

APPENDIX C: BOMB THREAT PROCEDURES FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Staff, students, and visitors in Ontario's schools have the right to learn, work, and be present in a safe and secure environment. To enhance safety and security, it is important that schools have plans for responding to bomb threats. According to the RCMP, the overwhelming majority of reported bomb threats are unfounded, but some are not. It's crucial to handle each incident calmly and consistently. Everyone who regularly spends time in an Ontario school must understand how to safeguard themselves and the students during a bomb threat.

The Ministry of Education, school boards, and police services from across the province continue to work in partnership to create safe school environments. This work includes planning and preparation if a bomb threat is received, an explosive device is discovered, or an explosives incident takes place.

Many school boards have actively undertaken the process of establishing Bomb Threat Response Plans, with the support of their police services. Plans and procedures reflecting the following policy must be included in the school's Emergency and Crisis Response Plan, which must be appended to the protocols already developed by school boards and police services.

Given the dynamic, complex, and fluid nature of such incidents, continuous communication, assessment, and coordination by first responders and the principal, vice-principal, or designate are of paramount importance in ensuring an effective response.

PURPOSE

The following policy is being provided to help elementary and secondary school staff ensure that their bomb threat plans meet basic requirements and to ensure an acceptable level of consistency across the province. Using these guidelines can help school staff and emergency services personnel work together to deal with bomb threat situations quickly and cautiously.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

While much of what is provided will be termed *Effective Practices*, there are two key elements which the *Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police* (OACP) is recommending as mandatory requirements by the Ministry of Education:

1. All publicly funded school boards in Ontario must establish a lockdown policy to ensure the development and implementation of individual school plans.
2. A minimum of two lockdown drills must occur each school year. It is recommended that one lockdown drill occur before September 30.

In developing Bomb Threat Response Plans, each elementary and secondary school staff should be guided by the following policy.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are critical in emergency situations. At a minimum, plans should include expectations with respect to staff, students, parents, and police.

Principal

The principal holds the ultimate responsibility for crafting and finalizing the individual school plan. They are also responsible for inviting the participation of police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) in plan development, ensuring that these agencies are aware of planning and drill activities, and overseeing the training of staff and students. Additionally, the principal, along with the vice-principal and designate, must have a comprehensive understanding of the school's bomb threat plan and the authority and responsibilities outlined within it.

During the initial stages of a bomb threat, the principal, vice-principal, or designate will be the authority responsible for the initial assessment and related decisions, including those regarding visual scans. For ongoing incidents, police are responsible for management of the threat and any subsequent criminal investigation. However, the principal, vice-principal, or designate will cooperate fully with police and any other agencies involved and strive to ensure that all staff and students do the same. During an incident, they should continue to exercise their duties, to the extent possible, in support of the emergency responders' management of the situation.

Staff

School staff, particularly the principal, vice-principal, or designate, have the overall responsibility for the training, safety, and well-being of students. During a bomb threat incident, principals, vice-principals, or designates also have the responsibility of working closely with police.

Students

Students have a responsibility to be familiar with the plan and to respond quickly to the direction of staff during a bomb threat or explosives incident. Any student with information on or prior knowledge of anyone or anything that may be associated with or result in a bomb threat, the placement of a suspicious package or device, or an explosives incident must come forward with that information as soon as possible.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians must be informed of the existence of an Emergency and Crisis Response Plan. Parents can be encouraged to reinforce with their children the responsibilities students have with respect to following directions during an incident and disclosing any information they may have prior to or during an incident.

Police

Police are responsible for responding to and investigating bomb threats and explosives incidents. During any such incident, police will assume command and control of the response and investigation but will liaise and work closely with the principal, vice-principal, or designate and other emergency services throughout the process. Police must be notified of all bomb threat incidents, regardless of other actions taken by the schools. The criminal investigation of bomb threats by police may lead to the apprehension of persons responsible.

Fire Department

The fire department may be present during bomb threat incidents to provide fire suppression operations if needed, and they will also offer fire suppression and rescue operations in explosives incidents.

FLOOR PLANS

See [Floor Plans](#) in [Appendix B](#).

IDENTIFICATION OF BUILDINGS, EXTERIOR DOORS, AND CLASSROOMS

See [Identification of Buildings, Exterior Doors, and Classrooms](#) in [Appendix B](#).

COMMAND POST

Each plan should designate primary, secondary, and off-site command post locations.

