

SCHOOL VIOLENCE: READY OR NOT

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT
OF
CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The reality of school violence has become everyone's concern from students, parents, school officials, police departments, to fire/EMS agencies. The frequency of large-scale schoolyard incidents are increasing and the demands placed on first responders to these incidents are multi-faceted and complex. The challenges faced by responders is to adequately prepare for and respond to these type of incidents. Public safety officials in Prince William County are facing the same challenge.

The problem was the lack of a plan to provide for a safe and efficient response to a school violence incident in Prince William County. The purpose of this applied research project was to develop a school violence response plan that could be endorsed by the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue and the Prince William County Fire and Rescue Association.

Action research was utilized to identify (a) what are other fire departments doing regarding school violence response plans, (b) what response plans or guidelines are available today should a school violence incident occur today in Prince William County, (c) what are the key components of a practical response plan, and (d) what other County agencies should be involved in the development and implementation of any school violence response plan.

The procedures utilized were a literature review of the topic and a survey of other fire departments. The literature review focused primarily on who should be involved in the plan implementation and what are key elements of a school response plan. The survey was conducted in an attempt to determine if other fire departments had an established school violence response plan.

The results concluded (a) many fire departments do have a written school violence response plan, (b) Prince William County is not as prepared as it should be for a school violence response, (c) a strong incident command system emphasizing unified command is the key element for a successful operation, and (d) many agencies other than fire/EMS and police are needed in the development and implementation of a response plan.

Recommendations from the research included (a) adoption of school violence response plan in Prince William County, (b) input should be received from all personnel at all levels within the department, (c) adequate training should be provided to ensure personnel familiarization, (d) emphasis should be placed on utilizing the incident command system and unified command, and (e) a lead agency should be identified to prompt training and to ensure an annual review of the plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE.....	5
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
PROCEDURES.....	15
RESULTS.....	17
DISCUSSION.....	22
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	25
REFERENCES.....	28
APPENDIX A (School Violence Response Plan).....	31
APPENDIX B (Survey and Survey Results).....	39

INTRODUCTION

Prince William County, Virginia, exemplifies a typical modern suburban community in its attempt to provide a high quality of life for its citizens. Political and government leaders work in harmony to ensure a “safe” environment. The balance of providing outstanding education opportunities in a “safe” environment is a goal shared by Prince William and many other communities but is one that has been challenged in recent years. The lack of a plan to provide for a safe and efficient response to a school violence incident in Prince William County is the problem.

The purpose of this applied research project is to develop a school violence response plan that can be endorsed by the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue and the Prince William County Fire and Rescue Association. Action research was employed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are other fire departments doing regarding school violence response plans?
2. What response plans or guidelines are available today should a school violence incident occur today in Prince William County?
3. What are the key components of a practical response plan?
4. What other County agencies should be involved in the development of any response plan?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Prince William County is located in Northern Virginia approximately 35 miles southwest of the Nation's Capital. The County encompasses 348 square miles and includes two independent cities and four incorporated towns. The federal government owns nearly 20 percent of the total land area within the County and includes two

national parks and the Quantico Marine Corps Base (Prince William County, 2001).

The County has long been considered a bedroom community with its citizens commuting daily to Washington, D.C. or other neighboring jurisdictions. Recently, local leaders have made it a high priority to actively lure and recruit high-tech businesses to the County hoping to capture the high-tech wave.

Current estimates place the County's population at 280,813. The County's population has nearly doubled since 1980 when the population was 144,703. On average, the population has grown by approximately 7,000 persons per year since 1980 representing an annual growth rate of 3.39 percent. By 2020, the County's population is expected to be over 390,000 persons (Prince William County, 2001).

Prince William County has evolved from volunteer fire and rescue services to today's version of combination career/volunteer system consisting of 275 career and 840 volunteer personnel. The system has been forced to change due to increased emergency incident volume and reduced volunteer participation. Fire and rescue services are comprised of 12 independent volunteer fire and rescue departments operating 17 stations and the supplemental career forces, employed by the Department of Fire and Rescue, who staff the volunteer stations, Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Career personnel also staff four advanced life support units and one station on a 24-hour coverage basis. The volunteer forces are responsible for the remaining time, which includes weekends, holidays, and Monday through Friday, 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The management of the fire and rescue services is empowered to the Prince William County Fire and Rescue Association by the Board of County Supervisors. The Association is comprised of the Department of Fire and Rescue Chief, the next ranking

career officer, one career representative below the rank of lieutenant, and the chief from each of the 12 volunteer fire and rescue departments. The Association is responsible for the coordination and delivery of fire and rescue services within the County.

The Prince William County School Board makes the policies that govern the school division. There are eight members on the School Board, one from each magisterial district and an at-large member who serves as chairman. The daily management of the school system is entrusted to the Superintendent and his staff. The Prince William County Public School Division is well known for its system of school-based management, which places decision-making and accountability at the school level (Prince William County Public Schools, 2001).

