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LESSON LEARNED

Prevention and Mitigation: Using Unmarked Police Cars when Traveling to and Parking at Schools

SUMMARY

School-based law enforcement officers should consider using unmarked police cars when traveling to and parking at their schools. This measure keeps potential perpetrators from knowing when police officers are onsite and when they leave.

DESCRIPTION

On September 27, 2006, an armed intruder took seven students hostage at Platte Canyon High School in Bailey, Colorado. First responders established incident command as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams barricaded the perpetrator in the classroom. The perpetrator, who claimed to have 3 pounds of C-4 explosives in his backpack, released all but 2 of the hostages. When negotiations stalled approximately two hours later, the SWAT team made entry in an attempt to rescue the remaining two hostages. In the course of the SWAT entry, the perpetrator killed one of the hostages and himself while the final hostage escaped to safety.

A sergeant from the Park County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) had been at the school that morning and had parked his marked patrol car in the school parking lot. Subsequent investigations of school surveillance cameras by law enforcement personnel revealed that the shooter arrived at the school at 9:44 a.m. and parked his jeep in the school parking lot. The sergeant left the school parking lot in his patrol car at 11:25 a.m., approximately 11 minutes before the perpetrator began his attack. Based upon the length of time the shooter waited at the school before initiating his assault and upon the concurrent departure of the marked patrol car, PCSO officers inferred that the shooter may have waited for the police car to leave the school parking lot before beginning his attack.

Since this incident, PCSO school-based law enforcement officers only use unmarked police cars to drive to and park at Park County schools. This practice prevents prospective shooters from knowing when a law enforcement officer is on campus and when the campus is unprotected and thus more vulnerable to an attack.

CITATION

Hancock, Mark. Lieutenant, Park County Sheriff's Office. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 19 Jul 2007.

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