

Published on *Security Management* (<http://www.securitymanagement.com>)

**A Campus Response to Crisis**

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Print Edition Only:

No

Weight:

0

Beyond Print?:

No

Teaser:

A campus response team implements important parts of the violence prevention plan, such as disseminating clear policies, promoting threat awareness, providing rapid response, and aiding in recovery.

One typical sunny afternoon in south Florida in 2013, a man entered the administration building of a private university. The man walked straight by the receptionist, announcing the name of the university employee he came to see and emphatically stating that the woman was his wife. The receptionist was concerned by the man’s demeanor. She noted that he was not wearing an employee ID and had not stopped to obtain a visitor’s badge. The receptionist called security and told them the employee’s name. Security contacted the employee, who informed them that she was in the midst of a divorce and that her husband was both verbally and physically abusive. Security called the police.

For many universities, the story would end there. But security’s second call was to the university’s Campus Response Team (CRT). The team was notified by radio and all team members in the administration building placed the facility in lockdown until the campus was cleared by security and by the police. After the police arrived, they escorted the man from university property without incident.

The entire CRT met immediately after the incident to formulate an action plan. The plan included partnering with security and police for extra patrols around the administration building. The CRT disseminated the husband’s photo and description to all reception areas and security personnel. A trespass warning was posted on campus to warn staff and students that the man was banned from campus property. The CRT provided extra safety measures to the university employee, including a panic button alarm, a parking space close to her workplace entrance, and a security escort to and from her car. The employee was also referred to counseling and support services, as well as to a community-based support program. The CRT followed up with the employee at regular intervals to determine whether more assistance was required. After these interventions, the employee obtained a legal no-contact order against her estranged husband, and she has not required additional university support since.

This type of incident, which threatens the safety and security of a campus, occurs almost daily at the more than 4,100 colleges and universities in the United States. To be prepared for these emergencies, respond correctly, and recover quickly, the university developed a security and safety plan that includes players from local emergency services, contract campus security officers, and staff and faculty of the university. Well-trained players from law enforcement, fire and rescue, and campus security are commonplace in academic settings. What makes this safety model special is the addition of existing professionals drawn from staff and faculty that comprise the CRT. This combined relationship has proven to make the university environment safer and has been cost effective.

The CRT also helps the university comply with federal laws. For example, the team improves campus compliance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act. The team also helps the campus embrace the concepts of the National Incident Management System, which helps agencies work together in crisis management. The team is proactive, pragmatic, cost-effective, and an extension of the overall educational mission.

The CRT is an integral part of the campus violence prevention program. The CRT implements important parts of the violence prevention plan, such as disseminating clear policies, promoting threat awareness, providing rapid response, and aiding in recovery.

**TEAM MEMBERS**

It is important to note that the CRT is not designed to replace the existing campus law enforcement or security presence, but to assist and enhance their ability to keep the campus safe and secure. The CRT is available to receive reports of potential violence from students, staff, and faculty. They are trained to respond when violence does occur to minimize the effect of a violent attack until the arrival of first responders. CRT members are not trained to confront aggressors; however, they are trained in campus protective measures such as assessing potential problems, calling emergency services, communicating via the radio to other CRT members, and directing campus lockdowns, emergency evacuations, and emergency drills.

The CRT is typically composed of 10 to 20 campus volunteers, depending on the size and layout of the campus, who come together to address incidents and threats to campus safety. CRT members have an interest in campus safety, have a feeling of ownership of the institution, and have a skill set that allows them to help maintain a safe campus environment. Often the CRT will include subject matter experts from the campus, such as professors of emergency management, criminal justice, psychology, or medicine, along with individuals who have previously worked in a related field. For example, some members have police, fire, nursing, counseling, or military experience. Other members may be laypersons that volunteer to be on the team because of an interest in campus safety or to improve their own skills in team building and emergency response. A liaison from the campus security force is also assigned to the team. One of the major advantages of the CRT is that it harnesses a broad scope of the best and brightest minds from the campus that can come together to discuss pending issues, assess threats, or respond to actual events until the arrival of first responders. All members of the CRT have an interest in the safety, security, and well being of campus staff and students.

Regularly scheduled meetings and training sessions allow CRT members to keep up to date on campus safety, physical security, and special events. The team also participates in simulated responses to real-life scenarios.

It is important that other campus personnel and the student population know who the CRT members are and that the CRT members are readily identifiable and are immediately accessible. To ensure the CRT is visible on campus, the team concept is discussed during student, employee, and faculty orientation and CRT members often attend student and faculty meetings to present safety briefings and discuss safety and security issues. In addition, team members are readily identifiable by a red lanyard with white “CRT” letters and a “CRT” identification badge that is affixed to the lanyard worn around the neck.

**POLICIES**

The CRT members are well versed in the campus violence prevention policy. This policy clearly states the institution’s stance on violence prevention and discusses every aspect of the issue. For example, violence is defined as classroom disruptiveness, bullying, physical violence, threats, dating violence, or stalking. These policies are provided to the student body and understood by all parties within the campus environment. The policies are accompanied by the penalties and discipline that offenders should expect if violations occur.

The policies and procedures are designed to minimize access to the campus by intruders and unwanted persons. For example, students and employees must display IDs while on campus property, and vehicle identification placards must be visible at all times.

Additionally, other target hardening methods are employed by the university, including limiting points of access to campus buildings and requiring all visitors to check in at reception and display visitor identification badges while on campus property. Locks that can be engaged from the inside are present on all offices and classrooms. As part of the security program, interior classroom windows are required to have the window blinds open during classroom hours. This “always open” window rule allows staff and security to easily perform classroom safety checks.

