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Campus Safety **EXPERT** SERIES



**18 TIPS FOR USING
METAL DETECTORS
EFFECTIVELY**



18 TIPS FOR USING METAL DETECTORS EFFECTIVELY

These 18 tips will ensure you get the most out of your investment in metal detection technology.

Metal detection is a hot topic of debate among school, university and health-care facility protection pros. Many want the weapons confiscation, deterrence and perception of safety that the deployment of metal detectors provides. That said, the costs, concerns about metal detectors sending the wrong message and human resources needed to operate these machines can pose challenges for some organizations.

The decision to adopt this type of weapons screening solution should be made on a case-by-case basis.

Should your campus determine that metal detection is right for you, be sure to adopt the following best practices provided by the experts Campus Safety has featured in our many articles throughout the years:

1. For K-12 schools, conduct searches randomly so students don't know when they will be checked for weapons. Schools might consider randomly drawing classroom numbers and search every student in a selected classroom. For special events, try an alternating sequence of random selection.
2. For high-risk areas, deploy two checkpoints: The first checkpoint screens everyone and the second is a surprise check that could be random or involve everyone.
3. Develop a secondary screening procedure for individuals who set off the initial detector. Usually, the secondary screening procedure includes hand-held metal detectors.
4. Use hand-held metal detectors as primary screening for individuals with implants, prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs and walkers, or for guests who are unable or unwilling to walk through the walk-through metal detector.
5. Consider screening bags with an x-ray machine.
6. Deploy good access control throughout campus so a weapons violator can't dodge an inspection point by going around the building and handing the weapons to someone through an open window or other door.
7. Deploy an armed officer to protect the security personnel operating the metal detection checkpoint.
8. Train officers, administrators, faculty and clinicians on how to detect a weapon with visual screening.
9. Place the detector in a location where it will operate properly and not experience interference from other equipment.
10. Be certain the detector is calibrated correctly, including every time a walk-through detector is moved.
11. Identify the three or four threat objects most likely to be encountered and then have the metal detector vendor re-tune the walkthrough device's sensitivity.
12. Determine which objects will be allowed inside the venue. Not all items that a detector finds are threats, such as pens, keys and coins. The portal's sensitivity levels can be adjusted to accommodate these items.



13. The screening process should be fast. Be very mindful of throughput so that students, patients and visitors can get to their classes and appointments on time.
14. For athletic events, concerts or other events at large stadiums, consider adopting a clear bag policy. The bags should be limited in size, and larger purses, coolers, briefcases, backpacks, computer bags and luggage should be prohibited. Adoption of this policy should help speed up the screening process.
15. Consider providing an amnesty box so students, parents, patients and visitors can voluntarily dispose of illegal or prohibited items, such as illegal drugs and weapons. If adopting this approach, be sure to develop appropriate property management policies so that legal but prohibited items can be returned to their owners once they leave your facility.
16. Have officers frequently check the areas (such as bushes) where weapons can be hidden that are outside the checkpoint to see if weapons or other illegal items have been dumped.
17. Post signs explaining your weapons screening policy and what items are prohibited or illegal.
18. Provide security/police officers with adequate and appropriate training on how to use metal detectors, as well as the policies supporting your weapons screening program.



THE PROS AND CONS OF INSTALLING METAL DETECTORS IN SCHOOLS

School and university officials must consider both the benefits and the drawbacks of every security investment, like this common entryway solution. *By Zach Winn*

Placing metal detectors in schools and colleges has always been a controversial move. As with every security decision, administrators have a lot of things to take into account before making the decision to purchase these devices.

But even more so than with other security investments, installing metal detectors needs to be a choice made with the wider community in mind. How will students, teachers and parents respond?

In some cases, district officials have faced criticism for using metal detectors. In New York City, that criticism led a city hall panel to recommend the devices be removed from many city schools.

But with every instance of weapons violence on school campuses, more officials wonder if metal detection is the best way to protect their campus. This trend has led to an increase in the percentage of schools that use the devices, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Some argue metal detectors are a strong deterrent while others believe they send the wrong message.

Although it's difficult to track security systems in all schools, NCES reports that 8.7 percent of public high schools in the country used metal detectors at least once during the 2013-2014 school year. That's nearly four percentage points more than in 2010, when NCES found that only 5 percent of schools used metal detectors.

