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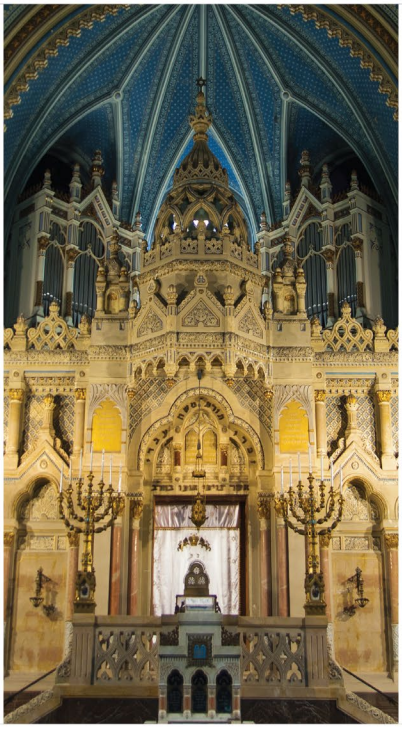

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency

Houses of Worship

Hometown Security Report Series
MAY 2017

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Background

Numerous studies estimate there are between 300,000 and 400,000 religious congregations in the United States. Many people think of a house of worship[1] as a safe area where violence and emergencies cannot affect them. However, violence in a house of worship is not a new phenomenon and many facilities are developing and updating security and emergency plans and procedures to ensure the safety and security of their congregations, visitors, staff, and facilities.

In the United States, there are:

- More than 300,000 religious congregations
- More than 150 million people who participate at activities held at religious facilities (48.8% of the total U.S. population in 2010)
- More than 230 denominational groups
- Many provide educational resources, prekindergarten and kindergarten through 12th grade

The average religious congregation has:

- 70 regular participants, including adults and children
- An annual budget of $85,000
- In large metropolitan areas a "mega-church" can exceed 10,000 members

(Religious Congregations & Membership Study 2012, National Congregations Study 2015)

Homegrown Violent Extremism and Domestic Terrorism

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recognizes that homegrown violent extremists could strike the Homeland with little or no notice (see www.dhs.gov/advisories). DHS has published multiple bulletins on this trend and advocates increased public vigilance and awareness given the reality of terrorist-inspired individuals who have carried out, or have attempted to carry out, attacks in the United States. DHS recognizes that terrorist-inspired individuals (Domestic Terrorist) and homegrown violent extremists may be encouraged or inspired to target public events or places.

Preventive Measures to Consider

Across the United States, Americans congregate daily in public spaces to work, shop, go to school, celebrate, worship, enjoy recreation, or cheer on their favorite sports team. However, as terrorist attacks have revealed, public gatherings are vulnerable. Adversaries may perceive public gatherings sites as attractive targets that may incur mass casualties, have substantial psychological impacts, and draw extensive media coverage.

To mitigate risk and enhance the security and resilience of public gathering sites and special events, partnerships between the private sector and the public sector are critical. To this end, the DHS shares information and provides training and technical assistance to help government partners, infrastructure owners and operators, and special event organizers safeguard public gathering sites and protect human life and critical infrastructure.

In local communities, DHS Protective Security Advisors (PSAs) work with Federal, State, and local government officials and private sector partners to protect critical infrastructure and special events. In doing so, PSAs encourage businesses to "Connect, Plan, Train, and Report." Applying

[1] A House of Worship is the building where adherents of a given religion worship. FEMA IS-505 Religious Literacy and Culture Competency Course.

these four steps in advance of an incident can help better prepare businesses and mitigate the risk they face. For more information on the Hometown Security Initiative, visit www.dhs.gov/hometown-security.

Houses of worship should consider the following preventive measures within the four Hometown Security steps:

Connect

Establish relationships with local first responders. Coordination with first responders to familiarize response personnel with the site layout and facility procedures can enhance the assistance first responder agencies provide (i.e., vital preparedness planning and response) when an incident occurs. Community security and emergency preparedness organizations that actively prepare for any hazard should also be leveraged. Such engagement will foster information sharing that can substantially enhance the ability of the facility to assess risks and make security and preparedness decisions to address vulnerabilities, hazards, and potential impacts.

CONNECT	• Develop relationships with local law enforcement and other facilities and businesses in the area. Invite local law enforcement to tour the facility to increase their familiarity with the religious facility. Provide local law enforcement with floor plans and the ability to access locked and secured areas.
	• Engage local first responders (e.g., law enforcement, fire response, emergency medical services) to ensure planning efforts are aligned.
	• Connect with community security and emergency preparedness organizations such as intelligence fusion centers.
	• Contact the local DHS PSA who is available to support training, security assessments, and planning efforts.
	• Communicate with members of the congregation, staff and visitors and let them know about the security measures being taken to ensure public safety.

Plan

Document security and emergency preparedness policies, practices, and procedures. Security plans identify protective measures designed to mitigate threats—such as criminal activity, active shooters, or improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—and vulnerabilities. Emergency preparedness plans detail actions to responses to crises. Facilities may have different names for such plans or incorporate elements of each plan into an overall larger document.