Effective Practices

Normally, the main office will be a command post location, with another area within the school identified as an alternate command post location. A third off-site command post location should be identified within the individual school plan if neither on-site command post location is available. Information regarding command post locations should not be publicly circulated. This will help to ensure that the command posts do not become locations for the placement of explosive packages or devices or for secondary incidents.

FACILITY ASSESSMENT AND PHYSICAL SECURITY

The careful assessment of a school facility and the development and implementation of sound security and planning measures may reduce the potential for bomb threats and explosives incidents. Local police services can be a useful resource when such assessments are conducted.

Effective Practices

Each school's bomb threat plan should detail proactive measures in a number of areas. In developing their plans, schools should:

- determine likely locations in and around the school for the placement of suspicious packages or devices;
- provide for controlled access to critical areas of all facilities (e.g., the main office, electrical rooms, mechanical rooms, etc.);
- consider the use of electronic surveillance or closed-circuit television (CCTV), and, if such surveillance is adopted, post signage regarding its use;
- address ways to ensure that emergency exits are kept clear from obstructions;
- provide for the regular inspection of first aid and firefighting equipment;
- include and provide for the regular review of document-safeguarding procedures;
- assess whether interior, exterior, and auxiliary lighting is adequate;

- develop an inspection procedure for all incoming packages; and
- consider other potential threats.

BOMB THREAT INTAKE PROCEDURES

In all cases, the communication of a bomb threat should be taken seriously. School staff in positions that make them most likely to receive bomb threats should be identified in school plans and should receive training in proper procedures (e.g., secretaries, principals, other office staff, etc.).

Effective Practices

The person receiving a bomb threat by telephone should try to keep the caller on the line as long as possible and should record precise details of the call, especially the exact wording of the threat. However, the person should end the call if staying on the line puts them in harm's way or prevents them from initiating response procedures.

If a bomb threat is received by email, electronic bulletin boards, or through social media, the same procedure is followed. Procedures should include how to immediately isolate the received message, remove it from any external posting, and communicate the information to the school principal, vice-principal, or designate during and after school hours, including on weekends and holidays.

It is recommended that a checklist be made available to staff members who are most likely to receive a bomb threat.

Staff should undergo training to accurately document specific details during a bomb threat call, including:

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| • precise wording of the threat; | disclosed; |
| • date and time of the call; | • any distinct speech patterns of the caller (e.g., accent, rate of speech, diction); |
| • phone number or line receiving the call; | • any background noises (e.g., traffic, music, laughter); |
| • caller's number, if displayed; | • the emotional state of the caller (e.g., intoxicated, excited, angry); |
| • gender and approximate age of the caller; | • the caller's name, if disclosed; |
| • location of the person making the threat, if disclosed; | • the recognition of the caller's voice by the call taker; |
| • exact location and detonation time of the explosive device, if disclosed; | • the time of call termination; and |
| • type and description of the explosive device (e.g., pipe bomb, truck bomb), if disclosed; | • any other information shared during the call. |
| • the time of intended detonation, if disclosed; | |
| • the reason for placing the device, if | |

If possible, the call taker should attempt to notify the school principal, vice-principal, or designate during the telephone call. If not, the principal, vice-principal, or designate should be notified

immediately after the call. All pertinent details of the call should immediately be relayed to the principal, vice-principal, or designate and documented.

School plans should address who will contact the local police service and provide details about the bomb threat. It is recommended that, unless there are exigent circumstances, this should be done after the principal, vice-principal, or designate has been provided with available information and after the initial assessment.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

One of the most challenging aspects of a bomb threat incident is the initial assessment of the threat and the accompanying decisions about whether to authorize a visual scan, to activate the Hold and Secure procedure or to evacuate students and staff. The safety of students and staff is paramount during a bomb threat; therefore, every threat must be assessed individually, based on known information.

These guidelines cannot prescribe when to conduct a safe visual scan or when to evacuate during a bomb threat. Rather, presented below are areas of concern that should be assessed during an incident. Individual school plans should address these areas and expand on them as necessary if other concerns are identified based on local circumstances.

Decisions regarding scans, the Hold and Secure procedure, and evacuation protocols are made following an assessment of available information, prioritizing the imminent threat to life. This evaluation process remains ongoing and subject to continuous reassessment throughout the duration of a bomb threat incident.

