



Making Old Schools Safer

A few weeks ago, I wrote about old cars or new cars and new school versus old schools. Which were the safest? The consensus of the discussion was new tended to be safer. That being said, not all children can attend new schools or even schools, which have been remodeled or retrofitted. We went on to discuss very low- or no-cost activities, plans, and processes that can make older schools safer. (Please refer to the Blog of January 23, 2015.)

Let's take this a step further and look at some low-cost retrofits, remodeling, and/or equipment changes that can provide greater safety. It is difficult to have this discussion without including some safety and security procedures as well.

- Provide training for your local fire, police, and emergency responders. They should understand the layout of your school facility, where the phones are located, where master controls are located, and how to operate the intercom and or bell system.
- Design the outside school property with appropriate signage, vegetation, fencing, and clearly defined boundaries.
- Assure there are no obstacles or landscaping obscuring the view of the entrances and exits; have periodical checks to ensure these areas have clear views.
- Keep the outdoor lighting well maintained.
- Place cameras in niches and blind spots around the school building indoors and outdoors.
- Install faceplates on the exterior doors to prevent jimmying of locks.
- Renumber all interior doors and floors of multilevel buildings so that the numbering makes sense and is sequential.
- Develop two-way communication systems between all classrooms or rooms in which children may be served.
- Work with the phone company for an easy-to-use caller ID system, which also enables call tracing.
- Keep unoccupied spaces locked when not in use.
- Ensure that unauthorized users cannot control restroom lighting.
- Install automatic battery and/or portable generators to maintain emergency and communication equipment when there is no electricity. Make sure these batteries or generators are well maintained.
- Install a panic button or alarm easily accessed by the front desk of the school. This alarm needs to be connected directly to the fire and police departments, on-site school security, as well as emergency services.
- Hire a safety and security employee to maintain and provide professional development on security and safety plans and to keep them current. This person should have a calendar with periodic assessments of security systems, playgrounds, athletic facilities, portable classrooms, and any other area that needs continual maintenance and attention to mitigate school hazards and safety issues.

- Install window safety film, if plexiglass windows are too expensive.
- Know the natural disasters that are more likely to occur in your geographic area; have disaster and sheltering plans on the ready at all times.
- Retrofit and remodel entryways to provide vestibules, along with revised floor plans that have school offices in the front of each building. This should be accompanied with visitor and parent sign-in practices.

While many of our current schools have not been designed with safety and security measure in mind, with thought, professional development, and relatively small financial investments, older schools can be made safe. Be assured, we here at the EFC realize that the list we have shared in this blog is only the very tip of the iceberg. For more information, please go to our website (www.efc.gwu.edu) and read the many trusted and tried procedures used to make the older school more safe.

Back to the new car, old car . . . Do we buy a new Camaro, or retrofit and remodel the antique Mustang to improve its safety? We can do a lot to make that old Mustang safer!! Watch the blog site in a few weeks: the topic will be Safety by Design: New Construction.

References and resources:

www.efc.gwu.edu
<http://rems.ed.gov/>

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