

**Developing a Safety and Security Manual
For a Place of Worship
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1. The safety and security manual is simply a collection of material. Often, it is referred to as a Safety and Security Plan--although in reality, plans are only part of the manual. The manual will contain, at a minimum:

- Procedures and policies to help prevent harmful or dangerous situations.
- Emergency response procedures (plans) for events that might reasonably be expected to present a threat or problem in the specific place of worship.
- Contact names and numbers.
- Lists of items and equipment and locations.

All of these could change over time as situations change in the area or the church.

Note: The emergency response procedures seems to work well when they are presented in two formats: As part of each section in the security plan and as a separate document or section for specific individuals and groups. That double-duty approach ensures it is easily found during study of the plan and training about the overall plan, but lends itself to easy review of specific areas.

More extensive advice on the contents of security manuals and materials might be available from written material or articles provided by denominational sources, church insurance providers and churches who have a well organized program.

Unfortunately not all programs have a manual that is helpful because it they are not detailed enough to provide clear guidelines—or so overly detailed that the reader gives up! Balance in this as in other things, is needed.

2. The following material is helpful in the manual or plan:

Overview information

The organizational structure of the church with staff information

Community resources in safety and security responses (crime, fire, public utilities, wastewater drainage, street maintenance, etc.)

Contractors, vendors and others that are resources for various tasks or responses for church maintenance or emergency assistance.

Note: Having key contact information in the manual or binder of material is one way to make sure people keep it handy. They are likely to use it frequently and have it readily available—and they are more likely to occasionally review all of the manual.

A section for each of the major areas considered in the safety and security assessment. Usually some experimentation and discussion is needed to decide how to best accomplish those divisions—and there will be duplications and sometimes triplications of material because of the way that works out. Rather than refer to other sections, repeat information in every section in which it is appropriate, so readers don't have to flip back and forth.

One way to structure the sections is to do it based on functions, processes and programs.

- Financial programs and processes (Offering collection and handling, purchases and approvals, credit cards, audits, etc.)
- Staff safety and security (Pastoral team, counseling team, administrative team, maintenance staff, etc.) (Being alone in the church, appointments, witnesses or observers, times when two should be present, safety guidelines for doing various tasks, lists of dos and don'ts or rules or requirements and responsibilities, etc.)
- Church facilities by building, floor, area or other division. (The assessment divisions can provide structure for this.) This is the section that might address fire alarms,
- Programs and activities (Worship service, Sunday School, Nursery, Childcare, Choir (services, practice, etc.), Social and other events, Vacation Bible School, Youth conference, vehicle use, travel to and from sponsored events, etc.)
- Emergency response plan:
 - *Weather emergencies
 - *Mechanical emergencies
 - *Medical emergencies
 - *Accidents and damage involving people and property.
 - *Criminal activities involving property (Building, property and equipment crimes.)
 - *Criminal actions involving people (threats, assault, kidnapping, sexual assault, phone calls, other crimes.)
 - *Disruption of services or activities (protests, emotionally disturbed persons, angry responses, etc.)
 - *Explosives or bomb threats
 - *Other threats or threatening situations.
 - *Violent actions (shootings, attacks against individuals or congregation.)

Each section will have concise but complete material that explains the rules, policies, procedures and methods pertinent to that section. It should also include the names or general descriptions of the people responsible for routine or emergency tasks or responses.

Example of forms or other material. The manual should contain blank copies and/or examples of any forms, sign-in sheets, approval forms, placards, etc. that are used by staff or others to fulfill the procedures described in the manual.

3. Once a manual has been developed, it should be distributed and trained about.

- Church leadership needs to have the complete manual.
- Individuals and groups should receive only the material they specifically need. For example, everyone using the social hall for a special event would receive an excerpt or special memo about safety and security issues related to the social hall.

4. Steps for developing the Safety and Security Manual:

- 1.)** Naming the people or person who will develop it, in cooperation with everyone involved and under the guidance of church leadership.
- 2.)** Starting and continuing an ongoing program of assessment of every aspect of the place of worship.
- 3.)** After initial assessments, starting to develop material for each major component of the church, based on how it works best for the specific church.
 - Very small churches often break it into programs and basic areas (Worship, Offering, Pastoral security, Parking Lot, Nursery, etc.).
 - Very large churches may separate things differently. (Main building, educational building, first floor, art and artifacts, school, etc.)
- 4.)** Approval of each section and thorough review to ensure it accomplishes what is needed. It should be complete enough to cover every aspect of safety and security for a person, item, area or process, but written clearly enough to be easily understood.
- 5.)** Distribution and training or review with those who will be involved in the procedures, especially leaders, teachers and volunteers.
- 6.)** Frequent updates and edits to reflect current information and changing policies and procedures.

Summary: There are no rules about how a safety and security plan is developed—and it often changes mid-way and looks differently than planned. The goal is to develop a manual that works for the people using it. However, often the test of usefulness is in an emergency—and it's too late then to make corrections. So, the contents and format of the manual should be closely considered and it should err on the side of too much information rather than not enough.

The final version may not be completed for months and even then it will be in a constant state of adjustment and change. The important issue is that all of the elements of a church—people, places, property, processes and programs--are being considered. That alone will increase the safety and security of a place of worship.