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INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Oklahoma's School Safety Initiatives

SUMMARY

Oklahoma developed two programs—Safe Schools 101 and the Oklahoma School Security Institute (OSSI)—to protect students from natural and manmade hazards. Together, these programs protect schools from the dangers of tornadoes and enhance school security and response plans.

DESCRIPTION

In response to the deaths of school children caused by the May 20, 2013 tornadoes and the December 14, 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, Oklahoma developed Safe Schools 101 and OSSI to improve safety in public schools. Safe Schools 101 funds structural evaluations and safe room retrofits and installations in schools to protect students from natural disasters. OSSI provides school officials with security measures and active shooter training, administers a tip-line, and offers mental health support services to students.



Figure 1: The May 20, 2013 EF5 tornado destroyed Briarwood Elementary School

The May 20, 2013 tornado destroyed the Plaza Towers and Briarwood elementary schools and killed seven students. Both schools lacked a designated safe room to protect students and teachers during a tornado. To increase the number of safe rooms in the state's schools, the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management (OEM) created Safe Schools 101. Safe Schools 101 trains school officials, building engineers, and architects to evaluate a school's structural safety and provide recommendations for improvement. Through this program, OEM has trained 216 individuals, including 50 architects and 26 building engineers. During the first quarter of 2014, OEM assessed 20 school buildings in the six counties directly affected by the May 20 tornado. The overall goal of the program is to assess every school in the state; however, the program will remain voluntary for both schools and participants in the training.

Following the Sandy Hook shooting, the Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security (OKOHS) built upon existing school security programs to develop OSSI. OSSI offers school officials six security courses in topics ranging from emergency operations planning to active shooter response. Since 2013, OKOHS has trained 510 school officials in school security measures—a significant increase from the 411 people trained over the previous five-year period. The *LLIS.gov* defines Innovative Practice as successful and innovative procedures, techniques, or methods developed and/or implemented by the emergency management or response community to adapt to changing circumstances that others may wish to emulate.

two-day school security training program includes courses on security assessments, emergency planning and preparedness, school bus security, and active shooters in schools. In addition, OKOHS partners with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Mental Health First Aid for Youth to train school psychologists and guidance counselors to identify warning signs in youth that may pose a security threat to their school. OSSI also established a tip-line for students to anonymously report suspicious behavior via phone, Internet, or text message.

INVESTMENT INFORMATION

The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and Emergency Management Performance Grant Program fund Safe Schools 101. A combination of funds from the State Homeland Security Grant Program and state appropriations support OSSI.

REFERENCES

Muir, David and Anthony Castellano, "Oklahoma Tornado: 2 Devastated Elementary Schools Had No Safe Rooms," ABC News: May 22, 2013.

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/oklahoma-tornado-devastated-elementary-schools-safe-rooms/story?id=19230427>

Oklahoma School Security Institute

<https://www.ok.gov/schoolsecurity/>

Safe Schools 101

http://www.ok.gov/OEM/Programs_&_Services/Safe_Schools_101/index.html

Briarwood Elementary School Photograph

<http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/70666>