

Expect the Unexpected: Preparing for Threats and Emergencies Before They Happen

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1

Why do we need this class?

By CRIMESIDER STAFF · AP · December 25, 2015, 9:41 AM

Texas judge shot in driveway released from hospital

2

Yeah, but we are just
justice court!

3



4

Where do Court Security Best Practices come from?

- In 1994, the National Sheriff's Association published results of a two year study relating to security in the nation's state and local courts.
 - The study became a national reference for the improvement of court security
 - The National Sheriff's Association served as consultants to the US Marshal Service in the development and training of court security professionals.
 - See *handout*.

5

Who should be involved in court security?

General concept is to involve **everyone** that has a responsibility in the court facility

- This involvement allows for security to be addressed from all vantage points and allows incorporation into the design of new facilities, upkeep and efficient coverage of existing facilities. And permits those responsible for the protection of the facility to be involved in the decision-making process.

6

Including you!

7

What are we talking about today?

- Trends in Court Security
- BEFORE: Prepare your space for security risks
- BEFORE: Prepare for policies for emergencies
- AFTER: Reporting Security Risks

8

Current Trends in Courtroom Security

9

Current Trends

- Each working day courthouses are visited by citizens who may be disgruntled and angry to the point of breaking the law.
- Individuals and groups have committed acts of violence in courthouses including:
 - Assault,
 - Murder,
 - Escape from custody,
 - Disruption of proceedings,
 - Shootings
 - Arson
 - Bombings

10

Types of Trends

- **TREND 1:** Since screening has gotten better in courthouses, violence has moved to the outside areas.

11

Shooting outside courthouse - Beaumont

12

National Center for State Courts - 2012 Future Trends in State Court
By: Tim Fautske, Steve Benson and Steve Swenson

Surrounding Areas

"because of heightened courthouse security measures (e.g., security screening, controlled access, law-enforcement staffing, etc.) some individuals may have to choose locations other than the courthouse to commit violent actions. These "incident-displaced" locations might include security-screening stations and courthouse plazas, parking, and perimeter areas."

13

- *Example of outer perimeter shooting*
- *Jefferson County, (Beaumont, TX) 3/13/2012*
- Bartholomew Granger, on trial for sexual assault, shot his 20 y/o daughter and his ex-wife, who were testifying against him. Granger was shooting from his vehicle in front of the county courthouse. He also shot 2 by-standers, killing one (a 79 y/o female), then ran over his daughter. He was injured in a gun battle with police, briefly took hostages in a business a block away before arrested.

○ **Play "Texas courthouse shooting – Beaumont"**

14

Types of Trends

- **TREND 2:** Virtual threats online including social media posts and finding judge information online.

15

- "The people who are being charged in court are only the tip of the iceberg of all of the threats that we are seeing," said Judge David McKeague, the chair of the security committee for the Judicial Conference of the United States. "They certainly have become more personal over the years, and they have become more fixated on individual judges."
- "Judges' photographs are being posted, pictures of their homes, their home addresses, their phone numbers, information about their significant others and their kids," McKeague noted. "All are apparently considered to be fair game by these people with grievances against federal officers."

16

Types of Trends

- **TREND 3:** Need for more emergency management preparation for natural disasters.

17

Texas has a lot of experience recently!

18

Types of Trends

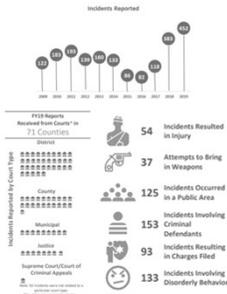
- **TREND 4:** Anti-government feeling.
- Sovereign Citizens from Security Magazine:
- These individuals believe that the U.S. federal government is illegitimate and that they are "freemen," outside the control of government....Furthermore, this mindset is comprised of pseudo-legal jargon as well as sometimes coupled with various conspiracy theories of militia groups: from a world-government trend to a foreign cabal controlling the U.S. and from the existence of UN troops and FEMA concentration camps on U.S. soil.

