



Lloyd S. Berkett Insurance Agency, Inc.

TEMPLE TOPICS – NEWSLETTER

VIOLENCE ON YOUR PREMISES

On Sunday, May 21, 2006, a gunman walked into a church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, near the end of Sunday morning services. He proceeded to shoot five people at the church before abducting his estranged wife and three children. While the children were eventually released, the woman was later found dead at another location. The pastor was shot during the incident.

Shocking as it may seem, violent incidents of this nature happen several times each year at Temples across the country. Because places of worship are open to the public, Temples have become more vulnerable to these senseless acts of violence. This fact sheet addresses what Temples can do to prepare for, and respond to, violent acts.

The Reality of Violence at your Temple

- While rare, acts of violence do occur.
- Violent acts may include robbery, assault, rape, even attempted murder or murder.
- The majority of violent acts are carried out by people who have a connection to the congregation.
- The most common violent act at Temples, as with schools, is a shooting.
- Often there are pre-cursors or warning signs to the violent act, such as threats or previous outbursts, disputes or confrontations.
- Most Temples are unprepared for a violent event or its aftermath.

Who is at Risk?

- No Temple is immune to the risk of a violent episode occurring.
- Temples of all sizes, locations and resources have experienced acts of violence.

Can a Violent Outburst Be Avoided?

- There is no assurance that a violent episode can be avoided. However, you can be prepared for the possibility of an incident.
- By taking personal responsibility for the safety of your Temple, you will have done the best thing possible to prevent a violent incident from occurring.

How to Make Your Temple Less Vulnerable

- Working with your Temple's Safety and Security Team, designate a point person on security issues to be the Temple security director. Define the responsibilities of that position.
- Develop a Temple security plan and guidelines with defined roles for all staff persons, including greeters, ushers and other frontline workers and volunteers. Your local law enforcement agency may be a resource to you in forming the security plan. Include in the plan a seating location for ushers and/or security personnel (strategically stationed in both the front and the rear of the sanctuary), lockdown procedures for areas of the Temple, crisis communications and an evacuation plan for the building.

- Establish a method for quickly communicating issues of concern, such as a weapon, to appropriate Temple personnel, such as the security director, as well as to authorities. Depending on the size of your Temple, walkie-talkies, two-way radios, pagers and/or cell phones may be appropriate to have on hand.
- Establish a no tolerance policy for fights, altercations, and other disruptions.
- Work with your local law enforcement agency to provide training for staff and frontline workers and volunteers on topics, such as violence identification and security methods.
- Openly discuss issues of concern and learn to defuse problems before they become incidents. Violence intervention training may be appropriate.

A Word About Security Guards

The use of professional or volunteer security guards at Temple has become more commonplace in recent years. Basically, a Temple has two options regarding security guards: (1) maintain its own security guard force or (2) hire a professional security guard service. Considerations for each of these options include:

Own Security Guard Force:

- The Temple is responsible for running background checks and screening all security guard personnel.
- The Temple is responsible for the training and supervision of its security guard personnel.
- The Temple is responsible for ensuring that its security force complies with all licensing and certification requirements that might exist under your state's law.
- The Temple will in most circumstances be liable for the acts of its security guards.
- One option is to hire off-duty active law enforcement officers. An advantage in hiring these individuals is that they will have superior training and experience. However, the Temple must still train these individuals in what their role will be in emergency situations.

Hired Security Guard Force:

- The use of a professional security guard service provides a layer of liability protection for the Temple.
- The Temple still must undertake reasonable precautions in hiring the security service such as checking references and fully understanding the service's screening, training, and supervision procedures.
- The Temple should verify that the security guard company has a license by obtaining a copy.
- The Temple should enter into a written agreement with the security guard service in which the service agrees to indemnify (hold harmless) the Temple from any injury or damage that might result from the service's activities.
- The Temple should make sure that security guard service is fully insured and have the Temple added as an additional insured on the service's insurance policies. Then, the Temple should obtain a copy of a certificate of insurance showing that it has been added as an additional insured on the service's insurance policies.

The use of armed security guards presents additional considerations. While the presence of armed guards can potentially prevent or bring an end to an episode of violence, their use also raises the risk of injury or death to innocent bystanders, claims for the use of excessive force, and an increased burden for ensuring that all guards are properly screened, trained, and supervised. Also, armed security guards must be properly licensed; hold necessary permits and only carry legal and authorized weapons.

Arming your Temple's security guards is something that should only be undertaken in consultation with your Temple's counsel, local law enforcement, and your insurance agent.

What to Do in the Event of a Violent Incident

If a violent incident occurs at your Temple, the first priority is to protect the people in your congregation. To do this, follow the below steps:

- Call 911.
- If there is an opportunity to keep the invader out by locking doors and/or closing off areas of the Temple, do so.
- If there is an opportunity to remove all members and guests from the premises, do so as quickly as possible.
- Quickly control panic situations. By doing so, you will be more likely to conduct a sequenced evacuation, if possible.
- A leader, such as the pastor and/or security director, must take charge and provide orders to be followed.
- All orders must be clear and direct, such as:
 - “Ushers, secure the building.”
 - “(Fill in name), contact the police.”
 - “(Fill in name), secure the nursery.”
 - “Everyone, take cover on the floor.”

How to Make Your Temple Staff and Members Less Vulnerable

- Never allow staff to work alone. Always ensure that there are at least two employees present at all times.
- Establish an internal distress code that will alert others in the office to your need for assistance. For example, if office workers typically address each other by first name, your distress code may be that addressing a colleague by last name (i.e., “Mr. Smith”) will signal a distress situation.
- Keep all doors locked except when in use and then limit access points as much as possible.
- Consider installation of a “panic button” for frontline workers such as receptionists.
- Ensure that exterior lighting is adequate in all areas, especially parking lots and walkways. Ask your local law enforcement for assistance with a lighting audit.
- Always park your car in a well-lit area that is not obstructed by shrubbery, dumpsters, trucks or vans.
- Ensure that all staff know of and understand the Temple’s security plan.
- Know where all telephones are located.
- Prepare for the worst case scenario.

While not every violent incident can be prevented, taking the steps outlined in this fact sheet can help your Temple become better prepared for responding to criminal acts at Temple and for communicating to your congregation during a crisis situation.

This material is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to give specific legal or risk management advice, nor is any suggested checklists or actions plans intended to include or address all possible risk management exposures or solutions. You are encouraged to retain your own expert consultants and legal advisors in order to develop a risk management plan specific to your own activities.

For a more complete Temple safety report of the things you can do to protect your Temple call us at 800 BERKETT. We are a leader in providing insurance services to Temples. We are here to help.