Effective Practices

Plans should identify in detail the information that needs to be immediately assessed by the principal, vice-principal, or designate during the initial stages of a bomb threat. The initial assessment should be based on the following:

- the information recorded on the bomb threat checklist (see [Bomb Threat Intake Procedures](#));
- any other notes made by the call taker;
- activities taking place in the school at the time of the threat (e.g., examinations)
- whether a specific location for a bomb was stated or the entire school was threatened;
- whether the threat was specific to the current time or a future date and time;
- any recent negative incidents involving a student, staff member, or anyone else connected with the school;
- whether there have been any other recent bomb threats or hoaxes;
- the likelihood of anyone having the opportunity to place a bomb in the stated location; and
- whether a suspicious device or package has been located.

Once the initial assessment has taken place and decisions have been made regarding a visual scan, activating the Hold and Secure procedure and/or evacuation, police must be notified. Initial contact with police may be made while the principal, vice-principal, or designate is conducting the assessment and making decisions. While it's crucial to furnish the police with detailed information

regarding a bomb threat beyond mere acknowledgment of its receipt, it's imperative not to postpone initial contact.

Plans should include a list of information to be provided to police, including the following:

- the information recorded on the bomb threat checklist (see [Bomb Threat Intake Procedures](#));
- the activities taking place in the school at the time of the threat (e.g., examinations);
- the status of any evacuation that may be underway;
- the status of any safe visual scan that may be underway; and
- the in-school contact person for police once they are on the scene.

A continual assessment of the situation must be ongoing, and the principal, vice-principal, or designate must be informed of all further information pertaining to the situation.

VISUAL SCANS

Plans must detail procedures for safe visual scans conducted by designated staff. When a threat has been made, a safe visual scan can provide critical information to support decision making during the initial assessment.

Effective Practices

Designating Persons to Conduct Visual Scans

As part of the initial assessment, the principal, vice-principal, or designate may decide that a safe visual scan of the school and/or classroom for suspicious devices or packages should be conducted. Every school plan should identify the staff member(s) who will conduct this visual inspection. It is imperative that scans be conducted by individuals who have detailed knowledge of the facilities and are familiar with students and fellow staff. Such individuals know what does and does not belong within the school; therefore, they are best suited to recognize suspicious devices or packages. These individuals should not be responsible for supervising students at the time of the visual scan.

Responsibilities related to safe visual scans are to be addressed as part of the planning process and not at the time of an actual incident.

Principals, vice-principals, and designates should undergo training to empower them in making informed decisions regarding the necessity and timing of conducting safe visual scans. Local police services can offer valuable assistance in this regard. Additionally, staff members designated to perform scans should be provided with basic guidance on executing safe visual scans.

Under no circumstances should a staff member conducting a visual scan touch a suspicious device or package. Upon detecting a suspicious package or device, the area must be promptly secured, and the package or device reported to the principal, vice-principal, or designate without delay.

PROCEDURE AFTER RECEIVING A CREDIBLE BOMB THREAT

The principal, vice-principal, or designate must consider the initial assessment when considering the next actions to take. The following are possible options:

- full evacuation of the school – when a possible explosion is imminent, but the placement of the explosive device is not known;

- partial evacuation of the school – when a possible explosion is imminent, and the placement of the explosive device has been identified in a particular section of the school; and
- Hold and Secure – when the threat is not imminent. The principal, vice-principal, or designate calls a Hold and Secure and police are contacted by calling 911. The principal, vice-principal, or designate follows police guidance for next steps.

PROCEDURES FOLLOWING THE LOCATION OF A SUSPICIOUS DEVICE OR PACKAGE

Effective Practices

When a suspicious package or device is located by staff member or student, appropriate procedures include the following:

- isolation and/or containment of the device or package, ensuring that it is not touched;
- immediate communication of the discovery to the principal, vice-principal, or designate, police, and fire services; and
- immediate re-evaluation of any evacuation decisions in light of the discovery.

Regardless of whether the package or device has been delivered to the school or located during a visual scan or under other circumstances, it is imperative that the object is not touched or moved and that it is immediately contained. This direction applies even if the package had already been moved prior to being deemed suspicious.

The school principal, vice-principal, or designate should be notified immediately of the discovery of a suspicious package or device and of any action taken to that point.

Police should be notified or updated when confirmation is received regarding the precise location of the package or device. Police will notify the fire department and EMS as required.

The school principal, vice-principal, or designate will work with emergency services personnel, which may include first responders, investigators, and bomb technicians, to evaluate the need to relocate evacuees and/or command posts.

Legitimate property may have been left behind in an evacuated area, so attempts should be made to establish ownership of any suspicious device or package. This should be done by making inquiries, not by handling the package or device.

