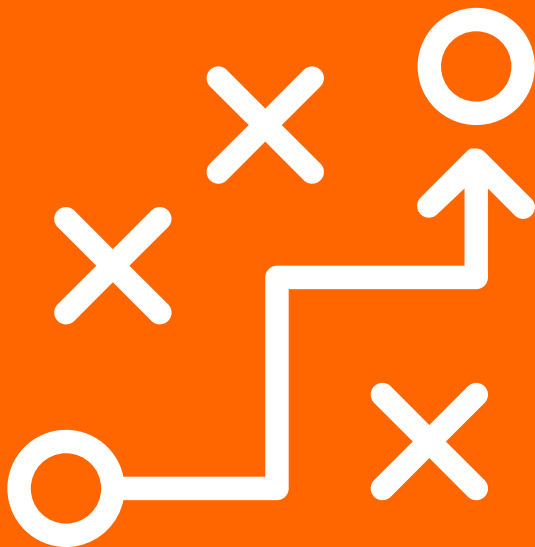
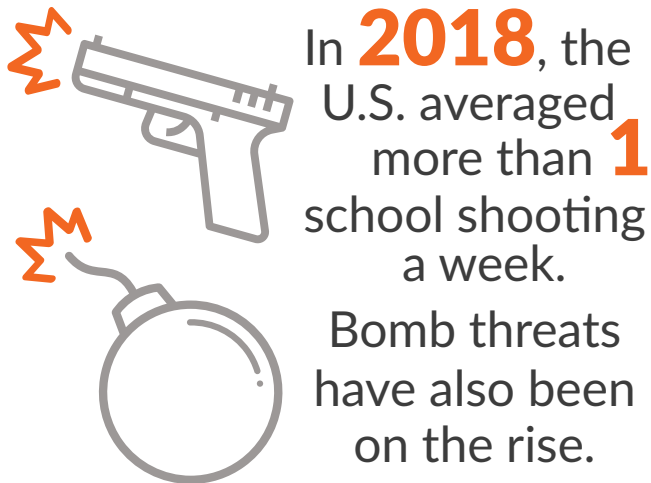


# Guide to Developing an Emergency Lockdown Plan for Schools



Once relatively anomalous, school campus incidents, like active shooters and bomb threats, have become the norm. In 2018, the U.S. averaged more than one school shooting a week<sup>i</sup>. Bomb threats have also been on the rise<sup>ii</sup>. In turn, educational institutions have had to act more like traditional response organizations in order to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and staff.



Schools have been diligent in developing and implementing a diverse array of emergency plans and procedures based on best practices in the field. But though schools usually plan for active shooter scenarios, their efforts often end there<sup>iii</sup>.

Meanwhile, an emergency lockdown plan is a necessary supplement to any school incident plan. Lockdown planning deals with the threat posed by an intruder or an emergency situation, which then prevents the evacuation of students from the building. The plan itself usually lays out multiple steps to isolate students, teachers, and staff via a lockdown.

Since emergency situations are usually so fluid, they present multiple planning challenges, even for veterans. That's why we decided to create a step-by-step, best-practice guide to developing your school's emergency lockdown plan.

## 1 Understand the purpose and scope

Before putting pen to paper on your emergency lockdown plan, it's critical to consider two factors: the plan's purpose and its scope. In other words, lay out what you are trying to accomplish with the lockdown plan and what it will cover.



How to lock all exterior doors, and when it may or may not be safe to do so



What to do when a threat materializes inside the school



How particular classroom and building characteristics (i.e., windows, doors) impact possible lockdown courses of action



When to use the different variations of a lockdown (e.g., when outside activities are curtailed, doors are locked, and visitors are closely monitored, but all other school activities continue as normal)<sup>iv</sup>

So then, what goes in the plan itself? Most plans list out protocols to follow in the event of a campus lockdown, define roles and responsibilities of team members, as well as provide clear action plans for teams to execute.

## 2 Master incident definitions and terminology

Memorizing a bunch of new incident and emergency management terms might seem like a stuffy, academic exercise, but it's extremely important to the development and successful implementation of your plan. Just think about it: in the event of an incident, you'll be collaborating closely with emergency response agencies. Personnel from those agencies all use the language of their field when responding to incidents.

In other words, understanding their vocabulary will help your incident response team to communicate more efficiently and avoid misunderstandings. Important terms like incident, team, role, team member have specific meanings in the emergency management context. Consult your active shooter or bomb threat plan.

Lockdown-related terminology has also proliferated. Lockdown, for one, means the sheltering of people from immediate or threatened danger in a safe and protected indoor location on the school campus and any related facilities, in an orderly manner.








