



PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 004-19

April 30, 2019

Protecting Houses of Worship and Faith-Based Events

Houses of worship and faith-based events are generally viewed as welcoming and peaceful locations where people can gather, reflect, worship, and sponsor social events for the community. Many of these places are also open to the public and have easily accessible schedules for services and events. This welcoming and open nature increases the security risk to houses of worship, regardless of the religion, of being subject to malicious acts.

Experts have assessed that homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) may target faith-based communities for several reasons to include ideological drivers, violent extremist messaging from a foreign or domestic terrorist organization, or hate belief. Further, these individuals know that these locations and organizations are vulnerable targets and an attack can result in mass casualties, substantial psychological impacts, make political statements, and draw extensive media coverage.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships along with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recognize that these venues are vulnerable targets and have coordinated an interagency partnership. The group has established a webpage where faith-based organizations can gather information to better secure their facilities. This webpage can be found at: [Resources to Protect Your House of Worship | FEMA.gov](#). Some of the topics covered:

- *At-A-Glance for Protecting House of Worship Venues*
- *Trauma, Resilience and Stress Management Resources*
- *Webinars*
- *Trainings*
- *Playbooks to test emergency operations plans for six hazards.*

It is important that houses of worship and hosts of faith-based events reach out to local community leaders, law enforcement, emergency medical services (EMS), and other first responders to develop a strong and healthy relationship and emergency response plan. By establishing these relationships, it will improve communication between all levels in the event of an emergency or incident.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Individuals responsible for securing houses of worship or faith-based events should identify and review resources to assist in securing soft targets and open venues, which are locations that are easily accessible to large numbers of people and that have limited security or protective measures in place, making them vulnerable to attack. DHS, National Protection and Programs Directorate, Office of Infrastructure Protection, has made a resource guide available to assist with the [Security of Soft Targets and Crowded Places](#).

Understanding what is suspicious and where to report it is critical. Examples of suspicious behavior may include, but are not limited to: attempted breach or intrusion of a restricted area or protected site; misrepresentation or giving false information; vandalism, sabotage and tampering with part of the facility; attempting to elicit information beyond mere curiosity about the event, security or procedures; testing or probing security; and photography, video, or other surveillance. Additional information can be found at: [Suspicious Activity Reporting: Indicators and Behaviors](#).



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The *See Something, Send Something* smartphone application provides an additional avenue for individuals to report suspicious activity by capturing a photograph or written note and sending the information directly to the Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Intelligence Center (PaCIC). However, it is best that individuals call 9-1-1 during emergency situations. Additionally, the PaCIC maintains a Terrorism Tip Line, 888-292-1919, 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, enabling the public to report suspicious activity to law enforcement at any time.

Houses of worship should consider creating emergency plans for their facilities, as well as provide staff with educational programs and training from the DHS and FEMA websites or from professional first responders. Some communities have worked together collectively and held safety events for houses of worship and have included speakers from the EMS community, DHS personnel, law enforcement, county government, elected officials, among others. The religious communities worked together to provide an informative program for everyone, regardless of belief.

- [Safety for Faith-Based Events and Houses of Worship](#)
- [Guide for Developing High Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship](#)

The Pennsylvania State Police can assist faith-based communities in a variety of ways. The Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources Unit (CIKR), collects and analyzes suspicious activity reporting to identify trends throughout the state and disseminates informative bulletins and alerts based on these trends. Analysts are available to speak at public events or private seminars regarding a variety of topics to include suspicious activity recognition and reporting. For more information regarding the CIKR Unit or if you would like to be added to the listserv to receive bulletins and alerts, please email sp-protectpa@pa.gov.

The Pennsylvania State Police Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Team (RVAT) provides in-depth security vulnerability assessments, along with recommendations to improve the security posture of any facility, public or private, within the commonwealth. The RVAT is comprised of state troopers specifically trained on assessment procedures related to physical security, explosive effects on structural design, threat analysis, and practical target hardening techniques. For additional information or to schedule a Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, contact the PSP RVAT by email at rapsoffdomesticsecurity@pa.gov or the PSP Domestic Security Section at (717) 346-4085.