



Problem-Oriented Guides for Police  
Problem-Specific Guides Series  
No. 32

# Bomb Threats in Schools

by Graeme R. Newman





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**Guide No. 32**

# Bomb Threats in Schools

Graeme R. Newman

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## About the Problem-Specific Guides Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (An assessment guide has been produced as a companion to this series and the COPS Office has also published an introductory guide to problem analysis. For those who want to learn more about the principles and methods of problem-oriented policing, the assessment and analysis guides, along with other recommended readings, are listed at the back of this guide.)
  - **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true
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elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.

- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem.
  - **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
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- **Are willing to work with other community agencies to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public entities. An effective problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

The COPS Office and the authors encourage you to provide feedback on this guide and to report on your own agency's experiences dealing with a similar problem. Your agency may have effectively addressed a problem using responses not considered in these guides and your experiences and knowledge could benefit others. This information will be used to update the guides. If you wish to provide feedback and share your experiences it should be sent via e-mail to [cops\\_pubs@usdoj.gov](mailto:cops_pubs@usdoj.gov).



For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org) or via the COPS website at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov). This website offers free online access to:

- the *Problem-Specific Guides* series,
  - the companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series,
  - instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics,
  - an interactive training exercise,
  - online access to important police research and practices, and
  - on-line problem analysis module.
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The principal project team developing the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein, professor emeritus, University of Wisconsin Law School; Ronald V. Clarke, professor of criminal justice, Rutgers University; John E. Eck, professor of criminal justice, University of Cincinnati; Michael S. Scott, clinical assistant professor, University of Wisconsin Law School; Rana Sampson, police consultant, San Diego; and Deborah Lamm Weisel, director of police research, North Carolina State University.

Nancy Leach and Cynthia Pappas oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Rebecca Kanable edited the guide. Research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University under the direction of Phyllis Schultze.

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## **The Problem of Bomb Threats in Schools**

The guide begins by describing the problem and reviewing factors that increase the risk of bomb threats in schools. The guide then identifies a series of questions that might assist you in analyzing the local problem of bomb threats in schools. Finally, the guide reviews responses to the problem and what is known about these from evaluative research and police practice.

The scope of this guide is limited to bomb threats in schools, public or private, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Colleges and universities are excluded because they generally differ from schools. Their organization and administration differ; they have their own police within the university community; and many universities do not have a physically identifiable perimeter as schools do. In fact, college campuses have much more in common with other public service organizations, such as health services, entertainment venues and, to some extent, shopping malls. While there are a number of common responses to bomb threats that apply to almost any setting, the environment of schools is sufficiently different to warrant separate consideration.

The feature that distinguishes a bomb threat from other kinds of assaults and threats is that it is primarily a furtive crime—or at least a crime that can be committed from a distance. Modern communications make it possible for offenders to communicate their threat without having to physically confront the targets at the time of the threat or even at the time of the assault. Many assaults or destructive acts in schools follow threats, or constitute threats in themselves. The reason why an offender might choose a bomb as the carrier of the threat over some

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† See the POP Guide on *Bullying in Schools*.

†† See the POP Guides on *False Alarms* and *Misuse and Abuse of 911*.

††† See the POP Guide on *Graffiti*.

other item or implement of destruction and injury (e.g., assault weapons, arson) is unknown, though the immediate, disruptive action it causes is surely part of the reason. Certain kinds of injury and damage may also be enhanced by a bombing, such as arson achieved through an explosive device.

### **Related Problems**

There are several problems related to bombs, threats, and schools that are not directly addressed in this guide and merit separate analysis. They include:

- assaults on school officials;
  - bomb threats that occur in other locations and against targets other than schools (e.g., businesses and other workplace environments, public spaces such as shopping malls, public event venues such as entertainment and spectator sports, transportation, health services, government services);
  - bullying in schools;<sup>†</sup>
  - burglaries of schools;
  - carrying weapons in schools;
  - drug dealing in and around schools;
  - false fire alarms;<sup>††</sup>
  - gang violence;
  - graffiti at schools;<sup>†††</sup>
  - hate crimes;
  - hazing;
  - school pranks that cause disruption;
  - shootings;
  - sport violence (where team spirit is taken to an extreme);
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- stalking (either of students or by students against teachers);<sup>†</sup>
- threats to harm teachers or students, including death threats; and
- vandalism of school property.<sup>††</sup>

### **Extent of Bomb Incidents and Bomb Threats**

Data on bomb incidents (any event in which an actual bomb or bomb look-alike is involved) and bomb threats (any event in which a bomb threat is communicated that may or may not involve an actual bomb or bomb look-alike) are limited. The FBI reports that close to 5 percent of bombing incidents in the United States in 1999 (the most recent year for which FBI data are available) were targeted at schools. It is unknown what portion of these incidents involved threats. For the period January 1990 to February 28, 2002 the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) recorded 1,055 incidents of bombs being placed in school premises.<sup>1</sup> Again, we do not know what proportion of these incidents involved threats. For the most part, however, it is probably reasonable to conclude that bomb incidents involving real bombs in schools are relatively rare, though they have been with us for quite some time.<sup>†††</sup> Furthermore, relatively few bomb explosions are preceded by a warning or threat to officials. Of the 1,055 bomb incidents in schools reported by ATF, only 14 were accompanied by a warning to school or other authorities.

<sup>†</sup> See the POP Guide on *Stalking*.

<sup>††</sup> See the POP Guide on *School Vandalism and Break-ins*.

<sup>†††</sup> The first known school bombing occurred in May 1927 in Bath, Michigan. A local farmer blew up the school, killing 38 pupils, six adults and seriously injuring 40 other students (Missouri Center for Safe Schools 2001).



† This is a widely quoted statistic. To the extent that the author could determine, it is not based on any specific research study. The Hartford Insurance Company (Hartford Loss Control Department 2002) reports that 5 to 10 percent of bomb threats involve real bombs. See: [http://mb.thehartford.com/insurance\\_info/pdfs/570-050.pdf](http://mb.thehartford.com/insurance_info/pdfs/570-050.pdf)

There are no national statistics on bomb threats as such, though they are more common than bomb incidents. However, we can say that they are not evenly distributed throughout school districts: rashes of bomb threats can occur in particular localities.<sup>2</sup> For example, in the 1997-1998 school year, one Maryland school district reported 150 bomb threats and 55 associated arrests.<sup>3</sup> The South Carolina Department of Education in its 1999-2000 school incident crime report lists "disturbing schools," which includes bomb threats, hoaxes, false fire alarms etc., among its 10 top crimes, second only to simple assaults.<sup>4</sup> During the past five years, many states have enacted severe penalties for issuing false bomb threats, which reflects the perception that the incidence of bomb threats is widespread.

### **Impact on Victims**

The occurrence of bomb incidents or threats can have a major impact on the targeted victims depending on how the school responds. The potential for serious injury and damage makes even an empty threat a very serious incident. Thus, even though some 90 percent of bomb threats in schools may turn out to be pranks,<sup>†</sup> each threat must be taken seriously and acted upon immediately. Evacuation of buildings causes major disruption, which in many cases may be an attractive outcome from the offender's point of view. Many school districts report losses in excess of \$250,000 because of school closings and costs of bomb search squads. School districts are increasingly requiring schools to make up days lost due to bomb threats.<sup>5</sup>

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Finally, the publicity that surrounds rare but shocking incidents of targeted violence in schools affects all communities, even those far away from where the incidents occur. After the Columbine incident,<sup>†</sup> more than 70 percent of respondents nationally said that the same thing could happen in their community. Fear of targeted violence in schools far outstrips the actual risk,<sup>††</sup> which makes responding to threats extremely difficult for school authorities that may be hesitant to reveal the occurrence of every single bomb threat that occurs, particularly if there is strong indication that the threat is false.

