

Presented by the **Houses of Worship Committee**

# Recommended Best Practices for Securing Houses of Worship



for people of all faiths

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# Recommended Best Practices for Securing Houses of Worship

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It's 7:30 p.m. and you just finished the last of the paperwork. You are heading for your vehicle. As Head of Safety & Security for your faith's House of Worship (HOW) and also a Certified Protection Professional (CPP®), you know the importance of documenting events and incidents while they are fresh in your mind. Today, it was even more critical because your HOW experienced an incident where services were disrupted and some of your people were hurt. Your HOW has just joined hundreds of others in the fraternity of Houses of Worship in the United States that have experienced at least one violent incident.

Before you can call it a day, you must wait for the first responders and press to finish their work; law enforcement personnel are finishing interviewing people, the injured have been transported to and treated at the local hospitals, and the press has wrapped up live coverage of the event. You're probably not turning on the television this night. Your briefing and update to the HOW leadership is complete, but you relive the incident in your mind:

*How could we have stopped the intruder(s)?*

*How could we have prevented the event?*

*What about the liability the HOW faces as a result of this event; will we be sued?*

*What steps does the HOW take to move forward with resuming services at the HOW?*

*How can we assure our members that it is still safe to attend this HOW?*

Traditional respect and reverence for churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples are eroding in the United States and around the world. No longer is the House of Worship considered "sacred" as it once was. Pastors, rabbis, imams and other religious leaders are targeted for violence and are in need of protection. Criminals, activists, and even governments have become more hostile towards people of faith and our HOW. In 2011, there were multiple assaults and shootings at churches, vandalism and arson at temples and mosques reported by the media. These represent only a fraction of the crimes being committed at Houses of Worship across America. The ability to worship freely is a constitutional right and an important part of the nation's critical infrastructure. The threats to the congregation are diverse, ranging from graffiti to arson, from petty theft, to the murder of members and religious leaders.

The ASIS International Houses of Worship Security Committee, a subcommittee of the Cultural Properties Council, has compiled and documented some recommended practices for safety and security challenges that many HOW face. The committee focused on two areas of HOW safety and security: 1) recommended procedural controls and 2) suggested physical controls. These recommended practices for safety and security controls provide fundamental security protocols and procedures that every HOW can utilize to form a foundation for providing their HOW with a basic security plan.

Application of these recommended practices for safety and security controls does not imply or guarantee that your HOW will never experience a safety or security incident, but they can assist you in preparing for them, or perhaps prevent the event from escalating. These recommended practices for safety and security controls are intended to provide every HOW with a starting point for establishing a rigorous and specific set of safety and security controls for your individual HOW, and apply those practices that fit your HOW and can be integrated into the culture of your HOW.

It is the sincere hope of the ASIS HOW Security Committee that as you review these recommended practices, it will challenge you to examine your HOW safety and security practices and determine your current security environment. We believe that you can apply these procedural and physical control sets and recommended practices to any gaps that may exist in your HOW security. The security control sets and recommended practices have been implemented, tested and adopted by various HOW over a period of years and therefore do not require a "Proof of Concept" because they are currently in place and operational at HOW's around the world. However, adaptation will be required and in accordance with your specific HOW as needed.

There are three main forms of a HOW in America: 1) the traditional HOW is an owned structure built in accordance with the individual needs of the faith, by the faith; 2) the modern space is typically a leased space in a commercial business park; and 3) the third form, perhaps the most common, is located at public schools or community centers where the religious services are held. The physical control sets described below will not fit into each facility, but all can be adapted to work for your specific HOW requirements.

### Exterior Controls

1. Consider enhancing perimeter security with fencing or CPTED principles. Use planter barriers and gates near entrances. Maintain any fences and gates in working order.
2. Ensure that parking lot lights are adequate and in working order and the timers adjusted seasonally.
3. Install motion-sensing lights in all areas that are dark and secluded. Utilize motion sensor lighting where practical.
4. Trim shrubs/bushes/trees around doors and windows to reduce hiding places and increase visibility.
5. Remove potential fire hazards, such as trash and debris.
6. Consider limiting signage identifying facility as HOW.
7. Develop facility traffic patterns to allow for vehicle checkpoint when needed.
8. Buffer parking areas from sanctuary where possible. Remove any graffiti as soon as it appears (preferably the same day) but after taking photographs of the writings and filing a police report.
9. Build good relationships with neighbors of the HOW.
10. Make an appointment with the community relations officer of your local police department to tour your center and make suggestions on improving HOW security.
11. Post HOW members at entrances and parking areas during worship and prayer times.
12. Consider installing door/window alarms to include an external alarm monitoring company for responses.
13. Consider installing security cameras to leverage the technology and provide additional monitoring.

