School Safety Planning:
A Law Enforcement Perspective

CENTEGIX®

Experienced law enforcement officials have seen and experienced many types of emergencies. Consequently, they've also witnessed a wide range of emergency responses. Retired Police Chief Jeri Williams has seen it all throughout her 33 years in law enforcement. Her extensive experience has taught her that healthy community relationships are key to successful emergency response, and she advocates for strong partnerships between schools and other community stakeholders. Here, Williams shares her insights about what elements combine to create a robust school safety plan.

Police Chief Jeri Williams' View on a Culture of Safety

Jeri Williams is a law enforcement veteran. She served as the Chief of Police in Oxnard, California, and retired after 11 years as the Chief of the Phoenix Police Department in Arizona. Chief Williams has experience with emergencies of all kinds, from domestic incidents to large-scale emergencies that require sizable first responder and law enforcement response.

"Ideally," Chief Williams said, "schools and other institutions would be safe places. Unfortunately, there are always events or incidents that leave us feeling unsafe in our environment. To create safer schools, the entire community needs to work together to forge a culture of safety."

Chief Williams emphasizes that in any type of emergency, from allergic reactions, heart attacks, and seizures to instances of schools being terrorized, every second matters. Any measures that accelerate critical incident response, Williams says, can mean the difference between life and death.

The Three Elements of Successful Emergency Response

According to Chief Williams, the following three elements are critical to effective emergency response at any scale:

1. Constant communication
2. Real-time information sharing
3. Leveraging technology

Communication

Effective communication must begin long before an emergency occurs. To create effective lines of communication, school safety planners must think of the community holistically. "Community" includes businesses, schools, hospitals, law enforcement entities, and private institutions. These entities should communicate at all times so that people become familiar with one another and the lines of communication within each organization.

In particular, safety planners should begin by laying the groundwork for relationships between community leaders, citizens, law enforcement, and public safety officials. These relationships are critical to facilitating successful responses in times of crisis.

"The first time you engage with a police officer," Williams said, "shouldn't be when something has gone wrong."

Creating common ground is the key to engaging all stakeholders in the conversation about safety and emergency response.

"There is not a human being on this planet who does not want to be safe," Williams said. By creating a shared investment in safety, organizations bring all stakeholders into the conversation.

Chief Williams says stakeholders must listen to each other to gain insight from these conversations and improve school safety. During a crisis situation, it is difficult to listen; when we are stressed, we are less likely to absorb information. Organizations, therefore, must create intentional time to reflect on what worked well during the crisis (or drill) and what did not. Taking the time to hear from everyone affected by an emergency helps schools create more robust and effective safety plans.

Real-time Information Sharing

Emergency response technology has played an increasingly important role in school safety plans in recent years. According to Chief Williams, real-time information sharing empowers law enforcement officials to respond effectively to emergencies on school campuses. When specific information can be provided to first responders by those immediately involved in an emergency, this creates an accurate picture of events. Officers can better understand—and can better prepare for—the specific conditions they will encounter.

Real-time information also facilitates law enforcement officers' ability to communicate important information to affected communities.

According to Chief Williams, "If we have a lockdown, [for example] how can I, as a law enforcement officer, communicate critical, real-time information with community members to help them understand how we are going to contain a dangerous situation?"

Chief Williams points out that most law enforcement agencies in the U.S. are underfunded and understaffed. This means that departments must streamline their responses and potentially work with limited resources. It is critically important to effective emergency response that law enforcement officers know what resources to send and where

to send them. This information saves officers time discovering the location of an emergency or a safety asset. Instead, their time is spent intervening in a crisis and providing help to those who need it.

Leveraging Critical Incident Response Technology

When approaching a critical incident, first responders must know where and how to deploy. Wearable panic buttons with location functionality direct responders to the precise location where assistance is needed. Equipping school staff with an easy-to-use badge that transmits their location in real time speeds emergency response and saves precious seconds in an emergency.

Emergency response technology empowers responders with the knowledge they need to deploy the right resources for a particular emergency. Responders deploy differently when responding to a fire than to a violent individual; their deployment to a bomb threat is distinct from their deployment to a natural disaster. The most effective emergency response technology for schools provides specific locations for people in need of assistance and for the resources first responders need to deploy effectively.

Chief Williams said, "First responders need to know exact locations and what they're arriving to. They need to know where the resources are."

In schools, first responder resources include:

- Fire extinguishers
- Automated external defibrillators (AEDs)
- First aid and bleed-stop kits
- Spaces where a weapon or violent individual could be hidden

Fire department personnel, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and law enforcement officers require distinct information to respond effectively. Williams asserts that the information afforded by critical incident mapping technology informs agencies' responses:

"In law enforcement," said Williams, "we need to know what tools and equipment to deploy when we arrive at an emergency."

Chief Williams says that by leveraging critical incident mapping technology, schools can provide a thorough and accurate understanding of an incident so that first responders can be best prepared to contain it.

Critical incident mapping technology is an essential element of up-to-date school safety plans. Chief Williams points out that a school's paper maps are often outdated. Over the history of a school, the grounds and buildings frequently change in ways not represented on original maps. For example, schools add mobile trailers, change the nurse's office's location, or change entry and exit points. When responders are unaware of these changes, they lose critical time navigating the campus. These wasted seconds can mean the difference between a successful emergency response and tragedy.