### **About Bomb Threats**

*Motives:* There are many supposed motives for bomb threats, among them: humor, self assertion, anger, manipulation, aggression, hate and devaluation, omnipotence, fantasy, psychotic distortion, ideology, retaliation and no doubt there are many more.<sup>6</sup> However, the research on motives is generally limited to other kinds of violence, so any imputation of motives to those who deliver bomb threats must remain speculative.

*Delivery:* Bomb threats are delivered in various ways: by letter, face-to-face, email, on a student's website, or even a gesture. However the most common means of delivering a bomb threat is by telephone.<sup>7</sup>

*How seriously should a threat be taken?* The seriousness of a bomb threat is self evident because of the potential for widespread destruction that can be wrought by a bomb, compared to other weapons that are usually aimed at particular targets. However, if, as we have noted already, 90 percent of bomb threats are hoaxes (either there is no bomb at all or the "bomb" is a fake), how seriously should

<sup>†</sup> The Columbine High School massacre occurred on April 20, 1999, in Jefferson County, near Littleton, Colorado. Two teenage students planned the massacre, carried it out by shooting 12 students and one teacher, and committed suicide.

<sup>††</sup> According to Reddy et al. (2001) "... the three major television networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC, aired a total of 296 stories on the shooting at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado...in contrast, lightning accounts for more deaths overall, and bathtub accidents account for more deaths of children, than do school shootings ... yet, they receive comparatively little media coverage."



† Making a false bomb threat is a federal offense punishable under United States Code 18-844(e), with a penalty of up to 10 years in prison, \$250,000 fine, or both. This penalty also applies to juvenile offenders (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives 2003). However the majority of juveniles are prosecuted under local and state laws, which increasingly provide severe penalties.

†† This is a widely held view among experts. There is, however, no formal research study that affirms or negates it.

the threat be taken? Since the extent of disruption caused by bomb threats is considerable whether the bomb is real or not, all such threats are often responded to on the assumption that a real bomb does exist. In fact, the law throughout the United States tends to treat false bomb threats almost as severely as real bomb threats<sup>†</sup> and makes little exception for juveniles. Yet in the hurly-burly of the school setting, many threats are made in the normal course of the day among students and between teachers and students, some of which allude to explosives. The majority of such threats are never reported to the police. For example, a student states to his gym teacher, "All jocks deserve to be blown up." The seriousness with which to take this threat depends on how it is delivered. If the student was laughing or joking, the teacher may pay no mind to it. If made by a student with a history of such pronouncements, the threat may be taken more seriously. It is therefore important for schools to develop a response plan that includes criteria for making assessments of seriousness and for adopting responses commensurate with that assessment (see next page).

*Specificity of Bomb Threats.* In general, the specificity of the bomb threat is the best guide to its seriousness.<sup>8,††</sup> The specificity of a bomb threat may be assessed according to:

- place and time indicated in the threat,
- description of the bomb to be used,
- specific targets mentioned or indicated, and
- reason given or implied in the threat.

Table 1 summarizes in a general way the reasons given or inferred for issuing bomb threats and their links to the specificity of the threat. This is a classification based on information published in newsletters and other information outlets of government and non-government

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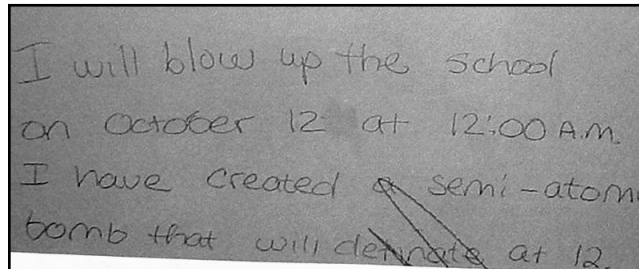
organizations that typically respond to bomb threats. Certain kinds of bomb threats are likely to be more specific than others. For example, a conditional threat must state the condition to be met, which requires much more specificity. In general, the more specific the threat, the easier it is to decide on the response.

**Table 1: Types of bomb threats in schools and their specificity**

Type	Threat rationale	Vague threat	Specific threat
Conditional	"Do this or else."	"Put back the candy machines or I'll bomb the school." Student expressing outrage, probably no bomb unless there has been a series of such threats.	"If you don't put back the vending machines, a bomb will go off in the cafeteria at 12 o'clock today."
Instrumental	Threat made in order to achieve another usually immediate goal.	Offender calls school and says, "There's a bomb in the building" and immediately hangs up. Student calls in false bomb threat in order to disrupt classes and get the day off.	"I've put a bomb in the school set to go off at 10:00. Burn down the school!"
Getting even	Bomber inverts power relationship between himself and the target.	"Death to all and I shall rule the world." Student places this threat on his website. Threat does not explicitly mention bomb. If identity of threatener is known should probably be taken seriously, especially if past history of threats.	"I'm sick of being humiliated by Smith. Today is the day when Smith and his precious science labs will be terminated."
Hate (ideological, religious, ethnic)	Bomber makes threat against hated opponent or target.	"Death to all child murderers!" Threat called into a school day before family planning officials visit school.	"Stay away from school tomorrow. The child murderers will be blown to hell where they belong! I'm not joking!"



David Corbett



Highly specific bomb threats tend to be more credible.

### **Factors Contributing to Bomb Threats in Schools**

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses. Unfortunately, there is no research that directly addresses the causes of bomb threats in schools. There is, however, a limited amount of research that examines how threats of various kinds arise in schools and the situations in which they occur.<sup>9</sup> The majority of this research is directed at developing two types of response: (1) an intervention plan aimed at prevention of threats and reducing their harm if carried out and (2) a response protocol in the event that an actual bomb threat or incident occurs. All of the research on which these two responses are based is focused on *threat assessment*, a protocol developed by the U. S. Secret Service to identify in advance individuals who may be most likely to attack the President and other individuals the Secret Service is responsible for protecting.

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The methodology used in these studies has been to collect detailed information concerning the circumstances that prevailed before and after major cases of targeted violence, including shootings and bombings. This information is then analyzed for any patterns that may indicate those circumstances that seemed to be conducive to targeted violence. The Secret Service applied this methodology to 37 cases of targeted violence in schools (which included some bomb-related events), collecting data on the personal and background characteristics of the offenders, their behavior before the violence occurred, and the school administrative and interpersonal response to the behaviors of the offenders before and after the event.

Based on the results of the Secret Service studies and those of student surveys,<sup>10</sup> there are four factors that contribute to bomb threats in schools and these factors interact in different ways in different situations:<sup>†</sup>

### *Offenders*

The Secret Service study of incidents of targeted violence in schools concluded the following:<sup>11</sup>

- The attacks were rarely impulsive; 75 percent planned the attack.
- The attacks were the end result of a series of events that to the attacker seemed logical and inevitable.
- Often the planning of the attack consumed almost all the attacker's time and energy to the point of obsession.
- Most held a grievance at the time of the attack.
- Most of the attackers had actually told a peer that "something would happen."<sup>††</sup>

† "...there is no profile or single 'type' of perpetrator of targeted violence. Rather, violence is seen as the product of an interaction among the perpetrator, situation, target, and the setting" (Reddy et al. 2001).

†† The Secret Service study found that "In virtually all ... cases, the attacker told a peer. In only two of 37 cases did the peer notify an adult" (Vossekuil et al. 2002).



† A third-year middle school mathematics teacher who reportedly told police she wanted the day off was charged Tuesday with calling in a bomb threat to Grayling Middle School (Traverse City *Record Eagle*, April 10, 2002).