For the 2001 school year, Prince William County Public Schools had an enrollment of 57,800 pupils, making it the third largest school system in the state of Virginia. The system currently has 45 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, 8 high schools, 5 special education schools, 1 alternative school, and 1 specialty school. The elementary schools house kindergarten through fifth grade, the middle schools house grades six through eight, and the high schools house grades nine through twelve. Eighty-seven percent of graduates continue their education at universities, colleges, and other schools (Prince William County Public Schools, 2001).

The Prince William County Police Department is comprised of 450 sworn officers who are assigned to one of three divisions: operations, criminal investigations, or administration. The department is managed by the Chief of the Department. The County Police receives support from the police departments that serve the three

incorporated towns and two cities that are within the boundaries of Prince William (Prince William County Police Department, 2001).

Historically, the County Police Department has worked much more closely with the school system than the Department of Fire and Rescue or the Fire and Rescue Association. The primary reason for this has been the lack of significant incidents and the daily contact that required an ongoing type of relationship. The Police Department has had resource officers in the County schools for nearly 20 years. Fire and rescue and the public schools have shared a good relationship with the schools but it has primarily been dealing with the occasional EMS call, minor fire incident at a facility, or a fire inspection issue.

Events that occurred on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, has influenced local school and public safety officials' view on developing and coordinating response guidelines to such an event. Officials have determined the County's response to a possible school violence incident should be more scripted and coordinated. Recently, officials gave instructions to develop a response plan with the three key agencies, fire and rescue, police, and public schools, developing their own section of the plan based on a coordinated approach. The three plans would then comprise the County's school violence response plan.

This research project relates to the Executive Fire Officer's Strategic Management of Change course as discussed in the Change Management Model chapter. There is a continuing stream of changes occurring in fire and emergency services as a result of new trends, and it is mandating that leaders in the field "stand ready" (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2001, p. SM 1-3).

This research project is relative to the researcher's current role as a senior level command officer assigned to EMS Operations. The researcher's assigned tasks include coordinating emergency medical services delivery for both the career and volunteer personnel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this research project concentrated on three primary areas (a) how significant is school violence (b) what type training and who should participate for preparation of a school violence incident, and (c) what was learned from the Columbine incident.

How significant is School Violence

In 1988 when the book *Planning for School Emergencies* was published, terrorist acts were discussed, but little was said about planning and preparing for such incidents. Now over a decade later, terrorism and violence have become important issues to schools across the nation (Della-Giustina, Georgevich, and Kerr, 2000, p. 17). National data collected by the United States Department of Education shows that 10 percent of the nation's schools experienced one or more serious or violent crimes during the 1996-1997 school year (Dell-Giustina, et al., 2000, p.19).

Barrett (2001) stated, The Columbine High School shootings brought the problems of youth violence to every home in America. You can't turn on a TV without hearing some talk show host or news reporter ask, "Who's to blame?" This tragedy struck a nerve in every state in the country. Lawmakers are arguing in Washington over gun control legislation, and state legislatures are discussing

ways of keeping guns out of the hands of kids. School systems and elected officials are asking questions and looking for answers (p. 74).

Columbine was not the first significant school violence incident in recent history.

Della-Giusting, et al., (2000, p. 16) list the following:

February 1997	Bethel, Alaska	Shooting – 1 Dead
October 1997	Pearl, Mississippi	Shooting – 2 Dead
December 1997	West Paducah, KY	Shooting – 3 Dead
March 1998	Jonesboro, AR	Shooting – 5 Dead
April 1998	Edinboro, PA	Shooting – 1 Dead
May 1998	Fayetteville, TN	Shooting – 1 Dead
May 1998	Springfield, OR	Shooting – 1 Dead
April 1999	Littleton, CO	Shooting – 15 Dead

Quigley (2000) advises, The threats against our nation's schools are not diminishing. There is evidence that despite the technology and money we use to disaster-proof our schools, these threats whether manmade or natural will continue to impact our nation's schools. While the public's attention to these threats varies with the latest incidents, we as emergency managers must always stand ready to plan, respond, and protect our schools (p. 4).

The realization of school violence is the impact from such an event could be felt in any community in the country. School violence incidents have the potential to continue and escalate in nature. Nothing stands out that would separate Prince William County from the communities who have experienced a tragic school incident.

What Type Training and Who Should Participate

Wallace and Brightmire (1999) write, "There is simply no adequate training for an event such as the Columbine High School tragedy" (p. 77). Nordberg (1999a) adds, "In a large-scale incident like the Columbine High School shootings, a well-defined incident command system is critical to the success of the operation. Previous training and daily use of the incident command system (ICS) and regular practice of the techniques involved in mass-casualty incidents (MCI) were hugely beneficial" (p. 47). Story (1993) states, "An important concept of any incident command system is a unified command. Often, large-scale emergencies involve multiple agencies--EMS, fire, law enforcement, public works, transportation, and others that have a responsibility to their own jurisdiction" (p. 54). Cline (1999) states, "Critical incident stress management training should be mandatory for everyone in your communications center and use the incident command system. If you don't have it in place, get it" (p. 85).

