



# School Safety Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 7

March 2014

## Bomb Threat Search Teams - Lessons Learned

*Submitted by Heartland Community College, James Hubbard, Executive Director of Facilities, and Keith Gehrand, Safety and Emergency Services Analyst.*

A bomb threat is one potential threat every school needs to be prepared to respond to. Odds are all colleges and universities will experience a bomb threat or suspicious package at some point. The disruption and danger cannot be fully eliminated; however, with some planning and preparation, an institution can save lives, minimize disruption, and act in a prudent well thought out process.

### The Incident

On August 20, 2010 at approximately 1:20 pm, the Heartland Community College switchboard received an anonymous phone call threatening of a bomb “in the building”. The College Safety and Security Services was immediately notified, who in turn notified the Executive Director of Facilities. The Community Commons Building (where the switchboard is located) was evacuated, and during interviews with the call-taker it was determined the caller was not specific to a building and, consequently, the remainder of the campus was evacuated. Local law enforcement and fire services were notified and responded to the campus. Members of the Emergency Response Team gathered in the College Emergency Operations Center (C-EOC).

After a brief review of the facts known to that time, it was decided to evacuate the Community Commons Building (CCB). Based on the information and the fact the caller did not specify the CCB, the remainder of the College was evacuated. Based on nothing further than the phone call, it was decided that, in addition to the evacuation, a cursory search of the Normal campus would be completed and the College would be closed for the remainder of the day.

At 6:15 pm, the cursory search of the campus was concluded roughly five hours after the call was first received. Employees had been sent home and activities at the College resumed the following morning.

A suspect later pleaded guilty to the Heartland bomb threat in addition to other threats he had placed in the Bloomington/Normal community. He was sentenced to prison in a plea agreement and received a five-year sentence.

During the course of incident and based upon first-hand accounts and post-incident discussions (an After Action Report was completed), a number of “lessons learned” evolved from this incident which the College focused upon for improvement. The following is a brief review of the major areas of improvement.

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*Protecting our  
future through  
information  
sharing*

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## **Bomb Threat Search Teams - Lessons Learned (continued)**

### **Review College EOP clarifying roles and responsibilities.**

In development of any Incident Specific Appendixes, such as a Bomb Threat Response, planning must be done in conjunction with local emergency response agencies. In this incident, it was revealed that an outside police agency will generally not conduct a search for explosive devices. Local law enforcement provided valuable assistance during this incident; however, the physical search of the campus was left up to the College. In this incident, finding people who were qualified and willing to assist in a search of the campus was a major impediment. In response to this area of improvement, the College chose to develop their own Bomb Threat Search Teams.

### **College Emergency Operations Center**

The C-EOC was activated to assist in the decision-making process and facilitate the evacuation and subsequent search of the College's main campus. The C-EOC at the time was more a loosely organized group of senior administrators who reacted to the scenario as it transpired. The importance of the role of the C-EOC in emergency operations cannot be underestimated, and the College elected to formalize the C-EOC and provide its members with training in the operations of the C-EOC. Based on an All-Hazard model, the C-EOC staff receives training in the Incident Command System, National Incident Management System, and C-EOC Operations. Manuals and job task aids were developed to help support the members of the C-EOC.

### **Bomb Threat Search Teams**

Based on the bomb threat scenario the College experienced, the College chose to invest time and resources into developing special Search Teams to respond to any future bomb threats. These teams include chosen administrative personnel under the College's policy for College Incident Response Teams (CIRT).

In the development of these teams, a three-phased approach was taken. Phase I involved a one-hour training providing the selected employees with the basic systematic process to conduct a search for explosive devices. Phase II was the completion of the four-hour Incident Response to Terrorist Bombings from New Mexico Tech Energetic Materials Testing and Training Center in Socorro, New Mexico. The training is provided to emergency response personnel free of charge under a grant from the United States Department of Homeland Security. The classes were provided by an employee of the College who is a certified instructor from New Mexico Tech. Phase III is a two-hour session of scenario-based training where participants are placed in multiple simulated scenarios. These scenarios provide the opportunity to search for inert devices.

Originally 89 persons, mostly administrative staff, were selected to participate on this CIRT. Of those selected, who were provided the option to withdraw from the search team without consequence, ten withdrew their names. To date, 29 persons have completed all three training phases, and the rest are continuing to attend the training until completion.

In addition to the team members being trained, the College invested in basic equipment to help the teams carry out their duties. The equipment was assembled and is kept secured, but accessible to a number of persons, for a future incident where it can be quickly taken to the Incident Command Post and distributed to the search team members. Equipment included gloves, flashlights, mirrors, masking tape and markers, and a reference guide on how to carry out the search. It was felt in addition to the yearly refresher training it would be advantageous for the search team members to have access to a quick reference guide during the stressful response phase.

### **Child Development Laboratory**

The College has a Child Development Lab (CDL) on campus which serves the needs of Heartland employees and students, and serves as a teaching laboratory for students. A challenge became obvious during the August 2010 incident regarding the reunification of children at the CDL with their parents. Communications with the parents were made, but no clear plan for reuniting the children with their parents was available, including how to allow the parents access to

## Bomb Threat Search Teams; Lessons Learned (continued)

### Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday of  
Every Month at 10  
am.

Next Webinar -  
April 2, 2014

### Special Topic

### What is a Threat and Vulnerability Risk Assessment?

Each webinar has a  
round table discussion at  
the end. Questions are  
always welcome!

To participate, you must be a  
vetted member. For more  
information please email  
[schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us](mailto:schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us)

the campus when all roads into the campus were blocked by local law enforcement. A specific evacuation and reunification plan was developed for the CDL as many of the children are infants and toddlers and cannot be simply released as with the majority of the College's students and employees. The plan has since been tested including the evacuation of the children, notification of the parents, and establishing an alternate reunification site.