- There was no definitive "profile" of an attacker, though there were many warning signs (Appendix B) that could possibly prove useful in identifying possible attackers.

While there has been some suggestion that bombers have particular types of personalities (obsessive-compulsive, psychopathic), there is insufficient scientific evidence to back up this claim.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the vast majority of threats are called in by students, though there are occasional cases of threats by teachers.<sup>†</sup>

### *Family Background*

No research has definitively, or even roughly, identified a constellation of factors that causes an individual to issue a bomb threat or target violence in a school. However, the general literature of law enforcement and school authorities (e.g., FBI, U.S. Secret Service, ATF working with the Department of Education) has identified a number of possible factors, though it should be emphasized that this does not mean that any one or even several of these factors necessarily lead to bomb-threatening behavior:<sup>13</sup>

- history of violence in the home;
  - parental acceptance of pathological behavior;
  - careless use of weapons in the home by parents, easy access to weapons, use of threats of violence to solve disagreements;
  - family moves frequently;
  - lack of intimacy in the home;
  - parents set no limits on child's conduct;
  - excessive watching of TV, violent video games allowed; and
  - no monitoring of outside interests, including drug and alcohol use, gang activity.
-



### *School*

A school climate that is insensitive to provocations to violence (such as bullying, harassment by teachers and students, an excessively authoritarian climate,<sup>†</sup> lack of respect of students for each other or teachers, gang activity, presence of provocative graffiti, lax dress rules, etc.) may be more likely to be a target of bomb threats. And where a school lacks basic prevention programs against attackers (such as monitoring entry and exit to the school, surveillance of areas in the school where bombs may be left, training of teachers to deal with violence in schools, and a systematic program for identifying and reporting warning signs), it too may be more likely to receive bomb threats.

### *Opportunity*

Making a bomb is easily within the ability of juveniles. In fact, ATF reports that the success rate of bomb detonations for bombs in schools is slightly higher than that for the national rate of all bombings. The range of explosive substances and ways of detonating them are limited only by the bomber's imagination and resourcefulness. Information on how to construct them is readily available on the Internet or is widely available in books.<sup>††</sup> Obviously, since this information is available to everyone should they wish to seek it out, its availability *per se* does not tell us which individuals are likely to make a bomb threat. Many of the recipes for making bombs use common everyday chemicals. However, even obtaining such information does not mean that individuals will use it to make a bomb or issue a bomb threat. Of course, they do not need any information on constructing bombs if they plan to issue a false bomb threat.

<sup>†</sup> Harsh imposition of authority by a school that relies entirely on fear not only has been associated with violence against teachers but also may result in a student's unwillingness to come forward to communicate potential problems of violence including his or her own victimization (Regoli and Hewitt 1994, Curcio and First 1993).

<sup>††</sup> There are many websites that provide the necessary information, though probably the most widely known is *The Anarchist Cookbook* of which there are many versions online ([www.rightho.com/anarchy/online.html](http://www.rightho.com/anarchy/online.html)) or the original is available in hard copy from many book stores. This book provides directions on everything from how to make letter bombs to counterfeiting currency. Another popular source is the *Black Books of Improvised Munitions Handbooks*, providing information on improvised explosives, bombs, firearms, timers, etc. This is a version of the U.S. Army Technical Manual 31-210.



† “The typical Hollywood device is sticks of dynamite with a clock taped to it. In fact, the most common device is a pipe bomb, a length of pipe filled with explosive...” (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives 2003).

†† The U.S. Postal Inspection Service reports that of 170 billion pieces of mail processed in a typical year, only a very few letter bombs—an average of 16—are reported or investigated (Hartford Loss Control Department 2002).

Concealment is also not difficult. Although bombs may be concealed in an incredible variety of containers—from fire extinguishers to pens and letters—most bombs are of the simple pipe bomb form that is concealed in an ordinary-looking bag or some everyday object.<sup>14,†</sup> Letter bombs are extremely rare, though they receive considerable media coverage.<sup>††</sup>

Part of the means to carry out a bomb threat effectively is the placement of the bomb. The preferred places are in areas where there is constant public access. Of the 1,055 incidents reported by ATF, 92 were outside, many of these in the parking lot; 190 inside, the majority either in the restroom or in a locker; and 123 either inside or outside in trash cans, air conditioners, window or door areas.<sup>15</sup> The

*David Corbett*



**Bomb threats have often been called in via pay phones which reduced the likelihood that police could locate the individual placing the call.**





opportunity to place a concealed bomb without detection is considerable unless the school has an established system of monitoring its premises.

Finally, the telephone's popularity for delivery of threats hardly needs explanation: it is widely available, cheap, and provides a (perhaps) false sense of anonymity for the caller. Pay phones exist in many if not all schools, and cell phones—until recently difficult to trace—are widely available among students. As we will see below, monitoring this ready-made threat delivery system may be one useful preventive response.

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## **Understanding Your Local Problem**

The information provided above is only a generalized description of bomb threats in schools, and because of a lack of research on bomb threats in particular, has drawn on other research on related problems such as school shootings. You must combine these basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

### **Asking the Right Questions**

Much of what you do will also depend on how the problem presents itself in your jurisdiction. Since bomb threats in schools are a statistically rare phenomenon, it is likely that you may hear of only an occasional threat in your local schools. However, there is always the possibility that a rash of bomb threats may occur. In either case, you will need to ask questions that will lead to an effective response. An effective response will determine: (1) how to deal with the immediate bomb threat, in real time, and (2) how to prevent bomb threats from occurring in the first place. The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of bomb threats in schools, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

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### *The School*

#### **Immediate response**

- Are the schools in your locality aware of the problem of bomb threats and their possible consequences?
- Does the school have a bomb-threat response plan?
- Does the school district and the local community have a disaster plan?

#### **Preventive response**

- Does the school have a climate of respect and clear and consistent rules of behavior?
  - Does the school keep a record of threats by students or teachers that are not reported to the police?
  - Does the school keep a record of violent incidents that occur in and around the school (including school buses)?
  - Is there a system among teachers for sharing information concerning serious threats or targeted violence?
  - Does the school have effective intervention programs in place to deal with problem behaviors, including bullying?<sup>16</sup>
  - Does the school have a process for receiving and responding to student grievances?
  - Does the school have an up-to-date telephone monitoring system?
  - Are teachers in the schools aware of the warning signs (see Appendix B) of targeted violence?
  - Do troubled students (potential victims and offenders) have a way to express their concerns to appropriate adults such as counselors or designated teachers?
  - Does the school monitor student activities in and out of the classroom, on school buses and at sporting activities?
-



- Does the school have a mechanism for identifying troubled children?
- Does the school work with parents to encourage supervision of student Internet use?

### *Threats*

- How many bomb threats at schools have been made?
- If there is a rash of threats, do some schools report more threats than others?
- If threats are received, are they targeted against any individuals (as in retaliation against bullies, for example) or are they unspecified?
- Does the school have a procedure for evaluating the seriousness of threats?
- When a threat is reported to the police, how serious is the threat and what type is the threat?
- What kinds of threats are received and do they vary according to type or location of school?
- What proportion of threats turn out to be hoaxes or pranks?
- Is there a way for bystanders who hear of threats or observe targeted violence to report such behavior to school authorities?

