



Securing Houses of Worship II

Project Executive Summary

Produced under the *Securing Houses of Worship II* project by the ASIS Foundation, Alexandria, Virginia in cooperation with Webster University

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About Securing Houses of Worship II

Securing Houses of Worship II is an ASIS Foundation initiative which serves as a follow-on to the original effort undertaken in 1998 and 1999. Our objective is to provide basic tools for both the security professional and leaders of religious congregations, helping them to better address relevant assets protection needs.

The impetus of the first effort was the mid-1990s series of arsons targeting Christian churches, primarily in southern states, which seemed at the time to be a new trend in hate-crimes. It focused primarily on physical security measures, and encouraged local ASIS Chapters in the United States to establish relations with neighboring religious institutions. Much has happened since then. Security and crime prevention are more complicated both for Americans and the institutions they comprise. The companion products produced under phase II of the project - one for security professionals and one for religious leaders - recognize the increasingly broad spectrum of risks facing today's faith-based community, and aim to reinvigorate professional security assistance to that sector.

Project Status

The two booklets are out for final review among a distinguished group of ten security professionals, all of whom are experienced in supporting Houses of Worship. Once their comments have been incorporated the booklets will be posted on the ASIS Web Site under the "Security Toolkit." Also posted on the site will be a PowerPoint presentation on the subject, a pamphlet on "How to Develop a Houses of Worship Project at Your ASIS Chapter" and relevant Internet links.

The research study will be completed shortly thereafter and will be subject to peer review, then submitted to the ASIS Information Resources Center for addition to their collection.

This completes the "Securing Houses of Worship II" effort under the auspices of the ASIS Foundation. These materials will continue to be monitored by the Principal Investigator and updated over time as appropriate.

A Guide for Security Professionals and ASIS Chapters

Purpose

Most security professionals have a strong background in assessment and protection methodologies for corporate, commercial, public venue and/or government environments. Nonetheless religious congregations represent a unique setting in terms of threats, vulnerabilities and the palatability of protective measures. The purpose of this booklet is to orient security professionals on the issues they need to consider in supporting houses of worship, identify assessment approaches and encourage their involvement in assisting the community of faith-based institutions in the United States.

The Nature Of The Worship Environment

A worship center is a dynamic place which can serve many different functions. The challenge for security professionals is recognizing the threats and vulnerabilities facing these institutions and what steps can be taken to mitigate the risks. The first step in overcoming this challenge is to understand why securing houses of worship entails a unique approach. Next, being able to identify the many tangible and intangible assets at these facilities will help security professionals gain a clearer understanding of the protection environment. By identifying assets, we can begin to see what types of threats and vulnerabilities face these institutions and the measures that are needed to mitigate them.

The environmental challenges often include a lack of awareness (and sometimes interest), a lack of internal expertise to assess and address risks, limited budgets and resources, and the need to maintain an open and worship-appropriate atmosphere.

Assessing and Addressing Needs

Security professionals must understand that the faith-based community is different in many ways from the business or government setting. Because of the challenges identified above, emphasis should be placed on the application of:

- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
- Developing and enforcing policies and procedures
- Personnel screening and management
- Relationships with neighbors and the community
- Relationships with “outside” groups which use the facility
- Awareness and training
- Ownership of assets protection and security functions
- Volunteer participation and congregation buy-in
- Facility maintenance and upkeep
- Effective communications
- Effective layout and use of facilities

Security systems and officers should be considered as augmentation to the above items when absolutely necessary. When employed, these measures should be carefully considered and planned with the assistance of an independent professional who is knowledgeable and trustworthy.

A thorough assessment should include aspects such as the mission and organization of the congregation, location and setting, area crime issues, surrounding facilities and existing relationships. All credible threats should be considered in conjunction with the congregations key assets. Both external and internal threats must be considered as well as natural and inadvertent threats.

Follow-up and training should be considered when providing assistance to faith-based congregations. Recommendations for trusted vendors and systems as well as a “reasonable budget range” should be part of your guidance where appropriate. Low-cost, low-tech solutions should be recommended to the extent possible except in those few congregations with a preference (and budget) for the opposite.

Advise congregation leaders on all avenues of risk mitigation: risk avoidance, risk transfer, risk spreading, risk reduction and risk acceptance to provide a truly comprehensive strategy.

Future plans, including expansion and construction, should be factored in to any security assessment or strategy, as well as projections for the neighborhood and population.

Congregation leaders should seriously consider the consequences of a loss of various types and the need to prepare an overall strategy. A wide variety of resources are available to both security professionals and religious leaders - many of which are listed in this booklet.

A Guide for Religious Leaders and Congregations

Purpose

This booklet serves as a guide to religious leaders of all faiths to recognize the challenges of protecting their institutions. This booklet is not a safety manual and does not cover every possible circumstance that may arise at your facility. The information provided in this booklet will give religious leaders a broad understanding of the risks and liabilities to their institutions and offer ways in which to mitigate them. We hope this resource provides you with an efficient and effective outlook to securing your house of worship.

