

Getting Started in Court Security

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MONTANA

JUDICIAL BRANCH

Court Security Position

- Started in January 2024
- Plan and Develop statewide initiatives for safety and security
- Develop and coordinate trainings related to de-escalation and security response
- Courthouse Security reviews
- Work with local law enforcement training and developing programs
- Be a support resource for all aspects of court security

Why worry about courthouse security?

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H44A-wpdAgA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Azk3a57ZHP8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd1MyDC8KOE>

Where do we start with a court security program?

- If we start *talking* about security, we will start *acting* on security
- *Security is not something that is done for you, it is something you participate in!*

Adopt and Emergency Action Plan

- The first, most effective thing we can do is prepare *our* people
- All persons who regularly work in the courthouse or courthouse annex should receive familiarization training regarding actions they should take during various emergency situations consistent with the emergency plans
- Training could include lockdown and evacuation procedures
- New judges and court staff should receive an initial court security orientation briefing that includes such topics as shooter in place and hostage-taking, emergency procedures (e.g., for fire, weather and medical emergencies), building evacuation routes, building
- Train judges and court staff on self-defense options, threat de-escalation techniques, and personal safety/security considerations during hostage situations
- The judicial branch has available a template that can be adopted for your specific jurisdiction

Establish a local courthouse safety and security committee

- Each committee should include representatives from the county sheriff's department, justice court, clerk of court's office, county office of emergency management, facilities management, and lawyers (county attorney, public defenders, and private attorneys)

Duties of the Security Committee

That judges and staff (state and local staff) in the court system understand the evacuation plan for the courthouse and other relevant parts of the disaster plan;

Ensure judges and staff understand the threat reporting system use the system to report threats to the courthouse or staff

Judges and staff understand the emergency alert (panic button) system in the courthouse, how to activate the system, and who to expect will respond. Such emergency alert systems should be tested routinely

That juries and other citizens serving the courts are given information about courthouse evacuation plans at the start of their service as a juror

Duties of the Security Committee

Each local committee should develop, review and implement a comprehensive set of policies and procedures to ensure the consistent application of security measures.

Each local committee should coordinate an annual training day (or week) instruct courthouse users about local safety and security procedures

Instruction should include active shooter training, bomb threats, fire evacuation, and other disaster preparedness measures.

Building Security Considerations

- Is court security routinely available?
- Is there an order against weapons in the courtroom?
- Video Surveillance?
- Duress alarms (on the bench and for staff)
- Is the courthouse alarmed after hours?
- Are the judicial offices secure?
- Is the exterior adequately lighted?
- Are metal detectors available?
- Has your courthouse undergone a site assessment?

What are the obstacles?

- Historic Buildings
- Buy in “It won’t happen here”
- Tradition, a reluctance to make courthouses less “friendly”
- Budgets
- Staffing

Situational Awareness

- **Scan:** Most people automatically scan new situations or environments, but don't always focus on the most useful information
- **Exits:** Always be aware of your exits and have an exit strategy.
- **Personal Space:** If someone is crowding you, seems suspicious, or is displaying threatening body language, scan them for subtle signs of violent intent or a hidden weapon. Increase the distance between yourself and this person
- **Visualize:** Play out scenarios in your head beforehand. If you spot a situation in your immediate vicinity that could pose a threat, such as a blind corner on a sidewalk, ask yourself, "If there was a threat behind that corner, how would I react? Where could I escape?" Premeditating such responses can help them to become second-nature in the event of an actual emergency, making your response more effective.

Situational Awareness

- **Intuition:** Trust your gut. If you get the sense that something is wrong or doesn't add up, do not ignore it. *Your instincts exist to protect you* – it is always better to be overcautious than to ignore warning signs that turned out to be legitimate.
- **Speak Up:** Report all the following situations immediately to your supervisor report any suspicious persons, activity, or behavior. Even if there is not currently a dangerous situation or nobody has been injured.

Tips for personal safety at home

- Installing a basic home security system including a doorbell camera
- Removing bushes and other growth from the near-vicinity of your home to deny cover for a would-be assailants
- Lighting the exterior of your home with flood-type lighting to deter surveillance and would-be assailants
- Developing a place in your home to retreat (panic room) should your home come under attack
- Notifying local law enforcement of the address of your home in advance of any potential emergency
- staying aware of strange cars or vans in the streets near your home (especially ones that don't show activity or movement)

Questions?

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