### *Munitions*

- Are there reports of weapons use by juveniles either in school or elsewhere?
  - Do hardware stores or other retail outlets notify police of unusual purchases of substances that may be used for bomb construction?
  - Are there isolated areas in your locality where juveniles might experiment with bomb detonation?
-



### *Locations/Times*

- Which schools have been the target of bomb threats?
- Does your town have a graffiti problem that indicates problems of racism or other kinds of hatred and does it extend to any schools?
- Are all incidents of arson or school break-ins reported to the police? If not, why not? If so, are they followed up to see if they indicate possible bomb threats or incidents?
- Do incidents of arson, graffiti, school break-ins or bomb threats occur in particular schools or particular areas?
- If targeted violence and threats are reported, in what locations in the schools do they occur? Are there hot spots such as a locker room, a cafeteria, particular bathrooms, a particular classroom?
- Are there particular times of the day or days of the week when bomb threats more commonly occur?

### **Measuring Your Effectiveness**

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them to determine whether they have been effective. All measures should be taken in both the target area and the surrounding area. In most cases you will need to coordinate collection of information with the schools. (For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers.*)

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The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to bomb threats in schools:

- Reduced number of threats received by school authorities during a particular period in response to a specific intervention, such as increased control by school of telephone access.
  - Reduced amount of time school activities are disrupted by bomb threats.
  - Increased willingness of students to report threats they hear about to teachers (though these may not be formally transmitted to police for action).
  - Increased willingness of school officials to share information with police regarding bomb threats.
  - Increased cooperation between schools and police in determining criteria for reporting threats to police, when police will be called to intervene and what their roles will be.
  - Introduction by schools of proven intervention programs targeted at problem behaviors.
  - Reduced time taken to apprehend offenders.
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## **Responses to the Problem of Bomb Threats in Schools**

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: give careful consideration to who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.<sup>17</sup>

### **General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy**

Responses may be divided into two categories: (1) preventive responses aimed at reducing the likelihood of bomb threats and (2) immediate responses to a bomb threat should it occur. Your preventive responses will have a significant impact on how you and the school respond should an actual bomb threat occur. Just as installing

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† There are many resources to guide you in how to develop a law enforcement-school partnership; The most comprehensive is: *Fostering School-Law Enforcement Partnerships* (Atkinson 2002).

†† There are many crisis plans available on the web and elsewhere. The most comprehensive is *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities* published by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (2003).

sprinkler systems in public buildings prepares for a fire that has a low probability of occurring, so establishing a system for dealing with a crisis and managing the public space of the school in a secure way will minimize the impact of a bomb incident should it occur. Many of the responses outlined below are those that the recipients of the bomb threat (most likely school personnel) must implement. Thus, your prime responsibility is to establish a close working relationship with the schools to ensure that they implement the responses that are appropriate for their particular situation. So it is worth repeating: you will be unable to implement many of the responses listed here unless you can cultivate a close and trusting relationship with your local schools and school districts.†

## Specific Responses to Bomb Threats in Schools

### *Prevention and Harm Reduction*

These responses are designed (a) to reduce the impact of a bomb threat should it occur (b) to prevent a bomb threat from happening in the first place and (c) to reduce the probability of a rash of bomb threats occurring.

**1. Developing a bomb threat response plan.** You must work with the school and school district to develop an overall response plan should a bomb threat be received. This plan should also be coordinated or preferably included within a disaster or crisis plan that most likely already exists in your community, and involves police, firefighters, emergency response teams and so on.††

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A bomb threat response plan should fall within the school's, the town's and county's overall crisis plans. It will avoid making serious mistakes<sup>18</sup> and ensure that the response is systematic and avoids panic. The school will need to form a response team whose function will be to formulate the response plan, and, should an incident occur, play designated roles specified in the plan. The school will need your help to form this team and develop the plan because it must be composed of not only selected teachers, school administrators, staff well acquainted with school premises (cleaning and maintenance staff), but also local police, fire and emergency services representatives. (See Appendix C for a detailed listing of questions to ask when you meet with school administrators and teachers to develop the plan.) Do not assume that, because the school district or school has a response plan, this is sufficient. A 2001 survey found that, although the majority of school districts had response plans, less than 40 percent had provided training of more than one day for the response team, and there was little attention to keeping the team and plan up to date.<sup>19</sup> Many districts had not conducted any drills to test the response plan. Considerable training and refresher courses (since there is continual turnover of staff) are needed for members of the response team and others with whom they would have to deal should a crisis occur, particularly in regard to the different roles of the response team members, lines of authority and leadership.<sup>20</sup> The online web course developed by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Domestic Preparedness in conjunction with the Energetic Material Research and Testing Center at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology is an easily accessible and useful training tool. It is offered for free at: <http://respond.emrtc.nmt.edu/campus/>.

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† See the POP Guide on *School Vandalism and Break-ins*.

**2. Developing a threat reporting system.** You should work with the schools in your jurisdiction to agree on what level of threats should be reported to the police. Should every threat that implies an explosive device—even those made obviously in jest—be automatically reported to the police? Reporting a threat to the police sets off a whole series of events that transfers the responsibility for the event from the school to the police and others external to the school, especially should the media become involved. If you have a close and trusted working relationship with each school, you should be able to work out a set of rules for collection of bomb threats and other incidents of violence, and a set of criteria for deciding when such incidents should be reported to the police. That decision will depend on an assessment of the risk posed by the threat. (See box below on risk threat levels.) A distinction should also be made regarding how such information will be put to use. If you are able to develop a research use for these reported incidents, without their reporting to you automatically setting off a full emergency response, for example, open sharing of incidents may be a feasible alternative, leaving it to the police to decide whether immediate intervention is required.

**3. Helping the school conduct a security survey to make it more difficult for intruders to place a bomb.**

A security survey of the school premises should be conducted with an eye toward preventing break-ins and identifying vulnerable areas such as poorly lit parking lots, parking lots too close to the school building, and hard-to-monitor areas.† Take steps to counter vulnerability by installing lighting as necessary, adding fencing to the entire perimeter of the school, installing break-in prevention hardware on doors and windows, removing unnecessary shrubbery or other items where bombs may be hidden,

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and patrolling parking lots.<sup>21</sup> Consider surveillance camera installation in locker areas and other areas that you identify from the security survey that are rarely used or supervised. Clearly, these preventive actions will demand money from a school's usually strained budget. Your help in working with the school board and district supervisors to convince them of the importance of securing the school will be needed.

**4. Controlling access to the school building and premises.** The security survey will identify points of access to the school premises. Advise the school, if necessary, to limit the number of entrances so that access can be monitored more easily, and require all visitors to register at the school's main office. Consider ways to make it easier to identify who does and does not belong in a school. School uniforms make it easier to differentiate students from non-students although they may not be feasible for all schools. Limit vehicle access to campus, or if not possible, situate parking lots far enough away from school buildings that any bomb that explodes inside a vehicle will not harm people in or near the school building.

**5. Monitoring communication into and out of the school and grounds.** As noted, telephones are the most common means of communicating a bomb threat. Make sure that the school administrators are versed in the use of 911 and enhanced 911, if it is available, and that they know how to trace a call using \*69.<sup>†</sup> Of course, school phones should have caller ID available. A quick and easy means of recording incoming phone calls should also be available.<sup>††</sup> Encourage schools to institute a cell phone policy that minimizes their use or even prohibits their use during school time. Schools should monitor use of public

<sup>†</sup> The introduction of call tracing considerably reduced the incidence of obscene phone calls (Clarke 1992). Publicizing its availability on all school phone lines may cause students to think twice before calling in a threat.