EVACUATION PROCEDURES

Plans must detail procedures to facilitate a safe and effective partial or full evacuation of the facility. See [Appendix D – Guidelines for Evacuation in the event of fire bomb threat and explosives incident](#) and consult your school evacuation procedure.

COMMUNICATIONS

Having primary and secondary communication systems allows for accurate transmission of information between officials, staff, students, and emergency services personnel.

Effective Practices

Plans should specify designated primary and secondary communication systems with provisions for internal communication with staff and students and external communication with emergency services personnel. The external communication plan should have provisions for communication with parents, guardians, or other stakeholders during extended incidents and after incidents.

In most cases, intercoms and telephones will be used as primary communication systems. Radios and walkie-talkies are **not** recommended as secondary systems, given that radio signals may detonate sensitive explosive devices. Runners, loud hailer, or other methods should be used for secondary communication systems. Local police services should be consulted regarding the use of cell phones, and staff and students should be educated about how such devices can be used in the event of an incident.

The protocol should emphasize the importance of reminding all responders of the danger of using radio communication in a bomb threat situation.

Media

Plans shall include provisions for dealing with media in the event of an incident. Please consult the section on [Media](#) in [Appendix B](#).

Communication with Parents, Guardians, and The Community

Please consult [Communication with Parents, Guardians, and The Community](#) in [Appendix B](#).

OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Procedures should outline how to notify and instruct staff and students who are outdoors when a bomb threat is received, a suspicious device or package is found, or an explosives incident occurs. It's crucial for staff and students to know where to gather or go in such situations.

Effective Practices

Staff and students who are outside the school buildings should never re-enter the school unless they are in close proximity to an identified threat location and have been directed to do so.

Although notification of those who are outside the school building(s) is important, the use of an exterior PA system may not be the best option, as it may cause panic and/or bring unnecessary attention from members of the community. The use of a personal messenger to identify the off-site evacuation location(s) is recommended. Once at the location, staff and students shall remain at that location until further advised by the principal, vice-principal, designate, or police. Plans should include the taking of attendance at the off-site evacuation location(s).

TRAINING

Plans should address initial and ongoing training of all staff as well as students and, where possible, visitors to the school.

Mandatory Requirement (Ministry of Education)

Each board must ensure that its staff, students, and other stakeholders are aware of their obligations and responsibilities within the individual school plans.

Effective Practices

Orientation for new staff should include mandatory training in bomb threat responses. Schools should establish a method to conduct bomb threat review training for all staff during each school year. Such training should be conducted as early in the school year as possible.

Schools may opt to conduct assemblies to educate secondary students on bomb threat procedures, explosives incident protocols, and associated evacuation plans. Given the younger age of elementary students, it's advisable for classroom teachers to conduct training sessions tailored to their level. Any training provided to students with special education needs should align with the accommodations specified in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

In many situations, it may be impractical to try to provide training to school visitors. However, when the visitor is in the school over an extended period, as in the case of a service provider, it is necessary to inform the visitor of the school's bomb threat procedures and explosives incident evacuation procedures.

Where possible, it is advantageous to have police partners present to assist with the training of staff and students. Fire department and EMS personnel could also be invited to training sessions.

DRILLS

Please consult the section on [Drills](#) in [Appendix D](#) in the event of a fire, bomb threat or explosives incident.

SCHOOL RECOVERY FOLLOWING AN INCIDENT

Plans should include provisions related to recovery after an incident involving a bomb threat, a suspicious package or device, and an explosion.

Effective Practices

Recovery procedures will differ significantly depending on the nature of the incident. In some situations, a debriefing should occur following the receipt of a bomb threat or following the location of a suspicious device or package. A debriefing should always take place following an explosives incident. The nature and severity of the incident will dictate who should be included in the debriefing.

When a bomb threat or a suspicious package or device is found to be a hoax, controlled communication, including communication relating to any debriefing conducted to evaluate actions, is important so that further incidents are not encouraged.

In serious situations following the location of a suspicious package or device or an explosives incident, the school board's Trauma Response Plan will normally be initiated. In all cases, communication with students and parents is vital.

PLAN REVIEW

Each school plan, as well as the board plan, shall be thoroughly reviewed annually.

Effective Practices

The plan should incorporate a dedicated page for documenting the date of review, the reviewing personnel, and a space for their signatures. If the board utilizes a web-based platform to log drill completions, a separate section can be allocated within the system to record the annual review date of the plan.