PLAN	• Be aware of current hazards related to the local area that may impact the house of worship.
	• Designate security and emergency managers to develop, implement, and coordinate all security and emergency management-related activities at the facility.
	• Post key information throughout the building so members of the congregation, staff and visitors are familiar with and have easy access to information such as evacuation routes and shelter-in-place procedures and locations. Ensure information concerning evacuation routes and shelter-in-place procedures and locations is communicated effectively to congregants, staff and visitors with disabilities or others with access and functional needs.
	• Develop plans for security, emergency response, and emergency communications. In the plans, consider the protection of employees, visitors and the congregation, access control, closed-circuit television (CCTV) usage (if applicable), signage, suspicious activity reporting, and parking security.
	• Ensure that the facility's emergency plans include people with disabilities and other access and functional needs. This priority is especially important when considering evacuation procedures and staging areas. Refer to the *Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship* released by the White House in 2013 for more information. Additional resources are available at the U.S. Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center Website.
	• Establish safe areas within the facility for assembly and refuge during crises.
	• Develop an incident communications plan for family notification and reuniting post-incident.
	• Evaluate security requirements and design a monitoring, surveillance, and inspection program that is consistent with the activities of the house of worship. This should include protocols for suspicious packages, suspicious activities, and surveillance events.
	• Ensure applicable plans address day and night conditions. Assess lighting for facility entrances, delivery areas, and parking lots.
	• Evaluate vehicle traffic patterns near the facility. Design and implement strategies to reduce vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian safety.
	• Develop a bomb threat management plan to enable informed decisions and appropriate actions upon receipt of a bomb threat, accurate threat analysis during bomb threat assessments, minimize the consequences of a potential attack or threat on personnel and structures, and deter potential perpetrators.
	• Create emergency action charts and post them throughout the house of worship for quick reference of actions to take during emergencies. Clearly identify and communicate egress routes in the event of a mass evacuation and shelter-in-place locations in the event of a disaster in which evacuation is not an option. Include in the lockdown plan processes for full and zoned lockdowns, the removal of individual access control privileges, and points of entry for emergency responders. Implement systems for automatic lockdown, or establish a procedure for manual lockdown of the facility.
	• Ensure plans facilitate the following activities: taking responsibility for managing the incident; ensuring communication to appropriate parties; analyzing the incident to identify strengths and weaknesses associated with pre-event plans and procedures, as well as incident response; rebuilding the facility's reputation, which may require making physical and procedural changes, and leveraging media outlets to raise awareness of community outreach activities; and sustaining the facility's reputation through a series of positive announcements, activities, and actions.

Train

Employees and volunteers need to have access to training resources, and plans should be exercised as appropriate. Training helps to ensure personnel know what to do during an emergency or business disruption. Recurring training programs help personnel to remain familiar with security measures and preparedness actions (e.g., evacuation, lockdown). Specialized training is needed for emergency team leaders and members, especially personnel who will take on additional responsibilities, such as administering first aid and using emergency response equipment (e.g., automated external defibrillators and fire extinguishers). Drills and exercises should be conducted to validate plans and to evaluate the ability of personnel to carry out their assigned roles and responsibilities.

TRAIN	• Train employees on security basics, emergency response, business continuity plans, and increased awareness of potential hazards.
	• Provide specialized training for emergency team leaders and members so they are familiar with their roles and responsibilities defined in the facility's plans. In addition, enable willing and capable staff members to complete training for additional response actions (e.g., using fire extinguishers, administering first aid).
	• Exercise any business continuity, security, or emergency action plans regularly (at least once per year) to ensure they remain applicable as changes occur at the facility. Involve first responders in exercises to familiarize them with the facility and its security plans, policies, and procedures.
	• Exercise the plan regularly with staff and other appropriate personnel (e.g., building management) to ensure that adequate resources are available to implement the plan and that all personnel can perform their responsibilities as defined in the plan.
	• Train staff to be aware of any suspicious behavior, to include visitors and fellow staff members who: o Inquire about security procedures, equipment, or plans with no need to know o Associate with known radical individuals or groups o Show changes in work behavior or begin working odd hours o Discuss previous acts of violence or express empathy with those who commit these acts o Distribute extremist literature
	• Train staff to be aware of suspicious behavior, such as individuals who: o Make efforts to conduct surveillance or 'case' the house of worship or religious facility o Inquire about security procedures, equipment, or plans with no need to know o Behave oddly or nervously o Wear noticeably bulky clothing, present an unusual gait, or act in a disturbed manner as they may be carrying explosives or weapons underneath clothing or in bags o Take pictures of the facility or question employees about security procedures or policies o Attempt to access unauthorized areas

TRAIN	• Train staff to be aware of suspicious activities or items such as the following:
	  ○ Vandalism accompanied by a message or claim of responsibility
	  ○ Postings on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) that detail or suggest planned violence against areligious facility
	  ○ Unattended packages, briefcases, or bags
	  ○ Unattended vehicles that are parked in odd locations for unusually long periods of time or appear suspiciously overloaded
	  ○ Vehicles that have smoke, odors, or chemicals leaking from them

	• Train staff on the "Run Hide Fight" response to an active shooter: if there is an accessible escape path, attempt to evacuate the premises; if evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide where the active shooter is less likely to find you; as a last resort, and only when your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter. Refer to the DHS Active Shooter Preparedness website (www.dhs.gov/activeshooter) for a variety of resources, including information on classroom training and workshops throughout the United States, online training available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Emergency Management Institute, and printable materials including posters and pocket cards.