<sup>††</sup> On December 20, 2002, Poughkeepsie, New York public schools received two bomb threats called in from local convenience stores; 1200 students and 100 staff were evacuated. Another threat came after Christmas break, which resulted in shutdown of schools in the New Paltz school district. Police worked with schools and local services to develop a better community phone security system. The next time a threat was called in, the voice of the caller was recognized from a recording made by the 911 system and an arrest followed soon after. The New Paltz school districts had experienced a rash of bomb threats in 1999, but since the December 20 incident, no further threats had been received.



phones and consider installation of surveillance cameras. Threats may also be sent by mail, so encourage the school to develop a system for checking and vetting all mail that comes into the school. All written communication should enter the school through one portal. A third means of communicating a threat is via the Internet either by email or posting on a website. School computer use should, of course, be closely monitored and students required to acknowledge and agree to a responsible use statement that, among other things, requires users to affirm that they will not use the computer to send threats, harass, or create and send destructive programs. Websites that incite violent behavior or provide information on bomb construction or weapon use should, of course, be blocked on all school computers. The level of surveillance of students and school activity is a sensitive issue. You will have to work carefully with schools and local community groups to establish a level of surveillance that is politically acceptable and feasible.

**6. Warning and educating students that weapons, contraband, bomb-related materials and bomb threats are prohibited.** Post signs warning that individuals, lockers and vehicles are subject to search. Institute a dress code that prohibits dress that makes it easy to hide weapons or bombs under clothing. If circumstances require, search bags on entry into school or install an electronic device to identify hidden weapons.<sup>22</sup> Communicate to students clear rules of acceptable behavior, and institute an anti-bomb threat program that educates students and teachers on the psychological, social, and economic destruction caused by bomb threats and other targeted violence. Students should be instructed on the law related to bomb threats, even when they are hoaxes.

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† See the POP Guide on *Bullying in Schools* for application of this approach.

Signs should clearly communicate to students the prohibition against and penalties for making bomb threats.

**7. Fostering a positive school climate, free of aggression.** Considerable research has been conducted in the United States and elsewhere on the effectiveness of using a "whole school approach"<sup>23</sup> to reduce acts of violence and aggression.<sup>†</sup> The overall social and moral climate of the school can have significant effects on reducing school violence. Other approaches have also demonstrated a reduction in the amount of school disruption and violence. These include those targeted at anger management, adolescent positive choices, conflict resolution, classroom behavior management, and anti-bullying programs.<sup>24</sup> However, the effectiveness of these approaches varies according to school locality, and they are usually more effective if targeted at high-risk students.<sup>25</sup> Peer mediation and counseling has generally not been found effective in reducing problem behavior. And in the case of drug use, instruction by law enforcement officers concerning the legal penalties and negative effects of drug use have not been found effective.<sup>26</sup> Thus, you will need to research with the school the appropriate type of intervention that fits its needs. The following guidelines are recommended:



† "Triggering events like fights, gang signs and terms, excessive teasing, bullying, extortion of lunch money, and trespassing...can all be precursors to more serious criminal activity like weapons and bomb threats." (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives 2003).

- Get the commitment of the school principal to the necessity of taking the social and moral climate of the school seriously. It is common, for example, for bullying and minor violence to be dismissed as "just a part of growing up."<sup>†</sup>
  - Foster a school climate in which respect for others is tantamount.
  - Treat all violence, even very mild forms (e.g., abusive language, taking a kid's lunch money) as serious. Expanding the definition of violence increases the awareness of its serious effects on children, may reduce tolerance of milder forms of aggression, and may reduce the incidence of serious violence.<sup>27</sup> However, this approach should not be confused with "zero tolerance," which demands swift and rigid punishment for minor acts that may in fact increase the overall level of aggressiveness in a school. Rather, the aim of promoting an expanded definition of violence is to increase awareness and sensitivity to the negative effects of everyday acts of aggression that are often passed off as "normal."
  - Encourage victims of violence to report incidents to their teachers.
  - Establish a school-wide policy that addresses issues of aggression, rumor mongering, harassment, and teasing.
  - Provide guidelines and training for teachers for dealing with specific actions of targeted violence in their classrooms.
  - Establish a system for teachers to report and share information on violent incidents and threats that occur in their classrooms.
  - Establish ways for students to report acts of violence and threats that they witness; make use of student leaders and representatives.
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**8. Identifying troubled children, bullies and victims of targeted violence.** As noted above, school intervention programs that target high-risk students have been found to be most effective. You should work with the school district to develop a training program for teachers on how to identify troubled children and the warning signs (Appendix B) of possible targeted violence.<sup>28</sup> However, note that risks increase if troubled children are grouped together in a single class or room.<sup>29</sup> The idea of identifying troubled children is to sensitize teachers to the warning signs of possible targeted violence when students may carry out their threats or violent fantasies. This is the main goal of the threat assessment approach. Encourage school principals to provide time for teachers to meet in groups to share information concerning troubled children and exchange ideas on classroom management when threats and violence occur.

**9. Reaching out to parents.** Many, if not the majority, of parents are busy working and often not at home when their children return from school. Encourage the school principal to provide useful after-school activities. Research has shown that students who attend after-school programs are less involved in delinquency and violence than those who do not.<sup>30</sup> This is perhaps the most effective way for a school to reach out to parents to show that it understands the pressures and demands that are placed on today's working parents. Schools should:



- Keep parents informed of what is happening at the school through cable TV, websites and letters and brochures sent to the home.<sup>31</sup> Some rules and their enforcement in regard to prevention of school violence may seem arbitrary and even unnecessary to parents, especially if their content and enforcement are communicated to them by their children rather than directly from the school. Understanding and compliance with school rules cannot work well without the cooperation of parents.
- Consider providing programs for suspended or expelled students, since they are at risk and may be unsupervised at home if parents work.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, work with the school to make it a central community resource that local organizations as well as parents come to for a variety of services and recreational activities.<sup>33</sup>

### *Immediate Responses to a Bomb Threat*

These responses are designed to ensure that you and the school respond to a serious bomb threat in a systematic and orderly manner so that panic and miscommunications among police, community services, the school and parents do not occur. Their effectiveness depends heavily, if not totally, on the first nine responses above, which provide the groundwork for the ordered steps of crisis response outlined below. They also help reduce the harm caused by the bomb threat.

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**10. Recording the threat.** As we have noted, threats are communications that are received mostly by telephone, and sometimes by mail or email. In one case, a bomb threat was scrawled on a bathroom wall.<sup>34</sup> The threat is the only information that links the bomb or possible bomb to the offender. It is extremely important to record the exact language of a threat received by telephone, or to preserve the original packaging, envelopes and contents of a threat delivered by mail and not to disturb it in any way. A simple, easy-to-use recording device should be available close to the telephone through which all calls come into the school. There are many forms available that include detailed checklists for recording bomb threats. The form available on the ATF CD on bomb threats is an excellent example.<sup>35</sup> This form should be included as part of the bomb threat response plan toolkit, and individuals who are likely to answer the phone should be familiar with the form and should receive training exercises in what to record, and what to say and not to say to the caller. Similarly, in cases where threats are made in person (such as by a student to a teacher in the classroom) teachers should be practiced and trained to solicit all relevant information, and to record exactly what the student says and his or her accompanying demeanor and physical attitude when making the threat.

**11. Analyzing the threat.** Once the threat is received, the details of the threat must be examined carefully to determine whether the threat is of sufficient seriousness to require immediate response and reporting to the police. This decision should be made easier if the response team (Response 1) has already laid down rules for assessing the level of seriousness of a threat and at what level of seriousness the threat should be reported to the police. The FBI has established a rough guide for ranking threats into three levels of risk.<sup>36</sup>

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### **FBI CLASSIFICATION OF THREAT RISK LEVELS**

***Low Level of Threat: A threat that poses a minimal risk to the victim and public safety.***

- Threat is vague and indirect.
- Information contained within the threat is inconsistent, implausible or lacks detail.
- Threat lacks realism.
- Content of the threat suggests person is unlikely to carry it out.
- Threat is made by young child (under 9 or 10) and there is laughter in the background.
- The caller is definitely known and has called numerous times.