Some plans don't treat all lockdowns as equal though. Instead, they modify terminology based on the severity of the perceived threat. Below you'll find a list of lockdown terms for partial or complete lockdowns:

Partial lockdown	Complete lockdown
Code yellow	Code red
Partial lockdown	Complete lockdown
Modified lockdown	Full lockdown
Soft lockdown	Hard lockdown
Code yellow lockdown	Code red lockdown
Preventative lockdown	Emergency lockdown
External lockdown	Internal lockdown
Lock-out	Lockdown
Lock-in	Lockdown-inside

Source: Graves<sup>v</sup>

## 3 Compile emergency contact lists

When planning for a lockdown, ensure that your incident response team has ready access to contact information for key stakeholders. Those include:

-  Emergency services
-  Local hospital
-  Local emergency information line
-  Local FBI field office
-  Local police department
-  School security
-  Local fire department

That information should be inputted directly (and updated as soon as it changes) into your incident response software and also posted in hard copy inside your crisis command center.

## 4 Develop your communication strategy ahead of time

Here, your lockdown plan should refer to the communication strategies laid out in either the active shooter or bomb threat plan of which it's a part. That source plan will have sketched out your media strategy ahead of time, named the Public Information Officer (PIO), and provided provisions for that person's media training.

It also will have addressed other central points, like the communication methods you'll deploy in the event of an incident (i.e. landline telephone, mobile phones, two-way radio) and which team members are trained to deploy special equipment.

On the whole, it's important to remember that when incident response goes awry, flawed communication is often to blame. So it's pretty imperative to plan your emergency lockdown communication strategy beforehand.

## 5 Select your team. Set their roles and responsibilities.

Again, the incident plan that triggered the Emergency Lockdown plan will have already named the response team and its responsibilities. The lockdown plan, on the other hand, only clarifies the responsibilities of a few additional lockdown-related roles: Chief Warden and Warden. For example, the Warden is tasked with the following:



Assisting people with the lockdown procedures



Moving people to protected areas



Taking attendance of people once relocated to a safe area

## 6 Prepare your response and action plans:

The final step you'll take is preparing your response and action plans. Your response plan designates concrete emergency notification procedures to take once the type of lockdown situation has been confirmed. Common lockdown scenarios include:



A missing student



A police chase in the community near the school



A medical emergency



An intoxicated, aggressive or severely mentally ill person who comes on campus or wanders into the school



A fight or an out-of-control student



A dangerous animal on campus



A phoned-in threat of violence like a bomb threat or threat of a shooting






A non-custodial parent who comes into the school demanding to see their child



Gunshots heard nearby the school campus<sup>vi</sup>

Though the specific faculty or staff member empowered to trigger this procedure will be laid out in team roles and responsibilities, activating the procedure itself will set off a set of clear actions your whole team needs to take. For instance, in the immediate response phase, a school principal or faculty member might be called to do the following:

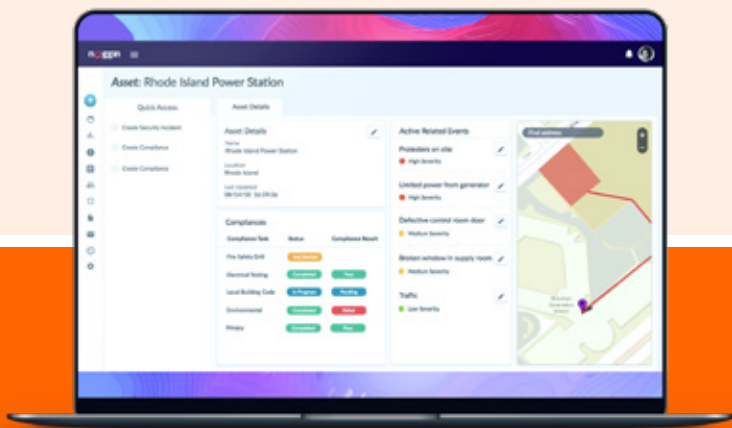
-  Initiate the Emergency Lockdown plan for areas of the campus where it is safe to do so
-  Call emergency services from a telephone and provide all known information about the incident
-  Announce over the PA system that a lockdown is in progress, providing as many details as possible and safe

Preparedness doesn't stop with planning though. Key to any effective lockdown response is training. Your staff will need plenty of practice physically performing your lockdown procedures, including reverse evacuation (or room clearing) protocols, which often come in handy during smaller crises. It's also important to involve public safety agencies (emergency responders, hospitals, emergency management agencies) during planning and training.

Unfortunately, active shootings, bomb threats, and other life-threatening security hazards are a fact of life on school campuses. It now falls to schools and school districts to develop, implement, and test robust emergency lockdown plans to reduce confusion and ensure safety.

### Citations

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- ii Jason Nevel, *The State Journal-Register*: *Study: Bomb threats becoming more frequent at schools.* Available at <http://www.sj-r.com/news/20171005/study-bomb-threats-becoming-more-frequent-at-schools>.
- iii Chris Dorn, *Campus Safety*: *9 Tips for More Effective School Lockdowns.* Available at <https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/safety/9-tips-for-more-effective-school-lockdowns/>.
- iv U.S. Department of Education: *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans.* Available at [https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1922-25045-3850/rem\\_s\\_k\\_12\\_guide.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1922-25045-3850/rem_s_k_12_guide.pdf).
- v Susan M. Graves, *Center for Homeland Defense and Security*: *Lockdown Terminology in K-12 Schools: Why It Is Okay To Use Codes And Which Codes Are Best.* Available at <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=798734>.
- vi *Ibid.*



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