

Strategies for Hardening Soft Targets

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A soft target may be defined as any selected victim of criminal acts which include theft, armed robbery, and/or armed assault. Those assaults, when perpetrated by “lone wolf” individuals or small unaffiliated groups are most difficult to predict or prevent.

The most practical preventing measures involve “target hardening,” or reducing the exposure to unexpected attack. These measures may be enacted by organizations of any size or scope, and are not necessarily costly to initiate:

Employee Awareness – regular briefings and reminders to all employees to be alert for persons acting in a suspicious manner, suspicious vehicles, or suspicious circumstances.

Streamlined Reporting Process – Enhancing the ability for employees at any level to report suspicious circumstances.

Affirmative Policies – Published policy, affirmed by the top level of executives, referring to prohibited articles, entry screening, and penalties for violation. Policies affecting security and life-safety must be consistently enforced.

Entry Screening – Professional package/personal screening at every public and staff entry. The method of screening will be determined by budgetary considerations, perceived threat levels, staffing levels, and physical characteristics of protected buildings.

Agency Coordination – Direct contact and regular interaction with emergency response agencies. Includes familiarization tours, distribution of building floor plans with designated areas of concern, conduct of tabletop and hands-on exercises, with all staff and emergency agency participation.

Review of Intelligence Information – Regular review and coordination of intelligence information received from legitimate sources.

Immediate Coordinated Response – Requires activation of Incident Command System and planned response to recognized threats. May involve activation of Emergency Operations Center, Building Evacuation or Lockdown/Shelter in Place.

All of the steps listed are necessary for reducing loss of life, unnecessary litigation, and protection of assets. Target hardening simply makes it more difficult for unauthorized persons to enter your facilities, or to carry out violent acts on your property. There are no guarantees. In most of the incidents involving active shooters, no entry screening process was in place. The practice of both tabletop and hands-on exercises reduces the confusion and accompanying turmoil when an attack occurs.

You must have a plan. You must publish, distribute, discuss, and practice the plan. And hope for the best!