***Medium Level of Threat: A threat that could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic.***

- Threat is more direct and more concrete than a low-level threat.
- Wording in the threat suggests that the threatener has given some thought to how the act will be carried out.
- There may be a general indication of a possible place and time (though these signs still fall well short of a detailed plan).
- There is no strong indication that the threatener has taken preparatory steps, although there may be some veiled reference or ambiguous or inconclusive evidence pointing to that possibility—an allusion to a book or movie that shows the planning of a violent act, or a vague, general statement about the availability of weapons.
- There may be a specific statement seeking to convey that the threat is not empty: "I'm serious!" or "I really mean this!"

***High Level of Threat: A threat that appears to pose an imminent and serious danger to the safety of others.***

- Threat is direct, specific and plausible. For example, "This is John Smith, I'm fed up with Mr. Jones yelling at me. There's a bomb under his desk."
- Threat suggests concrete steps have been taken toward carrying it out, for example, statements indicating that the threatener has acquired or practiced with a weapon or has had the intended victim under surveillance.

Source: Adapted from O'Toole (n.d.)



**12. Evacuating the school.** The assessment of the seriousness of the bomb threat will help decide whether to conduct a search, what kind of search to conduct and whether an evacuation or partial evacuation is necessary.<sup>†</sup> Of course, if an evacuation is contemplated, a search of the evacuation route and holding areas is necessary prior to ordering the evacuation. The decision should be considered by the bomb threat response team, but the final decision will be the responsibility of the school principal or school district superintendent, after consultation with local police and other emergency-related officials—again, depending on the assessment of the seriousness of the bomb threat, and depending on the working relationship you have developed with your schools. While in most cases it is likely that there will be no bomb, and that the motivation of the threatener is probably to cause widespread disruption to the school by calling in a hoax, there is strong pressure to conduct an evacuation even if there is the slightest doubt that a real bomb could be present. It should be noted, however, that evacuation might not necessarily be the safest or even necessary response.<sup>37</sup> In one case, for example, a student called in a threat, expecting an evacuation, and then shot students as they exited the school according to a practiced evacuation plan. In one junior-senior high school in New York in 2001, a rash of bomb threats resulted in the evacuation of the school only twice. Furthermore there is some anecdotal evidence that conducting evacuations for every bomb threat rewards the caller by doing exactly what he wants, and so may increase the incidence of such threats. In any event, the response plan (Response 1) should also have produced an evacuation kit containing basic but important information on such details as bus schedules, phone trees, name tags, bus rosters and routes etc.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>†</sup> The questions you must answer are: "Will it be an overt or covert search?" and "Will it be conducted without evacuation or after evacuation of the area to be searched? Regardless of the extent of the evacuation, a search is almost always advisable" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). It should be noted, however, that evacuation may not necessarily be the appropriate response and will depend on local circumstances. In one junior-senior high school in New York in 2001, a rash of bomb threats resulted in the evacuation of the school only twice (School Board News (2001).



**13. Locating a bomb.** If the school has already attended to the importance of maintaining the physical security of the school and its surroundings (Response 3), the search procedure will be much more efficient.<sup>39</sup> The response team should have assembled all available plans of the school and a search protocol during its development of the response plan. There are various search techniques and procedures that may be followed, such as two-person searching, order of rooms to be searched, whether special equipment or explosives experts are required, etc. Your response plan should have reviewed such procedures and adapted them to its own plan. A search completion checklist is also of considerable use.

**14. Talking to the media.** Your response plan should have included directions on when to call the media to report the incident or threat, who should do it, and preferably who to call in the media. The response team should have included a media representative in developing the plan. It is preferable that parents and relatives of the children be given timely and accurate information. Positive relations with media outlets will make this task much easier to accomplish. As a result of constructing the response plan, training in media relations could be an important undertaking for those individuals who will talk with the media in time of crisis such as a bomb threat.<sup>40</sup>

**15. Following up after the incident.** Whether the consequences of the bomb threat resulted in discovery or even detonation of a bomb, or whether the threat turned out to be just a hoax, you may need to follow up with the school to:

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1. Put the school in touch with the National Organization for Victim Assistance ([www.try-nova.org/](http://www.try-nova.org/)), which provides a wealth of information and access to support groups for victims of many different kinds of violence.
2. Review the bomb threat response plan. After the bomb threat incident is over, the bomb threat response team should meet and review where things went right and where things went wrong and adjust the plan accordingly.

**16. Placing police officers in schools.** Depending on local conditions prevailing in the school and surrounding areas, placing police in schools on a permanent or regular basis may be appropriate. However this should be done as part of an overall "safer schools" approach, in which police work with the schools and local communities to reduce violence and the climate of violence in the school's neighborhoods and communities.<sup>41</sup> If police are perceived by both teachers and students as the major school disciplinarians, this shifts responsibility to the police and inadvertently undermines school officials' authority and control.<sup>42</sup> Some research has suggested that the introduction of police into a school may signal over-reliance on police intervention and may in fact increase levels of student disruption.<sup>43</sup> Thus, this action should not be taken without extensive preparation and dialog between the police department and the appropriate school authorities.



### **Response with Limited Effectiveness**

**17. Implementing zero tolerance.** Some states have legislated mandatory laws that, for example, require "suspension for 365 calendar days any student who makes a false bomb threat...".<sup>44</sup> There are no research data to support the effectiveness of suspension (either long or short term) or other drastic punishments that are often implemented in the name of zero tolerance, in reducing student disruption or school violence. However, there is research that links suspension to a higher dropout rate.<sup>45</sup> A zero-tolerance policy may also contribute to an excessively authoritarian climate, which may actually provoke violence in schools.





## Appendix A: Summary of Responses to Bomb Threats in Schools

The table below summarizes the responses to bomb threats in schools, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. *The first nine responses are aimed at preventing the initial occurrence of a bomb threat or rash of bomb threats in schools. Your effectiveness in implementing these responses will affect considerably the extent of harm resulting from an actual bomb threat and the efficiency and effectiveness of your response and the school's response (Responses 10-15) to the threat.*

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Prevention and Harm Reduction</i>					
1.	22	Developing a bomb threat response plan	Response plan reduces confusion should a threat occur and identifies points of early intervention	...the bomb response plan is coordinated with the school's and community's overall disaster response plan	Requires collaboration with local emergency response teams, such as police, firefighters and EMS services
2.	24	Developing a threat reporting system	Identifies possible warning signs and communicates that violence or threats of violence are not tolerated	...you have a close and trusted working relationship with the school	Data collected may be used for policing research as well as indicating when immediate police intervention is required



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
3.	24	Helping the school conduct a security survey	Identifies points of vulnerability for placement of bombs or break-ins	...it is followed up with specific recommendations for improving security, such as installation of appropriate lighting, placement of parking lots etc.	Your help will be needed by the school to convince the school board and district supervisor that the expense of upgrading security is justified
4.	25	Controlling access to the school building and premises	Makes it more difficult for would-be bombers to enter school	...the school involves the parents and students in implementing these changes	Some changes may be unpopular for legal, moral or political reasons
5.	25	Monitoring communication into and out of the school and grounds	Increases chance of identifying possible sources of threats	...the school installs secure phone system, restricts cell phone use, monitors public phone use and Internet activity	Incoming email is difficult to control; regular mail must be inspected in case of letter bombs or threats by mail
6.	26	Warning and educating students that weapons, contraband, bomb-related materials and bomb threats are prohibited	Students learn that there are clear rules and laws against bomb threats that the school takes seriously	...the school communicates clearly by its policies and actions that contraband, weapons, and explosives are prohibited from school grounds and that bomb threats have very serious consequences	Searches may be legally challenged; collaboration of parents and school board is essential in establishing these procedures. Instruction by law enforcement officers may not be an effective method