Security officers are required to patrol the buildings and grounds at differing times so that patrol times do not become routine or predictable. If a potential threat is identified by the CRT, other security methods may be employed to provide additional protection. For example, if a threat against a specific class or instructor is suspected, security might place a panic button alarm in the classroom, move the class meeting location to a room closer to security, or increase monitoring of the classroom or office by security or administration. Specific parking spaces in proximity to secure entrances and security escorts may also be made available to staff or students upon request.

**AWARENESS**

The CRT model also stresses threat awareness on campus. This is important in an educational environment where there are typically large groups of people in close or even semi-confined quarters such as a classrooms, auditoriums, and sporting events. The CRT is critical in helping students, staff, and faculty remain vigilant and provide an avenue to report any suspicious or threatening activity. It is important that the CRT and campus security foster a relationship with the students and campus staff that is open, approachable, and responsive. To do this, the CRT has developed a protocol for responding to reports of potential issues or problems. When a threat or suspicious activity is reported to the CRT or other safety authorities, the team will meet, address the issue, and develop a response or action plan. A CRT member will contact the reporting party to let him or her know that the complaint was taken seriously and thoroughly investigated. If possible, the reporting party is advised of the outcome of the investigation.

**TRAINING**

Every security incident has distinct elements. By training for different scenarios and meeting to discuss safety threats, the CRT can be more prepared to respond when a threat occurs. Each team trains a minimum of once each year with the campus director of safety and security. Examples of training topics include “CRT Concepts and Basic Procedures,” “Emergency Communication Methods,” and “Prevention and Response to Workplace and Campus Violence.” This training typically includes classroom lecture, scenario-based practical drills, discussion, and feedback. This training is documented and maintained by the university for review and Clery Act compliance purposes.

In addition to this training, each individual campus CRT and its members are required to meet monthly for training and to discuss safety and security updates and issues. Meetings usually include training, dissemination of pertinent information, and discussion of potential safety issues or violations. The CRT meeting also provides a forum for members to share their specialized knowledge with other members such as proper radio procedures, hurricane and storm preparation, first aid skills, and communicating effectively with stressed or depressed individuals. Throughout the year, each CRT will also perform live training scenarios such as campus lockdowns, fire drills, bomb threats, and other emergency responses. Minutes are recorded at each meeting and are submitted to the director of safety and security so that proper documentation is maintained.

**RESPONSE**

Typically an incident that is already discussed in university policy such as a fire alarm or intruder on campus would proceed in a predetermined fashion. CRT members would call 911, notify security, evacuate, or lock down—depending on the threat—and return to normal after first responders secure the scene. When unusual incidents or threats arise, the CRT truly shines. In these cases, 911 is called, the campus is secured until emergency responders arrive, and the team assists the first responders. After the incident, the team will meet to debrief and discuss how to prevent this type of problem in the future and make suggestions for appropriate responses and potential policies.

The CRT is at its strongest when proactively meeting to discuss potential issues and preventing future problems. This allows the team to formulate an action plan. These plans often include engaging the combined services of the CRT, campus security, reception, and other affected university employees. The CRT will often recommend that additional safety precautions be employed such as increasing security officer presence, requesting extra patrols or services from local law enforcement, limiting access to certain buildings, and providing extra services such as the panic button alarms, special parking, or security escorts mentioned earlier. The CRT may also request that student services provide counseling and community assistance information to those in need of such services.

Different CRT members may take the lead depending on the nature of the action plan. For example, while being counseled for poor attendance and failing grades, a student commented to his professor that he was having personal problems outside of school that included “girlfriend problems and money issues” and that he wasn’t “able to focus on anything lately.” He told the professor that “maybe he would be better off dead.” The professor immediately brought this to the attention of a CRT member. The CRT met and formulated an action plan that included the campus president, student services, and the university student outreach counselor. The student was directed to counseling and other community-based services. The student continued to be monitored by the student outreach counselor and is now doing well at home and in school.

Often times the CRT will convene and respond to reports of safety violations, potential conflicts, or even physical security issues such as fire hazards, unauthorized entries, or upcoming special events. It is important that the CRT work in concert and not separately from the campus police or security authority. An example of the CRT working with local law enforcement is when the team assists the police by disseminating crime prevention information on campus or collaborating with the local police, campus security personnel, and campus staff by developing a security plan to be used when the campus hosts a special event.
 **RECOVERY**

Just as important as preparation, training, and response is the recovery process. After an event or incident, the CRT will meet and hold a debriefing. The CRT discusses the effect of the incident and whether the campus community will have difficulty returning to normal operations. The team also addresses what resources may be required for continued response and what support the CRT can give to first responders. The discussion also includes any challenges confronting the organization of the CRT and what lessons can be learned from the event. For example, after a large campus graduation ceremony was held, the CRT debrief included recommendations for additional security, locations where security officers were most needed, and the addition of an emergency command post for future similar events.

One of the most pressing issues confronting academic security professionals is how to provide the safest campus environment and still be fiscally responsible. As public safety and security resources become more limited, it is necessary for institutions to reach out to volunteers to develop cost-effective and innovative techniques to improve campus safety. The CRT finds strength in the fact that it combines the knowledge, commitment, and perseverance from those professionals who are already committed to the institution and to demonstrating the effectiveness of the CRT and are willing to commit even more.

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