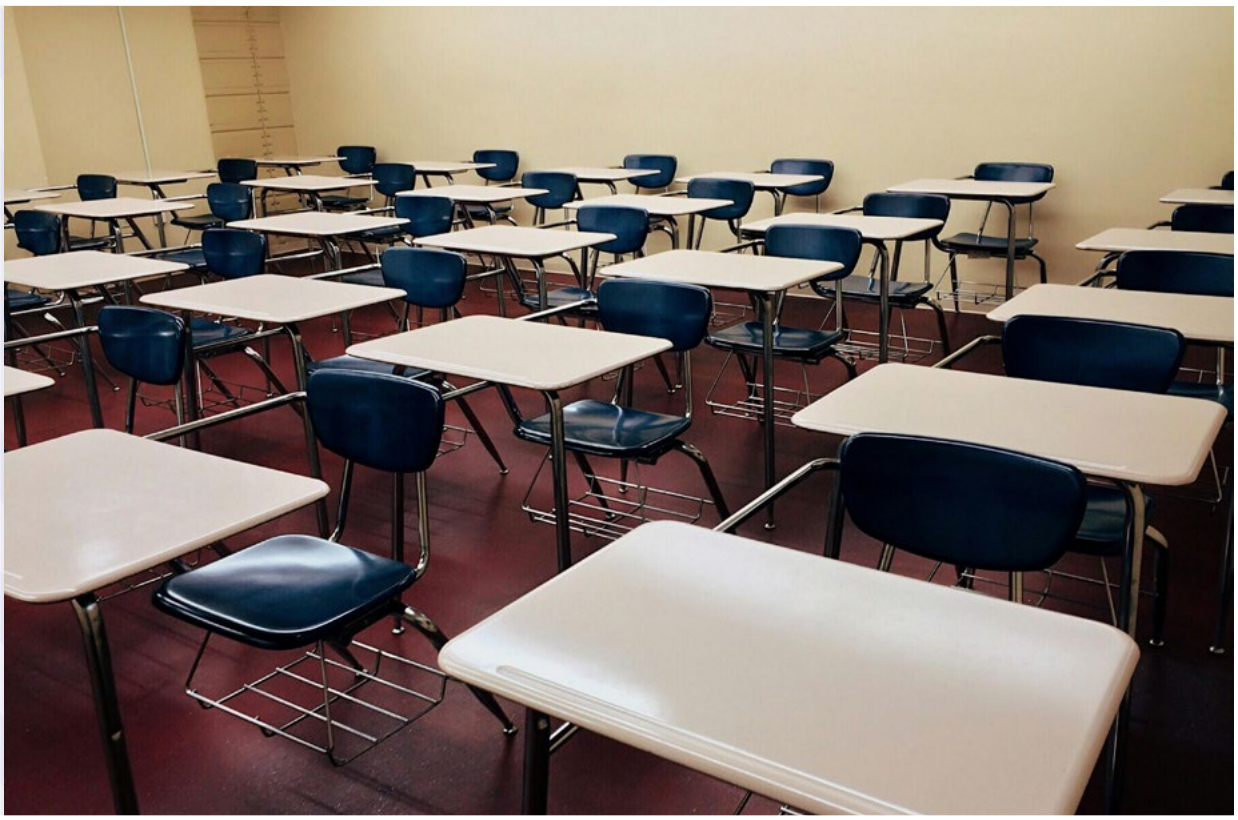
The Big Five

Violent Threat to Schools Response Guidance



Coalition for Safe Schools & Communities

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San Mateo County

SAN MATEO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

VIOLENT THREAT TO SCHOOLS RESPONSE GUIDANCE

Threats of violence can have a major impact on a school community. Most threats are non-credible, yet the potential for serious injury and damage requires that every threat be taken seriously.

The practice of *swatting*, making a false report of a violent threat to scare the public and exhaust law enforcement resources, has become more common over the past decade. Schools have often been the target of swatting events.

Threats of violence to a school can be delivered in various ways: print document, in-person, e-mail, social media, phone call, or public posting (e.g., writing on bathroom walls). How the threat is delivered and how specific it is determines the actions the school takes. The Violent Threat to Schools Response Guidance should be used by schools in collaboration with law enforcement to determine the immediate response when a threat is made.

If appropriate, implement the Student Threat Assessment Protocol once the threat response is completed.

Clear, concise, and timely communication to staff, students, and families is important in mitigating fear, panic, and confusion when a school receives a violent threat. Schools and districts should coordinate their communication to the community with law enforcement to ensure consistent messaging. **The Emergency Communication Guide** provides templates for messaging communities during an emergency, including a violent threat to schools.