	• Train staff on counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) strategies and procedures to prevent, protect against, respond to, and mitigate bombing incidents. The DHS Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP) develops and delivers a diverse portfolio of no cost counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) awareness solutions and training courses. Training courses available to faith-based communities include:
	  ○ Bomb Threat Management Planning (MGT-451)
	  ○ Protective Measures (PER-336)
	  ○ IED Search Procedures (PER-339)
	  ○ Vehicle-Borne IED Detection (PER-312)
	  ○ Bomb Prevention Awareness (AWR-348)
	  ○ Explosive Effects and Mitigation (AWR-337)
	  ○ Protective Measures Awareness (AWR-340)
	  ○ Response to Suspicious Behaviors & Items (AWR-335)

	• Increase staff awareness of counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) resources and familiarity with C-IED products. OBP provides a wide array of awareness products—including cards, posters, checklists, brochures, videos, briefings, and applications—designed to share counter-IED awareness information with the general public and across the public and private sectors to prevent, protect against, respond to, and mitigate bombing incidents. Products available to faith-based communities include:
	  ○ Suicide Bomber Awareness/Active Shooter Card
	  ○ DHS-DOJ Bomb Threat Guidance
	  ○ DHS-DOJ Bomb Threat Stand-Off Card
	  ○ DHS Bomb Threat Procedures/Checklist
	  ○ What To Do – Bomb Threat Video available at www.dhs.gov/what-to-do-bomb-threat
	• For more information on the OBP Counter-IED training, please visit www.dhs.gov/obp.

Report

Establishing suspicious activity reporting procedures is critical to security and mitigation of a potential incident. Suspicious activity is any observed behavior that could indicate terrorism or terrorism-related crime. This includes, but is not limited to, unusual items or situations, such as unattended packages; individuals asking questions at a level beyond typical curiosity about, for example, a building's security procedures or utilities; and individuals paying unusual attention to facilities or buildings beyond a casual or professional interest. A house of worship should establish reporting procedures; communicate those procedures to employees, volunteers, visitors, and members of the congregation; and train staff on using these procedures.

REPORT	
	• Post details on reporting suspicious activity and encourage staff, visitors, and members of the congregation to report suspicious behavior to the proper authorities (e.g., a volunteer or staff member designated as head of security, local law enforcement). Things to consider include unattended vehicles; repeat visitors or outsiders who have no apparent business in non-public areas; abandoned parcels, backpacks, and packages; and other unusual activity.
	• Establish a system for reporting security concerns. Include mechanisms for the documentation, investigation, and review of related incidents and actions taken. Train staff and volunteers on reporting procedures.
	• Remain involved and get information on DHS's "If You See Something, Say Something™" campaign.

Conclusion

Ensuring the safety of congregation members, visitors, staff, and volunteers is a priority for all houses of worship. By connecting with local first responders; developing plans for identifying issues and supporting incident response; and training staff, congregants, and visitors in reporting concerns to emergency authorities, many incidents may be mitigated or avoided.

DHS Resources

For more information on the **Hometown Security Initiative** and connect, plan train, report, visit www.dhs.gov/hometown-security.

Protective Security Advisors are security subject matter experts who engage with State, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) government mission partners, and members of the private sector stakeholder community to protect the Nation's critical infrastructure. For more information or to contact your local PSA, email NICC@hq.dhs.gov.

The Ready Campaign provides help with planning for businesses at www.ready.gov/business. Ready Business will assist businesses in developing a preparedness program by providing tools to create a plan that addresses the impact of many hazards.

DHS Active Shooter resources include free courses, materials, and workshops to better prepare you to deal with an active shooter situation and to raise awareness of behaviors that represent pre-incident indicators and characteristics of active shooters. Additional information is available at www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness.

The "If You See Something, Say Something™" campaign encourages the public and key frontline employees to identify and report indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime to the proper transportation and law enforcement authorities. Resources are available at www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something.

Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI) information is available at https://nsi.ncirc.gov/. This initiative provides law enforcement with another tool to help prevent terrorism and other related criminal activity by establishing a national capacity for gathering, documenting, processing, analyzing, and sharing SAR information. SAR training for private sector partners is located at https://nsi.ncirc.gov/hsptregistration/private_sector/.

Counter-Improvised Explosive Device (IED) information, resources, and tools for enhancing IED preparedness, including information on a wide array of no-cost training courses offered by the Office for Bombing Prevention, are available at www.dhs.gov/OBP.

Information on **DHS cybersecurity programs** is available at www.dhs.gov/cyber. To find out more about the Cybersecurity Awareness Campaign, go to http://www.dhs.gov/stopthinkconnect. For tips from the U.S. Computer Emergency Response Team, go to https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/tips.

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