lock all doors, requiring keys or number pad for access.
- Invite police to visit often, be conspicuous.
- Each school should label doors to outside with number or letter on both sides of it.
- Community involvement, encourage and embrace it.
- Teachers know when kids are heading for trouble. Let Law Enforcement know.
- Family dysfunctions increase trouble in schools.
- Soft targets are easier to attack.

Response

- Lockdown – remove kids when safe to do so and police authorize it.
- Identify a Password for safe – all clear assurances or have familiar person do it.
- Media needs managing , should be done from an off-site location.
- Remove all students and staff except one who knows facility really well.
- Address the management of public perception, initially and subsequently with every phase. Trial and public appearance of perpetrator will trigger anxieties.

For more information:

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