RESPONDING TO/ DOCUMENTING THREATS

The following steps are designed to help the school/district respond to a specific threat in a systematic and organized way, mitigating panic and miscommunication across communities, the community at large, and first responders.

PHONED THREAT:

- Remain calm and DO NOT HANG UP
- Notify School Site Incident Commander and designate someone to call 911
- If the phone has a display, copy the number and/or letters on the display
- Write down the exact wording used in the threat
- Record the call, if possible
- Keep the caller on the line for as long as possible
- Complete the **Targeted Threat Checklist**
- Work in partnership with local law enforcement and submit a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) to the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC): **https://ncric.org/default.aspx?menuitemid=630**

VERBAL THREAT:

- If the perpetrator leaves, observe their exit path
- Notify School Site Incident Commander and designate someone to call 911
- Write down the exact wording used in the threat
- Write down or commit to memory the physical description of the person making the threat
- Complete the **Targeted Threat Checklist**
- Review any camera/video footage of campus
- Review call logs from on-campus phones (if possible)
- Work in partnership with local law enforcement and submit a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) to the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC): **https://ncric.org/default.aspx?menuitemid=630**

RESPONDING TO/ DOCUMENTING THREATS

WRITTEN THREAT:

- Handle the threat document as little as possible
- Notify School Site Incident Commander and designate someone to call 911
- Rewrite the threat exactly as received and note the following:
  - Date, time, and location of threat
  - Any situations or conditions surrounding the discovery and/or delivery
  - Full names of any personnel or students who saw the threat
- Secure the original threat document; DO NOT alter the item in any way
- If small and removable, place in a bag or envelope
- If large or stationary, secure the location and take photos
- Complete the **Targeted Threat Checklist**
- Review any camera/video footage of campus
- Work in partnership with local law enforcement and submit a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) to the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC): **https://ncric.org/default.aspx?menuitemid=630**

EMAILED/SOCIAL MEDIA THREAT:

- Leave threat message open on the computer
- Notify School Site Incident Commander and designate someone to call 911
- Do not delete or share the post. Photograph, screenshot, print, and/or rewrite the threat exactly as it appears and note the following:
  - Date and time threat was received or posted
  - Subject line, sender's address, or social media handle
  - Any situations or conditions surrounding the document's discovery and/or delivery
  - Full names of any personnel or students who viewed the digital threat

EMAILED/SOCIAL MEDIA THREAT (*Continued*):

- Review any camera/video footage of campus
- Review logins to campus computers, email accounts, and postings sent (if possible)
- Complete the **Targeted Threat Checklist**
- Work in partnership with local law enforcement and submit a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) to the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC): **https://ncric.org/default.aspx?menuitemid=630**

SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE:

A suspicious package is defined as a package potentially containing explosives or other hazardous material that requires a bomb technician or hazardous materials technician to conduct further evaluation. Suspicious package indicators include:

- Placement and proximity of the item to people and valuable assets
- Tangible aspects such as unexplainable wires, electronics, or other visible bomb-like components
- Unusual sounds, vapors, mists, or odors
- No return address
- Excessive postage/foreign postage
- Stains
- Misspelled words, incorrect titles, or poorly written address
- Unexpected delivery

Actions if a Suspicious Package is Received or Found:

- DO NOT use two-way radios or cellular phones near the device. Radio signals can detonate a bomb
- DO NOT touch or move a suspicious package
- Notify School Site Incident Commander and designate someone to call 911

RESPONDING TO/ DOCUMENTING THREATS

- Document the following:
  - Date, time, and location package was found
  - Any situations or conditions surrounding the discovery and/or delivery
  - Full names of any personnel or students who saw the package
- Complete the **Targeted Threat Checklist**
- Review any camera/video footage of campus
- Work in partnership with local law enforcement and submit a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) to the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC): **https://ncric.org/default.aspx?menuitemid=630**

ASSESSING THE THREAT

The Violent Threat to Schools Assessment helps determine the School Site Incident Command's next steps which could include:

- Contacting local law enforcement
- Conducting a Level 1 Student Threat Assessment
- Initiating a Secure Campus
- Initiating a partial or full school site **EVACUATION**
- Searching the campus
- Initiating a school closure

