

The security Week That Was: A Recap – Feb. 15, 2008 by Geoff Kohl, editor, SecurityInfoWatch.com

School shootings: What can be done?

[In the light of the shootings at Northern Illinois University, and instead of our regular summary of industry news and happenings, I want to instead point your attention to a conversation I had this morning with a school security expert in our industry. Whether you're working in the field of school protection, integrating security systems for schools, or just a parent yourself, I think you'll value Patrick's thoughts on how to improve school security. We have to 'wake up' that school incidents like the one yesterday afternoon simply can't be dismissed with a "What's the likelihood it would happen here" type of attitude. That article/interview appears below. -Geoff]

Yesterday afternoon, a gunman dressed in a black trench coat walked into a lecture hall on the campus of Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Ill. He used a shotgun and two handguns and opened fire on the unsuspecting students. When it was over, at least seven persons were dead, and well more than a dozen were injured. It's the kind of story we report on much too often.

[\[See NIU shootings news story.\]](#)

I spoke this morning with one of our regular experts on the topic of school security issues: Patrick Fiel, former head of security at D.C.'s public schools and now a safety advisor with ADT Security Services. Fiel was at the annual conference of the American Association of School Administrators, which is largely focused on K-12 schools, and he said that on the show floor, the shootings seemed almost to be a non-issue: "It was business as usual," said Fiel, "which is sad."

Fiel agreed that such incidents are accelerating in frequency, and that he foresees an increase in similar, future incidents. Fiel added that it's only the most dramatic incidents that get reported. "We don't hear [in national news] about the one- and two-victim incidents that are happening." He notes that there were 32 violent deaths in campus-related incidents last year -- and that was just the numbers for the K-12 schools, so it doesn't include incidents like the Virginia Tech murders.

So what do we do? And I think we'd all agree that measures have to be taken to prevent such incidents. Here' are 10 of the top elements that Fiel suggests:

1. Limit access doors to campus buildings. Cut entrances to one or two points, make the other doors locked to the outside, but able to open freely for fire/life safety exits in order to comply with fire codes.
2. Add a badging/card access system for students to enter the building, and funnel them through limited access points.
3. Add an armed officer (private security or a law enforcement officer) who is superbly trained and able to respond to live shooter incidents. Fiel said he is seeing an increase in guard/officer presence at schools, but that it still needs to increase.
4. Train all potential responders on the ins/outs of the campus so they have resources to know which building is which, what entries are, etc.
5. Pull in your staff. It's not realistic, said Field, to expect a small police force that has to arrive to be the end-all of incident response. Staff/faculty are already there, and they need to be trained in lock-down/shelter-in-place and other response mechanisms.
6. Find the budget money. "'We don't have the budget' is a lame excuse," said Fiel. "These schools can always find the money after the incident; it's coming from the same resources that were there before an incident." Pull the community together to find the money.
7. Address emergency notification systems. Add a solution to the campus if one doesn't already exist and test the percentage of students/staff it can reach.

8. Create widespread school security standards. Right now security plans are often created at the individual school level, and there exists a great vacuum in terms of knowing what other schools are doing/should be doing.
9. Conduct preparedness/response drills. "I think schools are starting to go through the motions [of increasing security], but they're not doing the drills," he added.
10. Most importantly, though, said Fiel, "School administrators first have to get rid of the 'It won't happen here' mentality. It is happening."

"Would this fully prevent any type of shooting from ever occurring?" said Fiel. "No, I don't think we can ever 100 percent stop these kinds of incidents, but it could limit them, and I won't be satisfied until I start hearing numbers and statistics about a decline in school-related violence."

Related Content:

- [7 dead in shootings at N. Illinois U.](#)
- [SD&I editor Deb O'Mara reflects upon shootings at her alma mater](#)

From all of us at SecurityInfoWatch.com and the Cygnus Security Group, we extend our prayers to those affected by the NIU shootings.

Quote of the Week:

"Times have changed; we are no longer seeing hostage situations. The shooters plan to commit suicide. By the time police arrive, it's often too late."

-- School security expert Pat Fiel,
commenting on changing paradigms for
school violence