

# Emergency egress plan response for school shootings

The recent school shootings in America remind all of us that the threat of danger is real, but Virginia Fire Chiefs Association urges schools districts to stay diligent in their preparations against the ravages of fire. Fire codes, fire protection systems, and increased preparedness drills have significantly reduced the risk of fire in educational facilities, but the threat of violence can jeopardize the progress made in reducing fire risk. The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association and the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) have created a positional statement on school safety and emergency egress plan in response to school shootings.

The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) has recommended that school work diligently to ensure that fire safety and prevention remains positioned to protect lives in an all hazard emergency environment. *Diminishing fire safety protection, in the spirit of addressing an active shooter threat, is not in the best interest of enhancing holistic school safety. We strongly encourage you to take an active role in working with all concerned parties to ensure our schools are as prepared as possible to the many threats facing them.*

*In the past, fire and explosives have been utilized in commercial and assembly facilities to cause mass casualties. Most buildings are not designed, nor constructed, in a manner that provides protection to occupants who shelter in place or seek an area of refuge. In fact, fire alarms may be the only active device that can bring about the needed safe evacuation and egress. We realize many schools use passive fire protection allowances as allowed by the consensus codes in lieu of providing automatic fire sprinklers or fire detection devices. Yet, it's important to remember, the key to any emergency preparedness is to plan and train. NASFM strongly encourages you undertake an approach that includes stakeholders working collaboratively to build site specific preparedness, code compliance, and response plans for your communities.*

*At the same time, we would like to make some specific recommendations as it relates to the operation of fire alarm systems.*

- 1. Fire Alarms – We discourage any deactivation, tampering, or modification of fire alarm systems and associated supervised life-safety and egress systems. Further we recommend strict compliance with the NFPA 72 standard.*
- 2. Fire Drills – Fire drills should be conducted as recommended by the consensus codes with frequency thresholds maintained. Special accommodations may be allowed where concerns exist for malicious activation of fire alarms. We recommend methods such as scheduling fire drills and sharing it in advance with staff/authorized persons. Employing sufficient personnel to monitor the drill, similarly to other outdoor events as part of normal school operation, is also recommended.*

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*3. Enhancements to fire safety and fire protection features in accordance with nationally recognized consensus codes – Upgrading buildings to a more current edition of the consensus codes can allow for the use of delayed alarms to include positive alarm sequence. The installation of other active fire suppression systems can also allow for the removal of numerous fire pull stations in existing conditions.*

In an effort to minimize potential impacts from new threats, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association suggests the following:

➤ **Be purposeful when conducting school fire drills,**

All-hazard emergency evacuation drills (ie. fire drills) are an integral part of the safety and security of all occupants. Drills provide occupants with the foundations necessary to react to all emergencies. Additionally, they are an educational component for the safety of occupants beyond the facility. Without proper training and preparation occupants may become confused and succumb to hazards encountered during an emergency. Fire drills are a critical component of any all-hazard safety plan to reinforce the appropriate response to emergencies.

➤ **Collaborate with local officials,**

Mitigating the threat of active assailants all the while ensuring the safety of occupants needs to be a collaborative effort with local officials. The complexity of dealing with active assailants includes securing facilities in a fashion that prohibits unauthorized entry and allows occupants to exit the structure in a safe and efficient manner. Private interest groups have begun soliciting educational facilities on “new and improved” locking devices that claim to secure the facility and prohibit unauthorized entries. Unfortunately, many of these devices may jeopardize safety of occupants. In light of active assailant threats and the need to add additional security devices, Virginia Fire Chief’s encourage educational facilities to contact your local Fire Marshal’s Office and Building Officials to begin the discussion of approved locking devices. Local code officials will ensure the devices sought out for increasing security comply with approved codes and standards.

**If you have any questions, please contact your local Fire Marshal or Building Officials Office.**

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## **School Security – Suggested Classroom Door Checklist**

- The door should be lockable from inside the classroom without requiring the door to be opened<sup>1</sup>
- Egress from the classroom through the classroom door should be without the use of a key, a tool, special knowledge, or effort<sup>2</sup>
- For egress, unlatching the classroom door from inside the classroom should be accomplished with one operation<sup>3</sup>
- The classroom door should be lockable and unlockable from outside the classroom<sup>4</sup>
- Door operating hardware shall be operable without tight grasping, tight pinching, or twisting of the wrists<sup>5</sup>
- Door hardware operable parts should be located between 34 and 48 inches above the floor<sup>6</sup>
- The bottom 10 inches of the "push" side of the door surface should be smooth<sup>7</sup>
- If the school building does not have an automatic fire sprinkler system, the classroom door and door hardware may be required to be fire-rated and the door should be self-closing and self-latching<sup>8</sup>
- If the door is required to be fire-rated, the door should not be modified in any way that invalidates the required fire-rating of the door and / or door hardware<sup>9</sup>

In the Suggested Classroom Door Checklist, "should" is used throughout. However, based upon building codes, life safety codes, fire codes, and federal, state, and / or local laws and regulations that are applicable to a particular school, these requirements may be MANDATORY.

Always check, and comply with all applicable building and fire codes, life safety codes, and laws, regulations and other requirements when considering safety measures in your building.

## **Additional resource information**

[www.firemarshals.org](http://www.firemarshals.org)