"Metal detection is on the rise right now," Joe Vazquez, the director of security sales for Garrett Metal Detectors, says. "It's one of the hottest security technologies."

With more school and college officials considering purchasing metal detectors, here is a rundown of some of the pros and cons of deploying this technology.

Pros of Installing Metal Detectors in Schools

Weapons Confiscation

The first benefit that pops into most people's minds when they think about metal detectors in schools is the ability to find and confiscate weapons from people entering the building or campus.

There's no doubt fewer unauthorized weapons in school buildings create a safer campus. But certain districts may benefit from weapons detection more than others.

Schools located in areas with high gun ownership or violent crime rates, for instance, may find weapons screening more useful than schools where students and visitors find it more difficult to get weapons.

For instance, many New York City schools are located in neighborhoods where the rate of gun violence is higher than the nation's average. Below are the numbers of weapons confiscations at NYC schools over the past three academic years, according to the NYPD:

- 2016-2017: 2,120 weapons
- 2015-2016: 2,053 weapons
- 2014-2015: 1,673 weapons

Approximately half of those weapons were confiscated using metal detectors, including firearms, stun guns and knives. Other school districts and universities are unlikely to find nearly as many weapons on their campuses.

Still, if the devices help officials confiscate even one weapon from an individual intending to do harm with it, many would argue that makes the investment worth it.



Many modern walkthrough metal detectors can pinpoint exactly where on a person an item is located that's causing an alarm.

Deterrence

The weapons confiscation metric isn't the only way to gauge the effectiveness of a metal detector. According to Vazquez, the mere presence of the machines may be enough to prevent violence if the attacker thinks they're likely to get caught as they enter the building.

This is particularly true for the students, staff and visitors who enter the building (and walk through the machines) each day and thus are familiar with the security systems in place.

Vazquez believes detectors could also stop attackers previously unaware of the machines.

"These machines are definitely a deterrent," he says. "Someone who has at least some hesitancy with what they're doing will probably reconsider if they see a checkpoint with a metal detector."

The deterrence factor is much harder to quantify than confiscations, but it's certainly something campus officials should consider.

Campus Community Safety Perceptions

The presence of metal detectors can certainly lead to tangible security improvements, but it can also set peoples' minds at ease by showing them that everyone in the building has been screened.

Campus security officials' primary goal should be ensuring a safe environment so teachers and students can focus on what matters most in school: learning. Metal detectors can help accomplish that.

And beyond weapons screening, the presence of the machines shows the community that the school is taking safety seriously and investing accordingly. Luca Cacioli, Director of Operations for CEIA USA, says school officials understand metal detectors complement a wider security strategy.

"Metal detectors are only a portion of the solution for school security practices," she says.

If a school has metal detectors, parents may worry less about its access control and visitor management measures. Of course, the machines' presence can be interpreted in different ways.



Cons of Installing Metal Detectors in Schools

Sending the Wrong Message

The two largest school districts in the country — New York City Schools (NYS) and Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) — have faced criticism for their use of metal detectors on school grounds.

Parent groups in New York, for instance, argued in 2015 that the devices were unnecessary and discriminatory because they were mostly installed in the schools with the most minority students.

The union for NYS school safety agents has said the machines are critical to school security, citing a fatal campus stabbing by a student that police said could have been prevented if a metal detector had been installed at the school.

In 2016, LAUSD faculty members and student advocates criticized a district policy to conduct random metal detector searches of students at all secondary schools.

“There’s an inherent tension between beefed-up security on one end of the rope and maintaining a welcoming, supportive school climate on the other,” Ken Trump, a school security consultant who heads National School Safety and Security Services, told the Christian Science Monitor in 2016.

Steve Hutton, the director of the Kentucky Center for Instructional Discipline at Eastern Kentucky University, believes school officials should instead focus on building relationships with students.

“You need to look below the surface,” Hutton explains. “For me, it’s about helping all kids feel capable, connected and contributing within the school. I tend to look to build relationships with kids as a starting place.”

Cost

Arguably the biggest factor slowing the adoption of metal detectors in schools and colleges is the cost associated with purchasing them. Many buildings on college campuses, for instance, have several frequently-used entrances that can make screening ineffective without the purchase of a large number of machines.

K-12 schools, meanwhile, may not have the money to buy the machines for even one front entrance.

Vazquez says the biggest difference he sees when dealing with customers in the education industry compared to elsewhere is the emphasis on cost.