Story (1993) continues, the first component of the three-P approach to MCI management is participation in the MCI planning process. The second-P is planning. A step that forces people who will work together during an MCI to work together beforehand to plan strategies for coping with potential MCI events. The last P of MCI planning is practice. In MCI management, practice never makes for a perfect MCI, but it does provide an opportunity to test the plan and improve it (p. 57).

Rigg (1998) comments, every school system should have a flexible, but carefully orchestrated mass-casualty contingency plan that includes teachers, school administrators, and the parents and guardians of students. We need to work in

partnership with everyone who might be potentially involved. We need to get school administrators to understand that they are a really important part of the emergency response team (p. 25).

Quigley (2000) states, "The local emergency manager is the most logical and effective instrument around to help schools plan and coordinate their response to disasters like we've seen lately" (p. 12). Heightman (1999b) writes, "The most compelling factor that contributed to the success of the Columbine incident was the ability of rescuers from multiple response agencies to work together as a cohesive team during the most chaotic event of their careers" (p. 9).

The need for incident and unified command training is of the utmost importance. The team needs to be well coached during a game of this magnitude. All recognized responders must participate, plan, and practice.

Lessons Learned From Columbine

Graham (2000) writes, "In less than one hour on April 20, 1999, two teenagers changed forever the way police and emergency personnel plan for and handle the unthinkable" (p. 22).

Nordberg (1999a) writes, the Littleton Fire Department administrators are focusing on three recommendations (1) establishing a very broad regional communications plan, (2) establishing a standardized management system that can be used by fire, EMS, law enforcement, and hospitals, and (3) being able to coordinate fire/EMS operations with police and SWAT team operations (p. 50).

Heightman (1999a, p. 46) provides several lessons learned at the Columbine High School incident:

1. A unified command post must be established and positioned well out of harm's way.
2. Early information received will be unclear and conflicting.
3. A staging officer and staging base need to be established early.
4. Triage and EMS staging areas should be located away from high-activity areas, such as the command post.
5. Position police officers in triage and treatment areas at violent scenes. Officers may need to be assigned to transporting ambulances.
6. All personnel in key positions at a complex scene must utilize incident command vests.
7. At incidents involving weapons, EMS and fire personnel directed to enter areas near the scene must understand it is impossible for law enforcement officials to guarantee the areas safe (clear) before they have all suspects in custody.
8. Cellular/telephone systems will overload.
9. Scene managers must prepare to request spare radio batteries, rehab supplies, vehicle refueling, auxiliary lightning, and utility company resources early in an incident.
10. Rescuers must be alert for explosive devices on victims.
11. Individuals evacuated from an involved facility can provide valuable information prior to being moved to a relocation collection point.

12. Scene managers must prepare to receive and deploy apparatus, personnel, and resources not specifically requested on scene.
13. A liaison from the command post needs to brief personnel in the staging areas about known or potential scene hazards.
14. Incident commanders should contact the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) early to restrict news helicopters from interfering with aeromedical operations and creating unnecessary noise.
15. Personnel unfamiliar with incident management systems will present logistical and operational complications on scene.

Effective and reliable communications is always one of the most important parts of any emergency incident. This is especially true in large-scale incidents involving multiple mutual aid agencies. Battalion Chief Ray Rahne of the Littleton Fire Department reported, "Communication was a major problem at the beginning of the incident, we were completely overwhelmed" (IAFC, 2000, p.2).

Willet (1999, p.59) provided several lessons learned and recommendations for communication centers to note:

1. Have televisions in your communications center.
2. Have ample outbound phone lines.
3. Build an extensive resource list of phone numbers.
4. Train your staff.
5. Have map files of schools in your center.
6. Know how to communicate.

Many of the lessons learned at Columbine were not unfamiliar to many in emergency management. The lessons learned reinforced several common response issues to any large-scale incident. Important themes appeared to be stay alert, anticipate, and take charge.

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The combined efforts of several agencies to provide pre-hospital emergency care to the sick and injured.

Incident Commander (IC). The individual who is in charge of an incident scene.

Incident Command System (ICS). An organization established at an incident site that is designed to effectively manage incident needs.

Mass-Casualty Incident (MCI). An accident or disaster involving multiple casualties.

Unified Command. A command system that allows incident commanders to develop a coherent and integrated incident response while each commander retains ultimate control over his or her areas of responsibility.

Assumptions and Limitations

While conducting the literature review, it was assumed that all reference material was unbiased and provided an accurate presentation of the information and facts given. All authors of reference materials were presumed to be credible and reliable in their findings and recommendations.

Participants of the survey were all presumed to have answered the questions with a fair and honest intent. It was assumed the survey allowed the person being surveyed the ability to properly identify his or her answer to the question being asked.

The research was limited based on the findings that although there were numerous reference sources on the topic, the actual content of the material appeared to be repetitive in nature. This led the researcher to believe actual planning and preparation for a large-scale violent school incident were key elements in the effective management of such a school incident.

Research Methodology

Action research was utilized for this project. The problem statement was rechecked for clarity and comprehensiveness and found to be appropriate throughout the literature review. The purpose of this research was to develop a school violence response plan that could be implemented by the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue.