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
7.	27	Fostering a positive school climate, free of aggression	A safe and secure social and moral climate works against violence including bomb threats	...you get the total commitment of school principal to the whole-school approach	Dealing with milder forms of aggression may help reduce or prevent the incidence of serious violence; some methods of intervention such as peer mediation are not effective
8.	29	Identifying troubled children, bullies and victims of targeted violence	Threat assessment training for teachers may help identify possible warning signs of bomb threats	...principal provides time for teachers to meet together and share information	Requires principal's commitment to threat assessment approach, and time away from the classroom for teachers
9.	29	Reaching out to parents	Parent cooperation helps to enforce rules and identify problems in advance	...schools make their facilities available for after-school activities and other community events where parents are involved	Rules aimed at preventing bomb threats and violence may appear unnecessary or excessive to parents; their involvement in understanding the rationale of such rules is essential
<i>Immediate Responses to a Bomb Threat</i>					
10.	31	Recording the threat	Response team, formed in Response 1, implements bomb threat response plan	...all procedures in considerable detail with forms and checklists are already provided	Recording exact details of threat is crucial

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Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
11.	31	Analyzing the threat	Seriousness of the threat is assessed so that appropriate action can be determined	...decisions have already been made by the bomb response team as to what level of threat warrants reporting to police or other type of response	Depends entirely on Response 1
12.	33	Evacuating the school	Decision is made whether to evacuate the school according to seriousness of the threat and local circumstances	...decision-making procedure and responsibility for making decision has been worked out before hand in the response plan	Requires school practice of evacuation routes, toolkit for identifying and tracking students, contacting parents etc., all of which would have been worked out in Response 1
13.	34	Locating a bomb	Response team conducts a search using procedures and materials provided by Response 1	...those searching are very familiar with the plan and school premises	Can be greatly enhanced if preparations for bomb search were made in Response 1
14.	34	Talking to the media	Positive media relations are established to ensure smooth and accurate communication to parents and community	...an individual of the response team (Response 1) is the designated media spokesperson and is trained in media relations	Individuals with media training may not be available in which case a press conference is called and a written statement made, in order to maintain better control over information
15.	34	Following up after the incident	Help the school provide support for those who have been traumatized by the incident	...you contact the National Organization for Victim Assistance	The response plan should be reviewed and adjusted where necessary



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
16.	35	Placing police officers in schools	Police conduct sessions on gang avoidance, conflict resolution, violence reduction	...done within a broader safer schools program, including extensive dialog with school authorities	There is a danger that police may be looked to as the disciplinarians thus shifting responsibility for the problem away from the school
<i>Response With Limited Effectiveness</i>					
17.	36	Implementing zero-tolerance	Student is immediately removed from school		Removing the student does not remove the threat, as threats are commonly called in by students who have a grudge, who may be on suspension or have dropped out





## **Appendix B: Warning Signs of Potential School Violence**

NOTE: These signs have been extracted from a variety of sources<sup>46</sup> and do not represent a scientific assessment, and should be regarded as speculative.

- Has engaged in violent behavior in the past.
  - Has tantrums and uncontrollable angry outbursts abnormal for someone that age.
  - Continues exhibiting antisocial behaviors that began at an early age.
  - Forms and/or maintains friendships with others who have repeatedly engaged in problem behaviors.
  - Often engages in name calling, cursing, or abusive language.
  - Has brought a weapon or has threatened to bring a weapon to school.
  - Consistently makes violent threats when angry.
  - Has a substance abuse problem.
  - Is frequently truant or has been suspended from school on multiple occasions.
  - Seems preoccupied with weapons or violence, especially associated more with killing humans than with target practice or hunting.
  - Has few or no close friends despite having lived in the area for some time.
  - Has a sudden decrease in academic performance and/or interest in school activities.
  - Is abusive to animals.
  - Has too little parental supervision given the student's age and level of maturity.
  - Has been a victim of abuse or been neglected by parents/guardians.
  - Has repeatedly witnessed domestic abuse or other forms of violence.
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- Has experienced trauma or loss in their home or community.
  - Pays no attention to the feelings or rights of others.
  - Intimidates others.
  - Has been a victim of intimidation by others.
  - Dwells on perceived slights, rejection, or mistreatment by others; blames others for his/her problems and appears vengeful.
  - Seems to be preoccupied with TV shows, movies, video games, reading materials, or music that express violence.
  - Reflects excessive anger in writing projects.
  - Is involved in a gang or antisocial group.
  - Seems depressed/withdrawn or has exhibited severe mood or behavioral swings, which appear greater in magnitude, duration, or frequency than those typically experienced by students that age.
  - Expresses sadistic, violent, prejudicial, or intolerant attitudes.
  - Has threatened or actually attempted suicide or acts of unfashionable self-mutilation.
-





## **Appendix C: Questions to Ask When Coordinating the Bomb Threat Response Team**

(Source: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives 2003)

### **Police**

- When should the police be called?
  - When will police respond?
  - Who will be sent?
  - What is the police department's role at the scene?
  - What is the school's place in the incident command structure?
  - What information, materials and participation will the bomb squad require from school administrators?
  - Where does evacuation decision-making power lie, with police or with the principal?
  - Will police participate in searches and if so, when and how?
  - When will an explosives detection canine be involved?
  - Under what circumstances will police assume command of the scene?
  - When do police relinquish command of the scene?
  - Will police assist with evacuation and relocation of students and how?
  - When will police declare the "all clear"?
  - Who makes the decision to re-occupy the facility, police, the principal, or someone else?
  - Who conducts follow-up investigation of bomb threats and how is the investigation conducted?
  - What role will police have in the prevention of bomb threats?
  - How can police assist in "hardening the target"?
-



## **Fire**

- When should the fire department be called?
- When will the fire department respond?
- Who will be sent?
- What is the fire department's role at the scene?
- What information, materials and participation will the bomb squad require from school administrators?
- Will the fire department participate in searches and if so, when and how?
- Under what circumstances will the fire department assume command of the scene?
- When will the fire department relinquish command of the scene?
- Will the fire department assist with evacuation and relocation of students and how?
- When will the fire department declare the "all clear"?
- What role will the fire department have in the prevention of bomb threats?

## **Bomb Squad (also may include Explosives Detection Canine Unit)**

- Who makes the request for the bomb squad?
  - When will the bomb squad respond?
  - Who will be sent?
  - What is the role of the bomb squad at the scene?
  - What information, materials and participation will the bomb squad require from school administrators?
  - Will the bomb squad participate in searches and if so, when and how?
  - What general procedures does the bomb squad use when dealing with a suspicious item?
  - When will an explosives detection canine be involved?
-



- Under what circumstances will the bomb squad assume command of the scene?
- When will the bomb squad relinquish command of the scene?
- What role will the bomb squad have in the prevention of bomb threats?

### **EMS**

- When should EMS be called?
- When will EMS respond?
- Who will be sent?
- What is the role of EMS at the scene?

### **ATF**

- Under what circumstances should ATF be involved?
  - Who makes the request for ATF?
  - Who will be sent by ATF?
  - What is the role of ATF at the scene?
  - What information, materials and participation will ATF require from school administrators?
  - Will ATF participate in searches and if so, when and how?
  - Under what circumstances will ATF assume command of the scene?
  - How does ATF work with law enforcement and the fire department?
  - When will ATF relinquish command of the scene?
  - What role will ATF have in the prevention of bomb threats?
-



### **Local Emergency Management Office**

- When will local emergency management be involved?
- What role will local emergency management take?
- What resources does local emergency management have?
- How will local emergency management respond when called?