## Interior Controls

1. When feasible, make sure that you have interior security lights that are left on after hours.
2. Consider incorporating access control to assist in “zoned” access during services.
3. Limit access to childcare, business offices, cash count areas and media room.
4. Consider installing window security liner in public areas.
5. Inspect entrance hardware, door closers and locks to ensure they are in working order.
6. Have solid doors with locks on all sensitive areas of the interior.
7. Consider establishing a “safe room” for the religious head of the facility.
8. Consider utilizing “VIP” entrances and “staging rooms.”
9. Consider establishing an “interview room” for suspicious or suspect persons.
10. Report suspicious packages to police, and do not touch the suspicious package. Develop a Suspicious Package Protocol with instructions on reporting to police as well as not touching or moving the item. Address this issue in emergency evacuation procedures.
11. Provide silent alarms and visual readouts throughout facility.
12. Install burglarproof bars on screens and large vents. (Note - research local ordinances before beginning security renovations. For example, window bars should not limit evacuation in case of fire.)
13. Request local law enforcement presence during high volume worship times and holiday celebrations.
14. Know your congregation! If something or someone appears out of the ordinary, notice it, and share with leadership.

## Recommended Practices – Procedural

1. Consider assembling a Safety and Security Committee/Ministry.
2. Appoint a security leader to oversee and coordinate safety compliance and security planning. If the Security Leader has no security or law enforcement background, make sure they reach out to local law enforcement and get acquainted.
3. Establish and document safety and security methods and procedures for your HOW.
4. Recruit members to provide safety and security for your HOW.
5. Train in security protocols. Consider including the ushers and greeters for the training.
6. Conduct evacuation drills and/or table top training with staff and volunteers.
7. Coordinate communications procedures (i.e., list, equipment, mass notification texts, email, and/or intercom).
8. Consider using radios for the team as primary communications tool where applicable.
9. Emergency communications protocols (Chain of Command) include Rabbi/Imam/Pastor.
10. Review and revise special event safety and security plan.
11. Consider establishing a visitors & guests authentication procedure.
12. Consider creating procedures for interacting with strangers/unfamiliar persons.
13. Reduce opportunities for just one person to be in the temple/church/mosque and synagogues.
14. If no one else is expected and there is just one person in the facility, keep all doors and windows locked.
15. If opening HOW for a service or special event, only unlock doors as needed. Do not unlock all the doors unless necessary.
16. When open for services, have greeters at each door who know the congregation/members.
17. Consider having someone “patrol” the halls, classrooms, and restrooms on a random schedule.
18. Report any suspicious persons or activities to a designated church/parish/mosque leader.
19. Know and build relationships with any member who is currently a law enforcement officer.
20. If the property is not owned by the religious organization, determine with owner your rights to restrict individuals from the property.
21. Develop relationship with local law enforcement agency and review their requirements for arrest if someone violates a trespassing notice given by religious leader.

22. Consider inviting law enforcement agencies to do several "drive-through" trips in your parking lots when you are having meetings and as their schedule permits.
23. Consider inviting law enforcement to utilize your parking lot to write their reports. This is a good visual deterrent.
24. If your circumstances allow, offer a key to your building to some law enforcement officers to use for writing reports, restroom breaks, etc.
25. File formal police reports on all incidents of vandalism, graffiti, and other suspicious activities.
26. As appropriate, have local police S.W.A.T. utilize your building for training. This gets them familiar with your facility in the event of an emergency.
27. Review access control procedures—identify all facility ingress and egress, including driveways and parking.
28. Establish layered perimeter security procedures—devise parking strategies that provide a physical barrier between the HOW and streets.
29. Plan and practice scenario based responses procedures—suspicious behavior, threatening situation, evacuations, and/or lockdowns.
30. Initiate contact with local law enforcement to create a contact list of e-mails and phone numbers.
31. Include law enforcement in your security planning process.
32. Notify law enforcement of HOW schedule of special events.
33. Consider hiring off-duty police officers as part of your security program.
34. Conduct security surveys of your facilities and neighboring areas.
35. Conduct a threat assessment—discuss with local law enforcement.
36. Review and discuss survey and assessment findings with security committee.
37. Make appropriate changes/maintenance/enhancements of problematic areas.
38. Implement access control measures (limit points of entry).
39. Review emergency response procedures, i.e., lockdowns and evacuations.
40. Convene security committee, volunteers (i.e. medical personnel), and security personnel for regular briefings.
41. Document descriptions of suspicious people or vehicles.
42. Coordinate safety and security planning with the special event planning committee.
43. Invite local, state, and federal law enforcement as your guests to events at the HOW, including holiday celebrations and outreach events. This will help build rapport and further introduce the community to their law enforcement.



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