A thorough literature review was completed at the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the National Emergency Training Center located in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Current sources were utilized to provide the latest information on the research topic. The literature review focused on three subtopic areas (a) how significant is school violence, (b) what type training and who should participate for preparation of a school violence incident, and (c) what was learned from the Columbine incident.

A situational analysis was conducted to determine if the influencing factors as determined by authors in the topic research field were the same as those being exhibited in Prince William County.

A survey of fire departments was conducted to help the researcher determine if other departments had developed school violence response plans. The survey was

distributed electronically in an attempt to enhance return results. The departments were polled to document the following:

1. Do you have a school violence response plan?
2. If no, are you considering developing a school violence response plan?
3. If yes, was the development of your plan coordinated with other response agencies?
4. If yes, are all of your personnel familiar with the plan content?
5. If yes, have you conducted drills on the plan?
6. If yes, does your plan include a “unified command” system?

Fifty-two surveys were distributed and 49 were returned. This constituted a return rate of 94 percent. Based on this return a confidence level of greater than 95 percent was achieved. The results were compiled electronically and tabulated to determine how common are school violence response plans and plan characteristics.

After a thorough review and study of the research material, a school violence response was prepared. Incorporation of response concepts, lessons learned, and local knowledge were utilized to prepare the document.

RESULTS

A proposed school violence response plan is shown in Appendix A.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. The survey conducted indicated 37 percent of the respondents have a written school violence response plan. Seventy-one percent of those who did not have a written plan indicated they were considering or had considered the development of a written plan (See Appendix B).

All of the departments with a written plan indicated their plans were developed and coordinated with other response agencies. The agencies most likely to be included were; local police, hospitals, school systems, social services, and private ambulance services.

When asked, "If all of your personnel were familiar with your written plan," all departments with plans responded to the positive. Fourteen of the 18 or 78 percent had conducted actual drills centered around the plan. Sixteen or 89 percent of the departments with plans stated they had incorporated an incident command system and the unified command system into their plans.

All of the respondents were either a career or combination department. All of the career departments with a population of greater than 100,000 indicated they had a written response plan and 40 percent of the combination departments with a population of greater than 100,000 indicated the same.

Research Question 2. Should a violent incident take place today in a Prince William County school, responders would have no written response plan or guidelines to help them in the mitigation of the incident. Responders would be forced to operate within their own department standard operating procedures. Based on current procedures, the incident would revert to a police operation and fall within their command structure.

The Prince William County fire and rescue service, both career and volunteer, utilized an "incident command system" on all major or significant incidents. This allows them to be very structured in their daily responses and helps to avoid confusion on significant incidents. Staffing of fire and rescue units allows fire and rescue personnel the opportunity to operate most efficiently as teams on emergency incidents.

The Prince William County Police Department as most police departments do, operate more on an individual basis with only one officer primarily assigned to a patrol car. The police department utilizes an incident command system that is not as structured or detailed as the system utilized by fire and rescue services. The police department has identified this as a weakness and is working to improve in this area.

Prince William County Public Schools operate under a school-based management style. This gives all authority of school management to the individual school principal. All public schools are required to maintain an emergency plan that is generic to the individual school. Until recently, there was no contingency for a major violent incident in any of the local school plans. These plans are updated and reviewed with staff on a yearly basis.

If a major school violence incident occurred in Prince William County today, the incident would most likely develop in this manner: a 9-1-1 call from the school, an immediate response from police and fire and rescue, first arriving units (fire or police) would discover the school being evacuated, no central or unified command being established, there would be no set way of doing business for such an incident. Response leaders would have to rely on their experience and other response guidelines to help them manage the scene.

Research Question 3. The plan should be all encompassing and include all divisions from within your department. Wallace and Brightmire (1999) write, "Communication on the upper levels and down through the ranks needs to be ongoing (p.77). All fire and rescue personnel need to be familiar with what their role will be in the event of a significant violent school incident.

Graham (2000) comments, "The incident management system is the key to success. It provides structure to handle the incident under the aegis of a commander; the framework to do what must be done (rescue, treat or transport victims) and a common language and standard terminology that responding agencies all speak" (p.23). Any plan should include the establishment of an incident command system and utilize a unified command system.

Paramedic Captain Jim Olsen, of the Littleton Fire Department, offers the following advice, "Resist the temptation to do your own thing. The scope of the incident (Columbine) was incredible. We were fortunate that the incident command system worked well" (Nordberg, 1999b, p. 46). Hostile, multi-hazard situations challenge the fire/EMS service to respond with nontraditional tactics and to operate under a unified incident command structure with law enforcement (USFA, 1999, p. 3).

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) (1999) further states, major incidents draw a substantial number of people and assets to the scene, complicating and comprising access/egress, site safety and security, and mission activities. Anticipating and successfully managing that influx is essential to maintaining command and control of the operational environment. Responding units should be staged outside the incident perimeter and deployed only when specifically assigned. Maintaining unit integrity and individual discipline reduces freelancing and promotes personnel and unit accessibility and accountability (p. 3).