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (2003).
  - <sup>2</sup> School Board News (2001).
  - <sup>3</sup> National School Safety and Security Services (n.d.).
  - <sup>4</sup> South Carolina Department of Education (2000).
  - <sup>5</sup> Kiesewetter (1999).
  - <sup>6</sup> McCann (2002).
  - <sup>7</sup> Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (2003).
  - <sup>8</sup> Tunkel (2002).
  - <sup>9</sup> McCann (2002).
  - <sup>10</sup> Gaughan, Cerio and Myers (2001).
  - <sup>11</sup> Vossekuil et al. (2002).
  - <sup>12</sup> Meloy and McEllistrem (1998).
  - <sup>13</sup> O'Toole (n.d.).
  - <sup>14</sup> Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (2003).
  - <sup>15</sup> Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (2003).
  - <sup>16</sup> Wilson, Gottfredson and Najaka (2001).
  - <sup>17</sup> Atkinson (2002); International Association of Chiefs of Police (1999); Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (n.d.).
  - <sup>18</sup> Cornell and Sheras (1998).
  - <sup>19</sup> Smith et al. (2001).
  - <sup>20</sup> Schonfeld et al. (1994).
  - <sup>21</sup> See Schneider (2002) for a comprehensive guide on safeguarding school facilities.
  - <sup>22</sup> Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (2003).
  - <sup>23</sup> Olweus (1978); Olweus (1992); Olweus and Limber (1999).
  - <sup>24</sup> Petersen, Larson and Skiba (2001).
-



- <sup>25</sup> Wilson, Gottfredson and Najaka (2001).; Gottfredson (1997).
- <sup>26</sup> Gottfredson (1997).
- <sup>27</sup> Astor (1998).
- <sup>28</sup> Reddy et al. (2001); Fein and Vossekuil (1998); Vossekuil et al. (2002).
- <sup>29</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (1999).
- <sup>30</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (1999).
- <sup>31</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (1999).
- <sup>32</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (1999).
- <sup>33</sup> See Adelman and Taylor (2002) for a comprehensive guide.
- <sup>34</sup> School Board News (2001).
- <sup>35</sup> Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (2003).
- <sup>36</sup> O'Toole (n.d.).
- <sup>37</sup> School Board News (2001).
- <sup>38</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (1999).
- <sup>39</sup> Higgins (1996).
- <sup>40</sup> Higgins (1996).
- <sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of Education (2000).
- <sup>42</sup> Atkinson (2002), p.21.
- <sup>43</sup> Poland (1994); Mayer and Leone (1999); Petersen and Straub (1992).
- <sup>44</sup> North Carolina Safe Schools (n.d.).
- <sup>45</sup> Petersen, Larson and Skiba (2001).
- <sup>46</sup> See International Association of Chiefs of Police (1999).
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Graeme R. Newman is a distinguished teaching professor at the School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany, State University of New York. He has published works in the fields of the history and philosophy of punishment, comparative criminal justice, private security, situational crime prevention, and ecommerce crime, and has written commercial software. He was the CEO of a publishing company for 15 years and, in 1990, established the United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network. Among the books he has written or edited are *Superhighway Robbery: Preventing Ecommerce Crime* (with Ronald V. Clarke), and *Rational Choice and Situational Crime Prevention* (with Ronald V. Clarke and Shlomo Shoham).

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## Recommended Readings

- ***A Police Guide to Surveying Citizens and Their Environments***, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993. This guide offers a practical introduction for police practitioners to two types of surveys that police find useful: surveying public opinion and surveying the physical environment. It provides guidance on whether and how to conduct cost-effective surveys.
  - ***Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers***, by John E. Eck (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001). This guide is a companion to the *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* series. It provides basic guidance to measuring and assessing problem-oriented policing efforts.
  - ***Conducting Community Surveys***, by Deborah Weisel (Bureau of Justice Statistics and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1999). This guide, along with accompanying computer software, provides practical, basic pointers for police in conducting community surveys. The document is also available at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs).
  - ***Crime Prevention Studies***, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Criminal Justice Press, 1993, et seq.). This is a series of volumes of applied and theoretical research on reducing opportunities for crime. Many chapters are evaluations of initiatives to reduce specific crime and disorder problems.
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- ***Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing: The 1999 Herman Goldstein Award Winners.*** This document produced by the National Institute of Justice in collaboration with the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Police Executive Research Forum provides detailed reports of the best submissions to the annual award program that recognizes exemplary problem-oriented responses to various community problems. A similar publication is available for the award winners from subsequent years. The documents are also available at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij).
  - ***Not Rocket Science? Problem-Solving and Crime Reduction,*** by Tim Read and Nick Tilley (Home Office Crime Reduction Research Series, 2000). Identifies and describes the factors that make problem-solving effective or ineffective as it is being practiced in police forces in England and Wales.
  - ***Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention,*** by Marcus Felson and Ronald V. Clarke (Home Office Police Research Series, Paper No. 98, 1998). Explains how crime theories such as routine activity theory, rational choice theory and crime pattern theory have practical implications for the police in their efforts to prevent crime.
  - ***Problem Analysis in Policing,*** by Rachel Boba (Police Foundation, 2003). Introduces and defines problem analysis and provides guidance on how problem analysis can be integrated and institutionalized into modern policing practices.
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- ***Problem-Oriented Policing***, by Herman Goldstein (McGraw-Hill, 1990, and Temple University Press, 1990). Explains the principles and methods of problem-oriented policing, provides examples of it in practice, and discusses how a police agency can implement the concept.
  - ***Problem-Oriented Policing and Crime Prevention***, by Anthony A. Braga (Criminal Justice Press, 2003). Provides a thorough review of significant policing research about problem places, high-activity offenders, and repeat victims, with a focus on the applicability of those findings to problem-oriented policing. Explains how police departments can facilitate problem-oriented policing by improving crime analysis, measuring performance, and securing productive partnerships.
  - ***Problem-Oriented Policing: Reflections on the First 20 Years***, by Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000). Describes how the most critical elements of Herman Goldstein's problem-oriented policing model have developed in practice over its 20-year history, and proposes future directions for problem-oriented policing. The report is also available at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).
  - ***Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News***, by John E. Eck and William Spelman (Police Executive Research Forum, 1987). Explains the rationale behind problem-oriented policing and the problem-solving process, and provides examples of effective problem-solving in one agency.
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- ***Problem-Solving Tips: A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships*** by Karin Schmerler, Matt Perkins, Scott Phillips, Tammy Rinehart and Meg Townsend. (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1998) (also available at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)). Provides a brief introduction to problem-solving, basic information on the SARA model and detailed suggestions about the problem-solving process.
  - ***Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies***, Second Edition, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Harrow and Heston, 1997). Explains the principles and methods of situational crime prevention, and presents over 20 case studies of effective crime prevention initiatives.
  - ***Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems: Case Studies in Problem-Solving***, by Rana Sampson and Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000) (also available at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)). Presents case studies of effective police problem-solving on 18 types of crime and disorder problems.
  - ***Using Analysis for Problem-Solving: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement***, by Timothy S. Bynum (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001). Provides an introduction for police to analyzing problems within the context of problem-oriented policing.
  - ***Using Research: A Primer for Law Enforcement Managers***, Second Edition, by John E. Eck and Nancy G. LaVigne (Police Executive Research Forum, 1994). Explains many of the basics of research as it applies to police management and problem-solving.
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- **Using Analysis for Problem-Solving: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement.** Timothy S. Bynum.
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