

# STUDENT SAFETY AND PREVENTION OF CRISIS SITUATIONS

By Dan Roberts  
Director, Professional Services – Transfinder Corporation

Students in schools are subject to numerous vulnerabilities. School personnel need to be concerned with their vulnerability both inside and outside school buses. Extremists or terrorists may be more interested in getting media attention by inflicting mass casualties rather than by attacking critical infrastructure, so students on school buses may become ideal targets. As a result, protecting the safety of students while in school and on school buses is a top priority.

## Why School Facilities and School Buses are Vulnerable

Schools have been designed to be warm, parent-accessible structures that provide a sense of community to the district with few restrictions for access. They run on set schedules with large numbers of people in a concentrated area, and they typically do not have a heightened sense of security so vehicles or people moving around school sites do not trigger a cause for concern.

School bus facilities, while not as accessible as schools, are still generally not restricted locations and so may provide ease-of-access that makes them vulnerable to attacks. Security at school bus facilities is generally minimal, with parking lots unlocked or not monitored on a full-time basis.

Additionally, both buses and schools run on highly publicized schedules, which add to their lack of security and make them more vulnerable in our society.

## Four-Stage Approach to Prevention

(1) One of the easiest prevention measures for school buses is to expand normal pre- and post-trip inspections. Pre- and post-trip inspections are the most effective security programs to prevent threats. All bus drivers should perform pre-trip inspections any time they are away from the bus for a period of time.

(2) Additionally, drivers should always practice good house-keeping. They should pick up after every run and keep the bus clean enough that they can easily detect unusual objects. House-keeping missteps, as shown in the bus on the next page, make it harder to detect potentially dangerous objects.

Pre-trip inspections are designed to counteract potential threats and ensure student safety go beyond making sure the bus is mechanically sound. They are designed to find explosives on the bus by performing a thorough under the bus inspection, including wheel wells, exhaust system, fuel/air tanks, areas around the battery box and electrical panel; thoroughly checking for new wires or devices under the hood; and looking inside the bus, under the dash, and inside the bulkheads for any new packages, backpacks, or boxes.

(3) The next step is to harden the bus storage facility to external threat. This includes fencing the facility, keeping private cars out of the bus parking area, and restricting and/or monitoring all entrances and exits. Additional consideration should be given to active monitoring of the bus parking area and increasing overall visibility by creating sight-lines down parking lot aisles, trimming shrubs to allow visibility and deter intruders, and maintaining adequate lighting to make activity after dark visible.

(4) The final step is to implement procedures and training programs in order to detect and prevent terrorism attacks. Continuous training in terrorism awareness and how to mitigate potential threats should be the norm. This develops a safety culture not only to reduce accidents, but also to prevent crisis incidents through awareness.

## Crisis Preparedness

Exercises help save lives and minimize damage by preparing people to respond appropriately when an emergency is imminent. Preparedness includes planning to respond when an emergency or disaster occurs and working to increase resources available to respond effectively. It also supports local, regional, and statewide emergency preparedness and response activities.

Schools should know about weapons and explosive devices. Knowledge about how a weapon or device looks and what it can do will lead to decisions about evacuation or shelter-in-place plans and how they need to be adjusted.

It is recommended that schools participate in “Table Top Drills” at least two times per year to plan an emergency response. They

should implement Operational Readiness Inspections (ORIs) to practice actual emergency situations and work cooperatively with local law enforcement to practice counter-terrorism tactics.

## Crisis Response

Response activities occur during or immediately following a disaster and are intended to provide immediate emergency assistance. Response efforts also are designed to minimize secondary loss or damage and expedite recovery. Schools should typically follow the incident command system format used by emergency responders across the country.

The incident command system follows a similar four-stage system as outlined in this article for school bus safety. The system has an organization chart, a definition of "action levels" and how they are implemented, an outline of the expected sequence of actions before, during and after the emergency, and directions as to who will coordinate directly with emergency response teams.

In the incident command structure, every district's transportation department should have an evacuation plan and map for every building in the district. The map should show the primary emergency loading and unloading area, as well as alternative loading areas if the primary is compromised.



## Crisis Recovery

Recovery involves short-term and long-term actions needed to recover from a crisis. This includes assessing damage to coordinate potential state and federal disaster assistance. This phase also considers the human component of an event, and may require crisis counseling.

Schools manage small-scale crisis counseling on a continuous basis. Large-scale events may require significant outside resources. Planning for large-scale events will expedite the process, should it occur, and can speed the healing process over the long term. \*



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