Gaffney (1995) writes, "There is one critical commonality between MCIs and disasters that should not be overlooked by emergency responders. Regardless of

whether the incident is an MCI or a disaster, it will have potentially significant mental health effects on rescuers. A critical incident stress debriefing component must be included in all MCI and disaster plans” (p. 71). Critical incident stress debriefing is an important undertaking for the health and welfare of involved personnel (USFA, 1999, p. 43).

Criss and Matter (1997) state, “No matter how well you plan, you will not have covered all the contingencies (p. 42). Any plan developed for a large-scale emergency response must anticipate incident escalation and provide flexibility.” Heightman (2000) comments, “Prepare escalation plans so your communications center can send extra resources to the scene when needed” (p. 36).

Research Question 4. The anticipation, preparation, and response to any large-scale school violence incident will require the resources of many agencies. The USFA (1999) reports, “Public safety managers need to reassess current response strategies in light of emergencies that, with increasing frequency, include wanton violence and demand a coordinated and joint public safety response” (p. 2).

In addition to County fire/EMS and police, the County public schools should play a key role in the development of any response plan. Prior to the Columbine incident, the local school system had begun to update their existing emergency plan. It was not until after the incident that a new plan was adopted (USFA, 1999, p. 7).

Nordberg (1999a) writes, “Probably the most important things is for fire, EMS, and the police to sit down and talk about coordinated operation” (p. 50). In Prince William County, this would require the involvement of the sheriff’s department, the two city

police departments, the three town police departments, and the two city fire/EMS departments that are found within the boundaries of Prince William County.

Larton (2001) states, "The tragedies at Santa and Granite Hills High School demonstrated a need for a continuing partnership between the dispatch centers, educators, first responders, and other interested parties" (p. 26). Representatives from the Prince William County Public Safety Communications Center should also participate in the development and implementation of the emergency response plan.

Area hospitals, obviously, need to be aware of the contents of any response plan that could involve mass casualties. Their existing relationship with local fire/EMS would definitely be an asset in this situation. Coordination with hospital security departments would be vital in the event of a school violence incident; with the many number of parents and media representatives who most likely would respond to area hospitals.

It is important that the Community Services Board be involved since they are a primary agency involved in the delivery of critical incident stress management. Other County agencies that should be aware of any plan development or implementation include; public works, social services, fleet maintenance, private ambulances, the Red Cross, and the health department. These agencies would play a key role in providing expertise and logistical support.

DISCUSSION

In its technical report on the Columbine High School incident, The USFA (1999) reports:

Emergency response agencies should develop multi-hazard, multiple casualty incident (MCI) plans. Such plans should designate the roles and responsibilities

of assigned positions and delineate casualty collection points so that victims from multiple venues can be systematically collected, treated, and transported. MCI plans also should stress the importance of using incident command vests and triage tags. Joint command and interoperable communication systems are two other essential components of multi-hazard multiple-casualty planning (p. 37).

The frequency and severity of school violence incidents seems to be escalating across the country. Research indicated incidents are taking place in school systems of all sizes and in all parts of the country. The USFA (1999) writes, "It can't happen here" is happening here, and the emergency service providers who may next be called must be prepared for that possibility" (p. 47). Emergency responders in Prince William County must be ready to respond to such an incident.

The direction given by senior emergency response leaders to develop a school violence response plan seems to be the wise and practical position to ensure a prompt and efficient response. Survey results indicated approximately 40 percent of departments responded did have a written response plan. Of those departments without a written plan, the vast majority was actively considering or had considered the development and implementation of a written plan. The direction demonstrates a proactive management decision that could pay many benefits should the need to implement arise.

Currently, the ability to effectively manage and mitigate a serious incident in a Prince William County school would be challenged. There are no agreed upon response plans between fire/EMS and police, much less with the other identified agencies that would be involved. Daily response procedures would be utilized in the event of an incident;

however, the complexity and size of the incident scene would quickly overwhelm the first responders and their commanders.

The USFA (1999) recommends that a “unified” command system be utilized for any large-scale incident involving the response of multiple agencies (p. 32). Prince William County should be prepared to implement such a system. Taking this one step further, the USFA (1999) further states, “To adequately prepare for complex incidents involving multiple casualties and multiple hazards, public safety organizations should plan their incident command operations within the context of a regional, emergency management framework” (p. 3). Prince William’s dependability on outside fire/EMS and police agencies makes this a crucial element to a successful implementation.

Use of the incident command system by the fire department on a daily basis will surely enhance operations on the emergency scene; however, all response agencies must be familiar with and practice the same sort of system. This perhaps, is the single most important element to a successful operation. All agencies responding with the Prince William units must be familiar with the incident command system and the utilization of “unified” command.

Another crucial element of the utilization of an incident command system is user familiarization. Brazle (2001) states, “Integrate the ICS process into your regular training and daily operations. Unless your personnel see the principles in action, they’ll forget the IC system” (p. 71). This is the primary reason fire and rescue services in Prince William County utilize the system on a daily basis. Other response agencies would be wise to review their current procedures and consider such implementation.

