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LESSON LEARNED

School Safety: Installing a Secondary Lock Box

SUMMARY

Schools should install a secondary lock box on the outside of the building to ensure that emergency personnel can safely access at least one of the lock boxes during an active shooter incident.

DESCRIPTION

On April 20, 1999, 2 students at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado, carried out an armed assault that resulted in 15 deaths and 24 injuries. The incident lasted for approximately 47 minutes, during which the 2 heavily armed seniors fired on their teachers and fellow students, scattered homemade explosives around the school, and exchanged gunfire with law enforcement personnel before committing suicide. Many students and teachers locked themselves in classrooms during the course of the incident to protect themselves from the shooters. This action likely saved many lives, although law enforcement personnel had difficulty accessing the locked rooms during the evacuation.

Fire personnel had a key to the school's lock box, which contained keys to all doors in the school building. However, they could not access the lock box due to its location directly outside the front door and in the direct line of fire of the shooters. SWAT teams had to use the butts of their rifles as battering rams to knock down doors and gain entry to the locked classrooms. The resulting banging sound of rifles hitting doors led to many false reports of "shots fired," even after the two shooters had already committed suicide. These reports created the false impression that the shooters remained alive and dangerous, thus slowing the SWAT teams' rescue operations.

After the incident, Columbine High School installed an additional lock box in the back of the school building, out of direct line of sight of any doors or windows. Schools should install a secondary lock box to ensure that emergency personnel will be able to safely access at least one of the lock boxes during an active shooter incident.

CITATIONS

Columbine Review Commission. *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*. May 2001.

https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=739

Olsen, Jim. Paramedic Captain, Littleton Fire Rescue. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 21 Jun 2007.

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