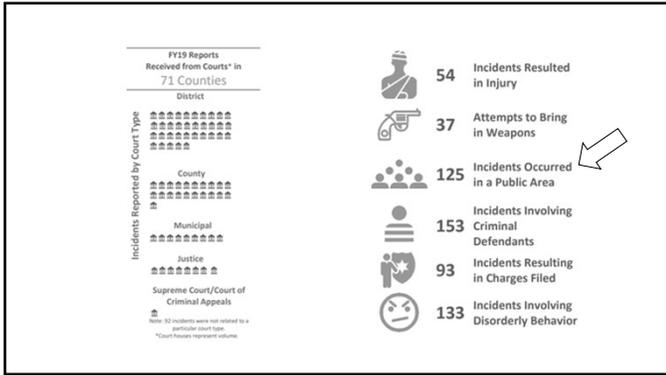
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Video of a sovereign citizen filming in Bexar County Courthouse

20

Texas Court Security Incidents
Fiscal Year 2019 Summary Statistics





22

Group talk:

- Choose a situation that has happened to your court in the last few years: covid, ice storm, fire, flood
- Discuss how your office handled the immediate action the court needed to take.
 - How was staff contacted?
 - How was the public contacted?
 - How was court equipment or paper protected? (Or used virtually)

23

Preparing for Security Risks Before They Happen

24

Preparation Part 1: Thinking about your physical space

25

Handout: Thinking About Your Building's Security Measures

26

Outside the Building

- Lighting
 - Is your building lighted outside?
 - Who has access to the switches?
 - Are public areas lit outside?
- Outside building
 - Landscaping?
 - Exterior door lock
 - Unused doors
 - Window access
 - Who can enter where?

27

Outside the Building

- What features are there around your courthouse? Your office?
- Walk around! Exterior and interior to get direct observations

28

What needs to be noted in this photo?

29

Be on the look out for these also:

- Physical barriers
- Vehicle and pedestrian access to the courthouse
- Gates
- Lights
- Parking
- Construction

30

Parking

31

Parking Lot Safety Tips

- Establish clear traffic flow with signage, mirrors, arrows
- Provide adequate lighthing
- Maintain the pavement
- Prepare for inclement weather

If these are an issue, who can you contact?

32

Inside the building

- Who has keys for the building?
 - How do you determine who has/gets a key?
- Does the court have an alarm system or panic button?
 - Do you conduct tests?
 - If so, how long does it take for law enforcement to respond?
- Is there a safe or vault? How do you store money?
- Working fire alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers?

33

Inside the building

- Are records kept in areas that are inaccessible for unauthorized persons?
- Window between public and clerk? Or barrier?
- How long is cash kept in the office?
- What's the process for taking it to the bank?
- Is there a public waiting area separate from the clerk area?
- Is there a way for clerks to exit besides the public waiting area?

34

Court Clerk
Window

35

In the courtroom

- Are unused doors secured?
- Separate entrances for judges/staff from public?
- Is the judge and court staff separated by a barrier?
- Potential weapons like drinking glasses kept out of public's reach?
- Do you know the firearm policy in the courtroom?

36

Let's discuss!

- After going through these security measure questions, what do you think is thing that needs the most improvement in your office to make it safer?
- Discuss in your table groups.

37

Prepare your policies for emergencies

38



Issue: Courts closed!

- Do you have emergency info for personnel?
- What is your policy for telling the public court is cancelled?
- What is your policy for moving court?

39



- What is your procedure for telling your court security officer when you think a dangerous person is coming to court?
- Procedure for telling your CSO when a security incident happens?
- What other court security policies and procedures should you come up with?

40

What are the rules and policies for inside the courtroom?

41

What are your court's rules?

- What is acceptable attire & unacceptable attire
- Court's policy on recording devices, cell phones, and other electronic devices being in the court room
- Court's policy on what items can be brought in the courtroom
- Court's policy on food and drink in the courtroom
- Court's policy on children in the courtroom

42

What are your court's rules?

- How are these policies communicated?
 - Online?
 - Posted?
- How is information communicated to the court security officer?

43

Have you considered?

- Service animals and emotional support animals
- Policy on guns in the court

44

Emergency Plans

- Are emergency plans current? Does the court staff know the emergency plan?
- What directions should people evacuate?
- How do emergency plans differ depending on the emergency?
- Is equipment up to date?

WALK THROUGH YOUR EMERGENCY EVACUATION ROUTES!

- Are they blocked? Can disabled people access them?