By contrast, a critical incident mapping system gets responders where they need to be as rapidly as possible. Safety officers, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics are not running around campus with their equipment searching for people to help. The seconds it takes to locate people can make the difference between life and death—every second matters.

Community Preparation for Emergency Response

According to Chief Williams, communities can best prepare for emergency response with preparation and repetition. All institutions should participate in regular drills and ensure everyone understands their organization's emergency protocols.

Within an organization:

- Conduct regular drills so everyone learns what steps to follow during an emergency.

- Get everyone comfortable with emergency protocols to know where to go and what to do when an alert sounds.

- Incorporate emergency planning into every level of operations.

School safety plans are most effective when all stakeholders are fully informed and school leaders intentionally create a culture of safety. Critical incident response technology creates the conditions for meeting these criteria. As Chief Williams says, leveraging technology in service of safety is the way toward successful emergency response.

CENTEGIX Technology Empowers Organizations to Plan and Respond

CENTEGIX critical incident response technology is designed to create a safety culture in schools. The CENTEGIX Safety Platform™ is the foundation of a school's multi-layered safety plan.

The Safety Platform engages educational leaders in creating and maintaining a school safety plan. It facilitates:

- Information sharing: multiple stakeholders can see and update map information.

- Planning: staff members gain insight into safety incidents, including locations, times, and other conditions, which facilitates the development of safety protocols.

- Peace of mind: the private, managed networks are not dependent on cellular or Wi-Fi connectivity.
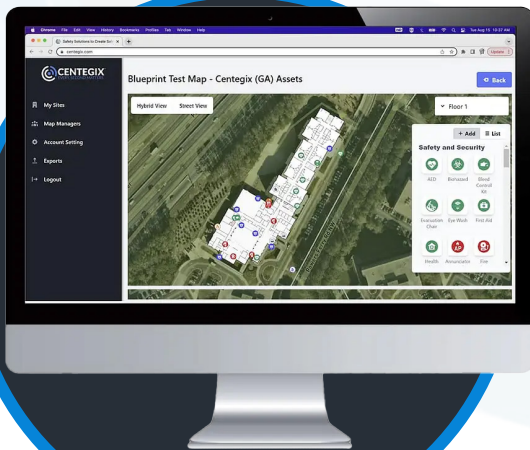
The Safety Platform components combine to accelerate emergency response and facilitate effective school safety planning.

CENTEGIX Safety Blueprint™

CENTEGIX Safety Blueprint is the Safety Platform's digital critical incident mapping component. Safety Blueprint can be updated in real time, enabling schools to avoid the pitfalls of outdated maps. When first responders know exactly where to go, they get there faster.

Safety Blueprint:

- Accelerates response by informing responders the level of emergency, staff alert, or lockdown, where crises are occurring, and the campus layout.

- Facilitates quick dissemination of campus information in an emergency.

- Locates all safety assets, including AEDs, fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and entry and exit points.

- Streamlines safety protocol maintenance work by reducing the time needed to manage critical information for every piece of safety equipment and its maintenance plan.

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CENTEGIX CrisisAlert™

Chief Williams asserts that constant communication and real-time information sharing are critical elements of an effective emergency response. CENTEGIX CrisisAlert is a wearable mobile panic button that empowers staff to request help from anywhere on campus. By ensuring that administrators and first responders are made instantly aware of emergencies, the CrisisAlert badge grants peace of mind to teachers and staff.

With CrisisAlert:

- Staff can quickly and discreetly request help, preventing a situation from escalating.

- First responders receive precise location details, speeding their response and saving critical seconds.

- Schools can count on 100% staff coverage; the CrisisAlert badge is easy to wear and use.

- A private, managed network provides reliable connectivity and eliminates associated with spotty cell or Wi-Fi service.

- Staff can initiate two types of alerts: "help needed" or "lockdown."

- The entire campus is covered, including outdoor spaces.

- Administrators can gather data about safety incidents to inform school safety plans.

- Campus responders are immediately alerted and can communicate with law enforcement and first responders.

CENTEGIX Visitor Management

CENTEGIX Visitor Management empowers school staff with information about who is present on campus. School staff can check in and authenticate visitors, ensuring that only permitted, verified visitors are allowed on campus.

Visitor Management:

- Records historical visitor details.

- Facilitates easy and secure check-in and check-out procedures.

- Empowers schools to determine who can and cannot gain access to campus.

- Enables schools to analyze visitor data to define visitor policies and volunteer and visitor lists.

In the event of an evacuation, CENTEGIX Visitor Management and Reunification aids in reunifying students with their approved guardians. Whereas manual reunification checklist processes are inefficient and can slow the reunification process, CENTEGIX's cloud-based solution digitizes reunification to prioritize efficiency. A faster reunification process minimizes trauma for students and staff and eliminates the possibility of human error during stressful moments.

The CENTEGIX Safety Platform™: Your School Safety Plan's Foundation

Experts in emergency response emphasize communication, real-time information, and technology as critical elements of an effective emergency response. The CENTEGIX Safety Platform is designed to provide accurate information that accelerates emergency response and empowers school leaders to plan effectively.

Chief Jeri Williams says that keeping institutions safe relies on leveraging critical incident technology. Want to learn more about how your school or district can use CENTEGIX solutions to create effective emergency response plans that keep schools—and the people within them—safe? Request a demo today.