“It’s all about budget,” he says. “That’s one of the biggest challenges for schools, they don’t have the budget. But the world isn’t going to change, so I say get the equipment you need, whether it be camera systems or access control or whatever. Find the budget somehow. Fundraise if you have to; just make it happen.”

Other Resources

The cost of the initial purchase of a metal detector is only a fraction of the total resources needed to operate it.

If a school has, say, two walkthrough metal detectors side by side at a front entrance, they might need five people to be standing with the equipment. That includes someone in front of the machines telling people what to remove to mitigate false alarms, two bag checkers to search bags and pass them to the other side and then typically someone behind each of the machines with a wand to conduct secondary screening if an alarm goes off when a person walks through the machines.

An armed security officer should also be at the station.

That’s just one staffing option schools can adopt, and different metal detector providers offer different solutions that change staffing needs. Cacioli says schools may use a variety of methods when operating the machines.

“Current challenges include the lack of consistent or cohesive practices among many school locations and security checkpoints,” Cacioli says. “This includes the lack of industry regulations relating to federal or national standards for education customers.”

Cacioli says school officials must take into account basic considerations during the purchasing process including ease of use, getting vendor references and ensuring the machines meet health and safety regulations with regard to human exposure.

“YOU NEED TO LOOK BELOW THE SURFACE,” HUTTON EXPLAINS. “FOR ME, IT’S ABOUT HELPING ALL KIDS FEEL CAPABLE, CONNECTED AND CONTRIBUTING WITHIN THE SCHOOL. I TEND TO LOOK TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH KIDS AS A STARTING PLACE.”

Vazquez adds school officials considering cutting corners with staffing or with machines may run into problems like operators letting people they recognize through without a thorough screening and general operator fatigue.

But Vazquez says understaffed security checkpoints are always better than no security checkpoints, particularly if one of the people stationed at the area is a police officer, which Vazquez recommends.

Schools Decide on a Case-by-Case Basis

So should schools use metal detectors? It depends.

There is no cookie-cutter security system that will perfectly secure every campus in America. Officials must assess their vulnerabilities and use their limited resources in a way that best fits their institution's needs.

"[We] know that while there are general similarities between school needs, there is no 'one size fits all' solution, and so we work in strong collaboration with customer requirements and their environments for the best metal detector solution," Cacioli explains.

There are also a number of considerations we didn't touch on here, which Hutton says can make metal detector operation a headache for school officials.

SCHOOLS CONSIDER METAL DETECTORS AFTER SOUTH FLORIDA SHOOTING

Following February's tragic mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in south Florida, many school officials are considering purchasing metal detectors for their buildings, including the district where the shooting took place.

Broward Schools Superintendent Robert Runcie says the district is considering installing metal detectors at front entrances of high schools.

The detectors are one of several security enhancements on the table. That list also includes bullet-proof glass.

Also in Florida, Hillsborough County School Board member Lynn Gray is calling for metal detectors in every middle school and high school in the district.

"It is not a question of if a shooting will occur, it is a question of when," Gray wrote in a statement. "When

the [Parkland] incident happened just a while ago, it could have been one of our schools."

Many other officials from school districts in states including South Carolina and Connecticut have also called for metal detectors in school buildings.

Still, Steve Hutton, the director of the Kentucky Center for Instructional Discipline at Eastern Kentucky University, believes there are better ways to secure a school building.

"In my opinion, metal detectors give folks a false sense of security," he says. "Kids know how to beat metal detectors ... They could slip a gun through a window or get help from a buddy to get it into the school. For my money, there's nothing that tops having a school resource officer in a building."



“There are considerations like do you have space for people to wait in line to get through?” he says. “There’s got to be at least 3 feet in between people as they go through the metal detectors, and you need to get kids in quickly, so that’s another issue. It may take an hour to get everybody in. You have to explore all of those components because it’s never as simple as it seems.” Overall, security solutions must fit the changing campus security landscape.

“Security threats continue to evolve and grow, and so does the need for ongoing state-of-the-art security solutions,” Cacioli says.

Vazquez wishes there was no need for metal detectors in schools but acknowledges that times have changed.

“It’s a sad situation that we have on our hands,” he says. “But with all the threats out there right now, we have a responsibility. We need to defend ourselves and defend those who can’t defend themselves: our kids.”

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