SCHOOL INCIDENT COMMANDER: SITE ADMINISTRATOR ACTIONS

- Assume Incident Command role
- Call 911 or local law enforcement
- Evaluate authenticity of threat using **Threat Risk Levels Chart** and **The Targeted Threat Checklist**
- Limit access to buildings and campus
- Work with Law Enforcement to determine which response of **The Big Five** to implement
- Implement **The Big Five Response**
- Notify district office and the County Superintendent of Schools
- Prepare communications to students, staff, and parents and guardians

ASSESSING THE THREAT

THREAT RISK LEVELS

Threat Level	Description of Threat	Response Options
Low Risk • Poses a minimum risk to school site • Lacks realism • Probable motive is to cause disruption	• Threat is vague and indirect • Information contained within the threat is inconsistent, implausible, or lacks detail • Caller is definitely known and has called numerous times • The threat is discovered instead of delivered (e.g., a threat written on a wall)	• Assess and monitor the situation • Contact law enforcement • Conduct a partial or full search of school site • Conduct a Level 1 Threat Assessment
Medium Risk Threat could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic	• Threat is direct and feasible • Wording in the threat suggests the perpetrator has considered how the act might be carried out • May include indications of a possible place and time • No strong indication the perpetrator has taken preparatory steps, although there may be an indirect reference pointing to that possibility • Indication the perpetrator has access to supplies and/or skills needed to carry through on threat • Increased urgency to the threat (e.g., "I'm serious!" or "I really mean this!")	• Assess and monitor situation • Contact law enforcement • Implement **Secure Campus** • Conduct full or partial search of school site
High Risk Specific and realistic, the threat appears to pose immediate and serious danger to the safety of others	• Threat is direct, specific, and realistic; may include names of possible victims, specific time, and location of device • Perpetrator provides their identify • Threat suggests concrete steps have been taken towards carrying out the threat • Perpetrator indicates they have practiced with a weapon or have had the intended school site under surveillance	• Assess situation • Contact law enforcement • Implement **Evacuation** • Conduct full or partial search of school site • Initiate school closure

IMPACT OF INITIATING SECURE CAMPUS

- Allows instruction and learning to continue
- Restricts access to the school site by visitors and prevents individuals from leaving school site
- Limits movement around the campus
- Law enforcement investigates the threat, which may involve bomb detection devices, canines, or other necessary tools

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVACUATION

- Determine safe distance from threat; off-site **EVACUATION** may be necessary
- Consider alternative evacuation routes based on perceived threat placement
- Consider using alternative Off-Site Evacuation Location if there is concern about a threat to predetermined Off-Site Evacuation Location
- Search evacuation locations prior to evacuating to those sites

TARGETED THREAT CHECKLIST

Today's Date: Time Threat Received/Viewed:

Time Call Received: Time Caller Hung Up:

Source of Threat (social media, phone call, email, on wall, shared by student or staff):

School Site:

Identifying Information (social media handle/email address of threat, caller ID info):

Exact Wording of Threat:

Ask Caller:
What is your name?
Where are you calling from?
What is your phone number?
What is your address?

TARGETED THREAT CHECKLIST

If a Bomb Threat, Ask Caller:	
Where is the bomb right now?	
When will it go off?	
What does it look like?	
What kind of bomb is it?	
What will cause it to explode?	
Did you place the bomb?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Why?	

TARGETED THREAT CHECKLIST

Violent Threat (Not a Bomb)
When will this happen?
Where is this going to happen?
Who is going to participate?
Where are the people who are participating now?
What is going to happen?
What type of weapons will be used?
Why is this going to happen?
Can you tell me anything else?

TARGETED THREAT CHECKLIST

Information About Caller								
Caller's Voice:								
Calm	Nasal	Deep Breathing	Cracking Voice	Angry	Stutter	Disguised	Accent	Lisp
Serious	Used Slang	Slow	Raspy	Incoher-ent	Joking	Rapid	Deep	Slurred
Distinct	Soft	Ragged	Clearing Throat	Normal	Loud	Laughter	Crying	Fright-ened
If the voice is familiar, who did it sound like?								
Caller's Language:								
Well Spoken	Educated	Foul	Taped Message	Read Message	Young Child	Young Adult	Middle Aged	Old
Caller's Demographics:								
Male		Female		Unknown		Approximate Age:		
Background Sounds:								
Street Noise	Voices	PA System	Music	House Noises	Motor	Office	Animal Noises	Clear
Static	Clear	Cell Phone	Long Distance	Factory	Machines	Kitchen Noises	Nature Sounds	Other
Other Observations:								

RESOURCES

RESOURCES USED TO DEVELOP GUIDANCE:

Northern California Regional Intelligence Center

Developing a Bomb Threat Annex

Bomb Threat Guide