The Challenge of Protecting Important Assets

Unfortunately, the religious community is subject to many of the same hazards that any other organizations face. These include both external and internal threats which can come in the form of street criminals, hate groups, terrorists, white collar criminals, crime rings and others. Typically, congregations are not well-prepared for the risks associated with these issues. This is primarily because:

- There is not a dedicated assets protection program within the congregation
- A thorough assessment has not been performed
- The congregation has not fully identified its tangible and intangible assets
- The necessary expertise does not exist (or is not known) within the congregation
- There is a limited resource/budget allocation for security
- The congregation has not been victimized in the past
- Congregation leaders don't know where to begin or where to obtain assistance

Many security professionals and vendors are accustomed to dealing with business and government clients with different needs and requiring different approaches. This booklet, along with its companion "A Guide for Security Professionals" is meant to educate both the religious community and the security professional on the unique needs of faith-based congregations and recommended approaches to managing security risks.

A variety of available resources are listed in this booklet as well as suggestions for assessing and addressing your security risks.

Assessing and Addressing Security Needs

Many congregations can choose to perform their own assessment simply by completing a brief security survey. An "internal" security survey can be completed by a knowledgeable congregational leader or by a designated security committee consisting of members/volunteers who are familiar with the facility and its daily operations. The results will provide an indication as to your need to undergo an assets protection assessment and/or acquire additional security services.

Although many congregations may have significant security expertise within their own membership and may have already had members perform various levels of assessment and strategy development, an outside assessment is often advisable. An outside representative can offer observations and solutions that may not be apparent to people with an intimate knowledge of the facility or congregation.

A brief questionnaire is included with this booklet to help you decide whether or not you need outside help with assessing or addressing your security needs.

Any effective assessment must include more than physical security issues such as locks and alarm systems. As you are now aware, many other risks can severely impact your institution. These include, but are not limited to legal liability, financial controls, child/youth protection, administrative procedures and relations with neighbors and protective service agencies.

The ultimate goal of the risk management process is to provide the best protection of an institution's assets at the least cost (in terms of time, money, effort and inconvenience) consistent with the value of those assets. Although we would like to eliminate all risks, that is not a realistic objective. Therefore, we need to find the best balance for a particular situation. Each congregation is unique and deserves a realistic and tailored approach to managing the risks of loss.

By taking a proactive security approach, religious leaders can implement some of the mitigation measures discussed in this booklet to minimize their risks while at the same time reducing their exposure to a variety of threats and vulnerabilities. Understanding the importance of protecting your assets and recognizing the threats and vulnerabilities to those assets is the first step.

A Research Study on the Application of Risk Management Principles to Protecting Assets at Houses Of Worship

A primary source of information for the study was a questionnaire designed to be completed by leaders of religious congregations, mainly in the United States. General background information about the questionnaire includes:

- A Web-based survey of 170 Religious Congregations was conducted over the period mid-2003 to mid-2005
- The respondents represented 45 US states, the District of Columbia and the province of Ontario, Canada
- The breakdown by faith group roughly equated to the proportion of nationwide affiliation with particular faiths: (approximately) 89% Christian, 6% Jewish, 3% Muslim, <1% Buddhist
- The respondents represented all regions of the United States
- The respondents represented all types of settings including large urban, small urban, suburban, and rural
- The respondents represented all sizes of congregations with membership numbers ranging from under 100 to over 5,000

Key Findings from the study were:

- Almost without exception, respondents to the survey reported “people” as their number one asset
- Respondents to the survey indicated a variety of other significant assets warranting protection, but primarily focused on tangible assets
- While the survey did not indicate “image” or “reputation” as a significant asset in general, other sources project those intangibles as extremely important
- A significant percentage of the respondents have affiliated programs such as a pre-school, daycare center or school, which impact the risk profile
- Approximately 75% of the respondent congregations open their facilities to use by “outside” groups, which impacts their risk profile
- Congregations generally do not have a significant budget allocation for assets protection or security
- In general, very large congregations (in terms of membership) have a significant budget for assets protection and security whereas other congregations do not; the size of the budget, however, does not necessarily relate directly to the reported crime rate in the area or to the degree of “activism” in which the congregation participates
- Even those congregations with a large security budget often lack sufficient expertise or guidance on how to effectively apply those resources to address existing risks
- Congregations with a dedicated security program/budget generally use a combination of security *officers* and security *systems*

- Many congregations, even those employing security officers or systems, do not have a dedicated individual or committee to manage the security function
- Many congregations neglect low-cost procedural protection measures such as marking and inventorying equipment, having an awareness program or conducting liaison with neighbors or the local community
- Over half of the respondent congregations do not have or enforce a policy on Information Technology security
- Over one third of the responding congregations do not have a backup/recovery procedure in place for their computer data

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