### College Communications

The final broad area of improvement was with the communications with College's Incident Command Post (ICP) and the C-EOC. This included communications with the campus community as a whole via the Emergency Notification System or other means used to communicate with the College's stakeholders. Other means include text messages, mass e-mails, webpage messages, and phone calling trees. In such a dynamic situation, it is imperative the College administration is not only involved in the response, but also looking forward to the recovery phase and returning the College to the pre-incident state as soon as possible. Many employees and students were left in an uninformed state and were uncertain what they should be doing. Additionally, the College administration and local responders (police and fire) need timely and effective communications in all directions from the beginning. In looking to correct this problem, the College has undergone a series of exercises, both table top and functional, to help train not only the College's CIRT members, but the College community as a whole. Immediate Action Guides were developed to provide students and employees with their duties the first few minutes of an incident. Additional training topics have been developed based on a Threat and Vulnerability Assessment to address the most likely incidents to occur on the campus.

### Conclusion

The College has recognized the importance of having a college community well informed and trained on how to respond during an incident. Whether the incident is the numerous tornado warnings received yearly, or something as dramatic as a bomb threat, the College has taken specific steps to help ensure an appropriate and timely response and the safety of students and employees. The work is not done because emergency management is a living process always evolving and changing. The College recognizes the obligation it has to protect its students and employees, while being active participants in the overall community emergency management process. By taking the lessons learned from a real world incident occurring on one of our campuses, we were able to make real changes and improvements to our operations. We hope these lessons learned will help other institutions of higher education improve upon their response capabilities.

### Points of Contact

#### Primary

James Hubbard  
Executive Director of Facilities  
Heartland Community College  
1500 W. Raab Road  
Normal, IL 61761  
309.268-8453  
[Jim.Hubbard@heartland.edu](mailto:Jim.Hubbard@heartland.edu)



#### Alternate Contact

Keith Gehrand  
Safety and Emergency Services Analyst  
Heartland Community College  
1500 W. Raab Road  
Normal, IL 61761  
309.268-8454  
[Keith.Gehrand@heartland.edu](mailto:Keith.Gehrand@heartland.edu)

## Fast Facts about Mumps from the Center for Disease Control (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/mumps/about/mumps-facts.html>

### **Symptoms**

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Swollen and tender salivary glands under the ears or jaw on one or both sides of the face (parotitis)

### **Complications**

Most people with mumps recover fully. However, mumps can occasionally cause complications, and some of them can be serious. Complications may occur even if a person does not have swollen salivary glands (parotitis) and are more common in people who have reached puberty.

Complications of mumps can include

- Inflammation of the testicles (orchitis) in males who have reached puberty, which rarely leads to sterility
- Inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) and/or tissue covering the brain and spinal cord (meningitis)
- Inflammation of the ovaries (oophoritis) and/or breasts (mastitis) in females who have reached puberty
- Temporary or permanent deafness

### **Transmission**

Mumps is spread by droplets of saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose, or throat of an infected person, usually when the person coughs, sneezes or talks. Items used by an infected person, such as cups or soft drink cans, can also be contaminated with the virus, which may spread to others if those items are shared. In addition, the virus may spread when someone with mumps touches items or surfaces without washing their hands and someone else then touches the same surface and rubs their mouth or nose.

Most mumps transmission likely occurs before the salivary glands begin to swell and within the five days after the swelling begins. Therefore, CDC recommends isolating mumps patients for five days after their glands begin to swell.

## What is a HIRA/THIRA and why is this a special topic during the April 2, 2014 webinar?

“Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education” and the “Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans” published during the summer of 2013 by FEMA list six steps in the planning processes. The second step of the planning process is called Understanding the Situation. This step includes sections on: Identifying Threats and Hazards, Assessing Risk, and Prioritizing Threats and Hazards. To do this, the guide cites FEMA’s “Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Guide (CPG 201),” which can be found at <http://www.fema.gov/plan>.

Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment is also called a THIRA. Another term that can sometimes be used to assess the risk and various hazards is Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment, which is referred to as HIRA.

How HIRA/THIRA can help a school or campus become better prepared and what exactly they are will be answered during the April webinar’s special guest, Darryl Drago, a strategic planner for Illinois Emergency Management Agency.

## Questions from School Safety Information Sharing Members

School Safety Information Sharing members are welcome to ask questions. The following are a few that were brought to the program’s attention you might be interested in.

Q: Can we share any information from the School Safety Information Sharing program and to who?

A: Anything we send regardless if it is labeled as FOUO (For Official Use Only) or as a pass through can be shared with those in your school or campus community. Products listed as FOUO can not be disseminated to commercial e-mail accounts, passed around or posted in public locations. You can discuss the content of the document with those in your school or campus who are in a position of “need-to-know”. FOUO documents can not be shared with the general public. Law enforcement involved in the program will receive additional information that is labeled LES (Law Enforcement Sensitive). This type of information is only available to current sworn law enforcement and cannot be shared with anyone other than law enforcement. If you have any questions on how to handle material that is sent out through the School Safety Information Sharing program, please feel free to reach out to Mia.

**Do you have something to share?** This is an invitation for anyone in the School Safety Information Sharing Program to submit lessons learned or success stories that could be helpful and shared with other schools and campuses in Illinois. Authors would be notified of acceptance if their story is selected for the monthly newsletter prior to publication. Questions or ideas, please contact Mia (information below).



Mia Langheim

School Intelligence Officer

### **School Safety Newsletter**

Statewide Terrorism & Intelligence Center  
2200 S. Dirksen Parkway  
Springfield, IL 62703  
Phone: 217-558-2661

E-Mail: [schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us](mailto:schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us)