Security Plans for Houses of Worship

Where to Start?

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Developing a security plan for your house of worship can be a daunting task. This article will break down the first few steps to get you started and provide resources to assist your planning efforts; making it a little easier to identify your security priorities and corresponding mitigation measures. As a place to start, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) developed the *Mitigating Attacks on Houses of Worship Security Guide* which provides an analysis of ten years of targeted attacks against houses of worship and potential risk mitigation solutions designed to achieve a robust and layered approach to physical and cyber security. This guide provides an easy-to-follow security framework and includes security considerations for daycare, schools, and online safety. You can find a wealth of security capacity building resources including the resources in this article on CISA's Faith-Based Organizations – Houses of Worship web presence.

Establish Roles and Responsibilities

Establishing roles and responsibilities is the first step in developing a security plan for houses of worship. Identify who will be the Security Coordinator, the person responsible for implementing the security strategy and in charge of the security program. Identify the Security Planning Team – members of the congregation who will inform and develop the security plan. Individuals with different professional backgrounds in security, emergency management, mental health, education, information technology, insurance, and other areas can help inform the planning process and provide valuable perspectives when conducting the assessment.

Vulnerability Assessments

The Security Planning Team should conduct a vulnerability assessment under the guidance of the Security Coordinator to identify the vulnerabilities of the congregation and house of worship and then develops a plan to address them. CISA developed a baseline security self-assessment that is designed to assist non-security personnel through the assessment process with the *Houses of Worship Security Self-Assessment Tool*. There is also an example vulnerability assessment in the *Mitigating Attacks on Houses of Worship Security Guide*.

Part of the vulnerability assessment is understanding the risk to the facility from a national and local perspective. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) National Terrorism Advisory System bulletin communicates updated information on the terrorist threat to the United States and is updated regularly. Houses of worship should also consider connecting with their local law enforcement and DHS Fusion Center for information sharing and updated threats in their area.

Develop a Security Plan

Based on potential threats and results of the vulnerability assessment, houses of worship can begin developing plans to mitigate the identified vulnerabilities with physical and cyber security measures. There are many resources for making a family plan for a disaster, an emergency response plan, and business continuity plan. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has a *Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship* and CISA offers an *Emergency Action Plan* template with video and user guide. You may use these guides to document the processes that personnel/volunteers should take to enhance security before and respond following an incident. Exercise the plans to build muscle memory – CISA developed the *CISA Tabletop Exercise Package for Faith-Based Organizations* with two exercise situation manuals and news videos to facilitate the exercises.

Soft Skills

As the vulnerability assessments and security plans are revisited every year, the Security Coordinator should consider augmenting security beyond traditional protective measures by positioning personnel and volunteers to be able to identify potential suspicious behavior and to take appropriate action to thwart a potential attack. CISA offers several resources to build a congregation's soft skills with the *Power of Hello for Houses of Worship* which helps congregants with identifying and effectively responding to suspicious behavior by suggesting questions to consider when navigating the threat. The *Power of Hello* placemat is translated in 18 different languages.

The *De-Escalation Series* is four products to assist stakeholders in recognizing the warning signs of someone on a path to violence; assess if the situation or person of concern is escalating; de-escalate the situation through purposeful actions; and report the situation through established protocols including 9-1-1 for immediate threats. This series is translated in several languages.

If you need assistance with your vulnerability assessment or security plan, the CISA Protective Security Advisors (PSA) are security subject matter experts located across the country, who provide access to a range of capabilities to identify areas that may be exploited by a nefarious actor and corresponding protective measures, training, exercises, and best practices. If you are not aware of who the PSA for your area is, please email central@cisa.dhs.gov.

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