

Illustration by [Michael Austin](#)

## PREPARING FOR PROTESTS



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During his arrest on April 12 in Baltimore, Freddie Gray sustained injuries in a police van that placed him in a coma. He died a week later, and as word spread about the young black man's death while in police custody—later ruled a homicide—sporadic protests began to emerge around the city. On April 25, activists organized protests in downtown Baltimore, which spiraled out of control when some violent attendees pelted police with rocks and damaged nearby property. Over the next week, parts of the city shut down as protests continued until the City of Baltimore filed charges against the six police officers involved in Gray's arrest.

During the week of protests, a state of emergency was declared, the National Guard was called in, and a mandatory curfew was ordered. Two people were shot, 486 people were arrested, 113 police officers were injured, 27 drug stores were looted, and hundreds of local businesses were damaged.

Countless protests have sparked throughout American cities in 2015 in response to instances of police brutality, race relations, and other community-specific and nationwide social grievances. Indeed, during the 2014 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, global business leaders identified protests, civil unrest, and collective violence as the most significant risks facing governments and businesses in the years ahead.

Bill Schieder "had a baptism by fire" when the Baltimore protests grew violent near his organization's global headquarters just weeks after he started his job as head of physical security and fraud risk. Although Schieder is in charge of security for T. Rowe Price's sites all over the world, it was the protests in Baltimore that took the company

by surprise. "We are an active asset management company, and we're trading at all times to make sure that the business stays working," Schieder says. "What really made this interesting was that it was such a fluid event."

T. Rowe Price has a security oversight committee made up of key strategic people within the organization—human resources employees, legal experts, facilities managers, risk officers, and a communications team. Schieder said the committee was invaluable in evaluating the needs of the firm, as well as coordinating and sharing intelligence with external organizations such as local law enforcement, government officials, and other organizations.

Susan Morton, a senior vice president with Marsh Risk Consulting, agrees that having an on-site team that can immediately make decisions about operations is essential during periods of civil unrest. The team should focus on what the organization needs to do to protect employees, infrastructure, and supplies, as well as communicating with key stakeholders.

"It's important to have teams at the right levels and with the right scope of authority," Morton explains. "If you need to shut down or get additional security at a location, you need to have a team and senior leaders at that location who can help make those judgment calls. The other issue is reaching back to the corporate team for support—you need a senior crisis management team at a corporate level helping the team on the ground get additional security resources or even equipment to repair a building."

Schieder says his organization's headquarters were not in the thick of the protests, but he had to worry about employees' safety when traveling to and from the office. "Baltimore is not the easiest place to get in and out of, so there were areas where we had to figure out whether the interstates were being blocked because of protests," he notes.

The best way to stay on top of protest-related information was via social media, Schieder quickly discovered. Protesters would organize and plan their next moves on platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, so the security committee was constantly monitoring the Web for such plans. "We actually got some information from some of our own associates who had kids who were in high school, and they would tell us what people were planning on these Instagram accounts," Schieder says.

Following protesters' plans on social media could be tricky, though—Schieder stresses the importance of vetting the information because "sometimes it was just chatter, and sometimes it was even thrown up as a diversion."

Ultimately, T. Rowe Price enacted its continuity plan that gave nonessential employees the option of teleworking. Employees who were needed to actively manage assets were instructed to work from an off-site office designed for such circumstances. Schieder notes that transferring operations to the continuity site was "seamless" due to years of training and drills.

"Because we didn't have anything specifically in place for protesting and riots, we considered how we would work an inclement weather plan: don't come in if you have the ability to work from home or from our six-building campus 20 minutes outside of Baltimore. That's for our traders to go to so we can make sure we're still trading," Schieder explains.

Morton says she encourages her clients to plan all aspects of enacting a continuity plan or closing the facility: How will employees be notified? Will they be paid, even if the office is closed and they can't telework? How do you communicate with clients or suppliers that one of your locations is closed?

"If you are a distribution center or a warehouse and all your vendors are going to be delivering items, if you choose to shut down that location, you would need to tell your vendors where to reroute those goods," Morton explains. "And

depending on the length of time, there might be some longer-term operational decisions to make. Do you transfer operations to different locations to make up in that capacity? How do you choose to handle that?"

Another issue Schieder encountered was communicating with the right people to redirect a number of job candidates who were coming to Baltimore for interviews at T. Rowe Price. The candidates were staying at hotels in downtown Baltimore near the protests, and Schieder had to coordinate with HR to relocate and reschedule them.

Keeping tabs on the mood of the protests provided insight, as well. The violent protests in Baltimore continued until Friday, May 1, when city officials announced they were going to charge six police officers in Gray's death. Schieder notes that the tone of the protests immediately changed after the announcement.

"It went from more of an angry type of a protest to almost a celebratory type," he explains. "It was interesting because a lot of the protesting toward the end of the week was different because all of the violence that had occurred earlier in the week. The theme toward the end of the week became one of solidarity—you'd see a lot of different demographics involved, and they really turned more peaceful."

The problem Schieder and his team now faced was the sheer number of protesters. Although the gatherings were peaceful, they grew even larger, creating traffic concerns and making it difficult for employees to commute. "We were always at a high alert, because these protests can turn in a moment's notice," he explains. "Unfortunately, there was a very small percentage of people that turned this ugly for the city, and it wasn't what the pulse of the entire community was. While in the back of your mind you've relaxed, you never really let your guard down because, like I said, as groups got together and merged, peaceful rallies can turn ugly really quickly."

Schieder says it wasn't until the National Guard started withdrawing from the city that the security team "was able to breathe a little sigh of relief."

It's important for the security response team to coordinate the logistics of business continuity during civil unrest, but violence prevention expert and Principal of Behavioral Science Applications Steve Crimando said that strategic communication can be the difference between a mediocre and successful business response. Crimando gave tips on how to communicate with employees and community leaders during times of protest in a webinar titled Security and Business Continuity During Times of Civil Unrest, sponsored by AlliedBarton.

"This obviously affects the entire community—neighborhoods, blocks, the whole city—so it requires a high degree of coordination with law enforcement and emergency managers in your jurisdiction as well, including some method for intelligence sharing," Crimando said.

Informing employees about potential business disruptions without scaring them is a tricky balance, but it's important to acknowledge a situation that your employees likely already know about, he noted.

Acknowledging a situation lets employees know that the company is aware, while ignoring it makes it appear as if the company is ignoring the issue, Crimando explained. "Everyone is talking about this, we all know this, why are we not discussing it?"

Security managers need to lay out how they will communicate with employees in a variety of circumstances, discuss what the company is doing to prepare for potential unrest, and go over basic crowd safety tips, Crimando recommended.