An incident the magnitude of a Columbine High School incident in Prince William County would stretch emergency resources to the limit. It is very important that agreements and consensus be made with other agencies that would be providing support to a County incident. All of the agencies previously identified should be involved to some degree in the development of the response plan. It is vital that all responding agencies know their role and what is expected of them.

The welfare of public safety personnel and others responding to a school violence incident should not be overlooked. Most likely, some of these responders will have children or know someone who has children attending the impacted school. The effectiveness of personnel in this situation will be limited. How incident commanders respond to this situation could have a negative or positive impact. Commanders should also not overlook the usefulness of critical incident stress as an important undertaking for the health and welfare of involved personnel (USFA, 1999).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prince William County should develop and implement a school violence response plan. The decision by public safety officials to institute a plan is prudent and justified based on the findings reported in this research project. The proposed response plan presented (See Appendix A) is the first step in preparing our community for the impact of a large-scale school violence incident. The proposed plan was developed based on the belief that concurrent police, fire, and EMS operations necessitate joint incident command structures, reliable and effective communications capabilities, and standard operating procedures.

The next step in implementation would be the cursory review of the plan by other senior and mid-level response managers. Their comments along with those of their personnel's should be considered for inclusion into the plan. It is important for both career and volunteer personnel to share in this part of the plan development. As is usually the case, early "buy in" by personnel relates to easier implementation and acceptance. Once accomplished, the Department of Fire and Rescue and the Fire and Rescue Association should approve and adopt the plan as the fire and rescue portion of the County's school violence response plan.

The Department of Fire and Rescue should encourage and sponsor training activities to promote initial implementation of the plan. This should not only include fire and rescue personnel but representatives from all agencies who may be called upon to assist in the event of an emergency. These agencies would include the police department, public schools, local hospitals, mutual aid police and fire/EMS agencies, public works, social services, fleet maintenance, and the Red Cross.

Training should be delivered in several different methods. The most obvious being actual review of the master plan once it has been formally adopted. A series of ongoing drills should be considered both during the implementation phase and at a minimum of yearly to ensure personnel familiarization. Tabletop training and actual "live" on-scene training exercises should be utilized to fully allow staff to comprehend the system.

A key segment of the training should focus on the incident command system and the use of unified command. In practically every research article, the importance of ICS and unified command was emphasized. This element appeared to be the most overwhelming key to a successful outcome of a large-scale emergency incident. This

would be very important in Prince William County since not all responders utilize the incident command system or are familiar with the principle of unified command.

A lead agency, whose role will be to coordinate training activities and ensure an annual review of the plan, should be chosen from the three primary agencies; fire/EMS, police department, or public schools.

Anyone interested in replicating this study should first consider reading the 1999 United States Fire Administration special report, Wanton Violence at Columbine High School. The report gives the most specific details of that tragedy and gives the most informative insight as to the lessons learned and what emergency responders should do to prepare for a similar incident.

It is important for local public safety officials to remember the impact of a school violence incident in your community could be felt for a very long time and how we respond could drastically influence the lives of many. We as first responders must be up to the challenge and be responsible for our community's planning for such an incident.

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Appendix A

Prince William County Fire and Rescue Services School Violence Response Plan

Background

In light of recent national tragedies on school grounds involving violence to students and staff, it is necessary to plan for the mitigation of such incidents should they occur in Prince William County. This plan has been developed to offer guidance for the conduct of fire and EMS operations at the scene of significant school violence. Fire and rescue personnel should be familiar with the contents of this plan; however, its content should be considered sensitive and not distributed outside the fire service.

Definitions

Signal 15: A code used by Fire and Rescue Communications to announce the report of mass casualty/shooting in progress or suspects armed with weapons or explosives on or in the area of a school.

Hot Zone: For the purposes of this plan, an area that presents a risk to personnel of exposure to hostile gunfire or explosive devices.

Patient Staging Area: A designated safe area outside the immediate hot zone where initial triage and urgent lifesaving stabilization may be performed prior to movement to the treatment area(s).

Communications

The Public Safety Communications supervisor will immediately notify fire and rescue personnel of the dispatch of a Signal 15 call.

Fire and rescue personnel and equipment shall be dispatched as appropriate to facilitate the care of injured persons and the control of hazards. The minimum dispatch complement shall include the structure fire response with a chief officer. Ambulances and medic units will be dispatched based on the report of injuries or mechanism (shooting, bomb, etc.).

Communications will dispatch the incident as follows:

1. Three alert tones.
2. Announce Signal 15.
3. Give name and address of school.
4. Station tones.
5. Announce Signal 15, repeat 1st verbal.

6. Give vital information on 2nd verbal.
7. Callback, repeating vital information.
8. An alternate channel will be assigned.

Communications will notify the First Due Volunteer Chief, the Fire Marshal, the Operations Chief, and the Department of Fire and Rescue Chief. In addition, all chiefs will be paged alerting them to the situation.