45

Tip: Create a package of essential documents for your files and for new clerks/judge/court security officer. Packet can include:

- Policies and procedures
- Overall court security operations
- Screening protocols
 - What can and can't be brought into the court?
- Procedures that govern courtrooms and other areas in the event of a security incident
- Risk assessment protocols
- Incident reporting materials
- Operation manuals

Emergency Plans – New Staff

46

Emergency Drills

47

Tips to prepare for emergency drills

1. MEET WITH YOUR COURTHOUSE SECURITY OFFICER to design drill.
2. Create an in-house Safety Committee to plan the drill. Include other offices if other offices are held in your building.
3. Create written evacuation routes and post them throughout the building.

48

Tips to hold an emergency drill

4. Always let law enforcement and court security officers (and fire department if a fire drill) know before you conduct a drill.
5. You can opt to not let staff know about a drill ahead of time, but make sure it is clear at the offset of the drill that it is a drill, not a real situation.
6. Conduct emergency drill of different types: fire, active shooter, etc.

49

Tips to hold an emergency drill

7. Change up the scenarios each time you have a drill. For example, put a cone up "blocking" a certain way out so that participants have to find another evacuation route.
8. Have the in-house safety committee hold a follow-up meeting so that you can discuss issues that arose.
9. Schedule drills regularly on your calendar.

50

Question: Who has had a
drill at work?
-Fire drill?
-Active shooter drill?

How did it go?

51

Court Security Incidents

Reporting incidents

52

Who knows your procedure for telling your CSO when a security event happens?

- What are the procedures for when a security event happens?
 - Do you know what a security event is?
 - What is the procedure for telling your court security officer when you think a dangerous person is coming to court?
 - What is the procedure for telling your CSO office when a security event happens?
 - Do you train new staff on this?

53

What is a Court Security Incident?

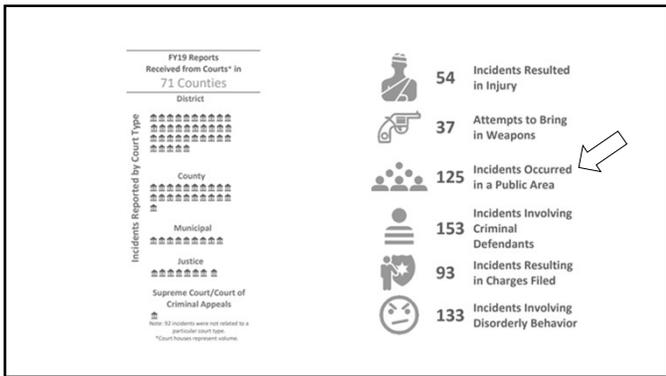
- Any adverse event that threatens the security of a person or property, or causes or may cause significant disruption to functions of the court due to a breach in security.
- This includes, but is not limited to,
 - threats to harm a person or property,
 - disorderly conduct,
 - assaults,
 - escape/attempts,
 - weapons,
 - introduction of weapons or contraband,
 - or any other serious situation involving security issues that disrupts court activities.
- Note: An incident is not a medical emergency or a non-threatening personnel matter.

54

Is this a court security incident?

- A rude litigant that says you don't know how to do your job
- A rude litigant who says you don't know how to do your job and uses his arm to knock everything off the counter
- A litigant who says the judge is a dumb*person*
- A litigant who says the judge is a dumb*person* and then says their home address out loud
- A person flirting on the phone
- A person flirting who calls after you ask them to stop and asks if you are in the office by yourself

55



56



When a court security incident happens....

- Who knows your procedure for telling your CSO when a security event happens?

Raise your hand!

57

What kind of things should you make note of when reporting a court security incident?

- Time/location/mode (i.e. phone, in-person)
- Was the threat verbal or written? Who was it directed at?
- Who perpetrated the incident?
 - Litigant, friend family of litigant, random member of the public, juvenile, etc.
- Was the incident reported to law enforcement?
 - "I didn't report this to law enforcement when it happened so I shouldn't inform my court security officer about it." **WRONG!**
- Brief description of the event

58

Group Discussion

- Have you experienced a court security incident? Did you report it at the time?
- After learning this information, what would you have done differently in reporting this info (if anything?)

59

Courtroom Security

"If courts cannot secure the safety of its judicial officers and the public inside the courthouse doors, they surely cannot secure justice for society beyond them."

Legal Aid Society of Orange County v. Crossan,
784 F. Supp. 1127 (S.D.N.Y. 1992)

60

We can
do this
together.