Operations

Unless specifically advised otherwise, all responding fire and rescue units will report to the identified primary staging site. This location is to be identified by the first due responding company during the callback. These pre-designated staging areas are identified in the attached chart and area maps.

In situations where a crime is believed to have been committed (shootings, bombing, etc.), the Incident Commander shall be the highest-ranking on-scene police official. In situations where no crime is believed to have been committed, the Incident Commander will be the highest-ranking on-scene fire official. Regardless of the affiliation of the Incident Commander, the unified command structure will be utilized.

The first arriving command officer will request the location of the police department's forward command location from Communications. The command officer or his designee will then proceed to that location to coordinate activities with the police department. This position will be designated as the Operations Officer. The Operations Officer will be responsible for direct communications with the Fire and Rescue Incident Commander and provide vital liaison with the police department.

The highest-ranking fire and rescue command officer will report to the designated command post location (identified in the attached chart) immediately upon arrival at the incident.

For safety concerns and ease of identification, all fire and rescue personnel shall wear reflective traffic or command vests. Vests should be worn over their uniforms or PPE.

Fire/HazMat Mitigation

The Fire Incident Commander will develop strategy and tactics for confining and mitigating hazards. Fire and rescue personnel will not enter areas that have not been declared safe by Incident Commanders. Defensive tactics should be a high priority if crew safety cannot be maintained.

Crews operating in a crime scene area will be escorted by police officers to provide assistance for protecting and collecting potential evidence. Crews operating in areas that have been subjected to gunfire or explosives will be escorted by a police security

team to insure their safety. The general intent of the plan is to have fire and rescue crews only working in areas that have been deemed safe.

EMS Oversight

While the basic components of EMS mass casualty management (Triage, Treatment and Transport) are employed in the mitigation of the incident, modification must be made based on the hazards of the scenario. Treatment areas must be secured from inside and outside hazards, and transport routes must be carefully protected from blockage by responding citizens.

Victim Triage

Based on information received at the command post and coordination between the police interior supervisor and fire and rescue sector officers, triage teams will locate patients and transport them to a treatment area.

A triage team will consist of an officer and four EMS providers. Once an area has been determined to be safe, the first fire and rescue triage team with a full escort by police personnel will enter the impacted area. The decision to determine if an area is safe will be shared jointly between the police and the fire and rescue sector officer at the point of entry.

Depending on circumstances, victims will be triaged in place utilizing START triage or moved to a location within or outside the building to a patient staging area. Crews must understand the dynamics involved in such an incident and realize the need for flexibility and patience in carrying out this assignment.

Police personnel will be tasked with retrieving patients from hot zones. Circumstances may dictate the need for all patients to be moved to a treatment area by police personnel.

The presence of possible explosive devices or booby traps will cause the immediate designation of the area as a hot zone, rapid evacuation by fire and rescue personnel, and immediate notification to the command post.

Treatment Area(s)

The Operations Officer will designate treatment area(s) and report their location(s) to the EMS Control Officer/Incident Commander. Depending on the circumstances, this location could be within or outside the building. The area should be declared safe by the police and fire and rescue commanders.

The police will be responsible for the security of the victim treatment area in addition to the routes of access and egress for EMS transport units.

EMS Transport

Identification and transport locations of all patients are important to assist the police investigation. Attempts should be made to accurately document the name of each victim transported and their destination hospital.

While police officers may want to interview patients immediately, red and yellow patient transports should not be delayed to accomplish this.

Operations Support

Hazardous Materials

The Hazardous Materials Officer and the Operations Hazardous Materials Officer shall respond to the command post to coordinate with the Incident Commander. Their primary role will be to assist the Incident Commander in determining the presence of hazardous materials and recommend mitigation actions. Other duties can be assigned as required by the Incident Commander.

Supply

Once it has been determined the incident will be prolonged, the Storekeeper and Courier shall make preparations to provide rehab and support logistics. Designated police and fire and rescue officers will coordinate logistics. These members should report to the staging area for assignment.

Training

Various members of the career training staff will be assigned to the rehab and logistics sector. These members should respond to the scene and report to the staging area for assignment. Their support in this role will be for the duration of the incident unless relieved of duty.

CISM

Members of the CISM team should be notified during the incident and prepared to respond if requested by the Incident Commander. If requested, team members shall respond to the scene and report to the staging area for assignment.

Staffing

A major incident of this type will quickly utilize all available resources. All available personnel should respond to their respective stations to provide supplemental staffing for the incident or provide coverage for additional incidents. Personnel, with the exception of command officers and identified staff, should not respond directly to the scene.

Chaplains

Communications will advise the fire and rescue chaplains of the incident and request they respond to the scene. The chaplains shall report to the staging area once they arrive on the scene and standby for further instructions.

Public Information

Upon notification, the Fire and Rescue PIO will respond to the predetermined press staging area or, if none has been specified, determine the most suitable location. This should be a joint decision with the Police PIO depending on the circumstances. Consideration should be given to the following factors:

1. The location should not impact ongoing operations.
2. The location should be large enough to accommodate a large media operation.
3. The location should be under cover in the event of inclement weather.
4. The event may be changed as the incident evolves.

The Police PIO will serve as the official source of all information regarding the incident to media representatives. This primary responsibility will continue for a period to be determined by the head of each agency.

The Fire and Rescue PIO will provide the needed support to the Police PIO for the duration of the incident. The PIO should provide all operational information to the Police PIO and provide updates as needed. The Fire and Rescue PIO will also assist in the daily briefings to the media and other related duties.

Operational Issues

A large scale incident, such as a mass shooting or a similar type incident at a school, will immediately strain fire and rescue resources. Fire and rescue personnel should take the following factors into consideration while mitigating a school violence incident:

Operations

1. A staging officer and the designated staging area(s) need to be established early.
2. Personnel in staging need to be briefed early as to the incident circumstances.
3. Commanders must prepare to receive and deploy apparatus, personnel, and resources not specifically requested on the scene.
4. All personnel in key positions shall utilize command vests.
5. All responding personnel must report to the designated staging area for assignment.

6. Fire and rescue workers must be alert for primary and secondary explosive devices.
7. Fire and rescue workers must realize early information received will be unclear and conflicting.
8. All responding fire and rescue staff must be familiar with incident command to prevent logistical and operational complications.
9. All responding members must know and stay within their chain of command.
10. Activation of the fire alarm system may cause mass and uncontrolled evacuation of the school or ignite secondary devices within the school.
11. Pre-plans must be updated regularly and contain all vital information.
12. More than one staging area may be needed.
13. Crew integrity and accountability must be maintained at all times.
14. The Incident Commander should request an additional command unit for fire and rescue support operations.
15. Clear and direct communications and the successful implementation of Unified Command are of the utmost importance to the incident outcome.
16. Individuals evacuated from an involved facility can provide valuable information, which should be passed on to the most appropriate personnel.

EMS Oversight

1. Position police officers in triage and treatment areas. Officers may need to be assigned to transporting ambulances.
2. Triage officers must determine and prepare to staff natural triage funnel areas where patients may begin to accumulate.
3. Notify local hospitals and initiate the "command" hospital early into the incident.
4. All responding fire and rescue staff need to be familiar with START triage and triage procedures.
5. Consider the utilization of commercial ambulances or buses early into the incident.
6. There may be a need for multiple triage, treatment, and transport sectors due to many different considerations.
7. All regional medevac agencies should be notified and pre-alerted.
8. Utilization of the OMD and other hospital staff may be required on the scene.

Operations Support

1. Scene commanders must prepare to request spare radio batteries, EMS supplies, rehab supplies, auxiliary lighting and utility company resources early in an incident.
2. Commanders should be sensitive to the needs of their staff members (relief, CISM, rehab, lead by example).
3. Command should also quickly identify a logistics officer.
4. The safety sector should be established early into the incident.

Communications

1. Cellular telephone systems will be overloaded.
2. Communications must consider resources for maintaining regional coverage.
3. The Communications Center will be overloaded and supplemental staff will be needed.
4. Rapid deployment of the PIO and coordination with the other agency PIOs are needed.

Appendix A

School Sample Page

Stonewall Jackson High School

8820 Rixlew Lane
Manassas, VA
Telephone #: 368-2106

Command Post

IBM Building #255
8963 Wellington Road, Manassas, VA 20109
Phone #703 – 367-5538 – 0800 to 1700 hours
Contact person – Mitch Myers
After hours – 703-367-3333 (Security)

Primary Staging

8300 Sudley Road (J.C. Penney)

Secondary Staging

George Mason University

Tertiary Staging

Manassas Presbyterian Church

PIO Staging

Nissan Pavilion

Relocate Students to

Stonewall Middle School

Hazard Area

Bus parking to the rear of the school up to 30 buses may be parked there at one time. A very easy place for someone to hide in or around buses. Also, there is a gas pump in the bus parking area.

Appendix B

Survey and Survey Results

Survey Questions

1. How would you describe your department?

Volunteer _____ Combination _____ Career _____

Results: 33 combination, 16 career

2. What is the population you serve?

Up to 50,000 _____ Up to 100,000 _____ Up to 200,000 _____

Over 200,000 _____

Results: 2 up to 50,000, 18 up to 100,000, 20 up to 200,000 and 9 over 200,000

3. Do you have a structured school violence response plan?

Results: 18 yes, 31 no

4. If no, are you considering or have you considered developing a school violence response plan?

Results: 22 yes, 9 no

If your answer to question # 3 was yes, please answer the following questions:

5. Was the development of your plan coordinated with other agencies? Who were those agencies?

Results: 18 yes, 0 no

Police, Schools, Hospitals, Sheriff, Social Services, FBI, Private
Ambulances, Disaster Relief Agencies, and Health Department

6. Are your personnel familiar with the content of your response plan?

Results: 18 yes, 0 no

7. Have you conducted drills on your plan?

Results: 14 yes, 4 no

8. Does your plan incorporate an incident command system and unified command?

Results: 16 yes, 2 no