



OFFICE OF THE ILLINOIS STATE FIRE MARSHAL

JB Pritzker, Governor
James A. Rivera, State Fire Marshal

To: Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

From: Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM)

Date: March 14, 2018

Re: Life Safety and Security Options Related to Fire Alarm Activation in Illinois Public and Private Schools

Use of building fire protection and fire safety systems as an accessory to targeted violence events, whether it be in a school or other occupancy, has previously been identified as an issue that schools and first responders in Illinois need to address. In some hostile or active shooter events activation of the building's fire alarm system has been used as a means to move occupants into the corridor or an interior open area or out of the building. Even with this history OSFM discourages any deactivation, tampering, or modification of fire alarm systems and associated supervised life-safety and egress systems, except as permitted by the codes used by public and private schools in Illinois. Further we recommend strict compliance with any required references to NFPA 72, National Fire Alarm Code. OSFM strongly recommends that law enforcement be dispatched along with fire department to fire alarms or reports of fire at public and private schools.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide uniform guidance for occupants within a school building. Many tools are available to schools to develop a cooperative relationship between life safety and security in a school building. The following topics discuss options available to school facilities.

Annual Required Crisis Planning Pursuant to 105 ILCS 128/25

Because the response time and capabilities of local first responders can vary greatly, approval for delayed evacuation or other approaches to intruder security should be made on a case-by case basis dependent upon the specific fire protection and construction features of local school buildings. For this reason, the OSFM strongly encourages school districts, as part of the required annual Crisis Planning process, to work with their local first responders in developing response to activated fire alarm systems. Additionally, there needs to be cross-training and cooperation between law enforcement, EMS, fire department personnel, and school staff (including substitute teachers). It is also recommended that the assigned Regional Office of Education (ROE) or Intermediate Service Center (ISC) approve any plans.

Fire Drills

Fire drills should be conducted as recommended by the School Safety Drill Act with frequency thresholds maintained. Special accommodations may be allowed where concerns exist for malicious activation of fire alarms. We recommend scheduling fire drills and sharing the schedule in advance with staff and authorized persons. Employing sufficient personnel to monitor the drill, similarly to other outdoor events as part of normal school operation, is also recommended.

Delayed Evacuation

In coordination with local first responders and the ROE or ISC, and as a part of the required annual Crisis Planning, school districts may choose to use a delayed egress approach taking into consideration the guidelines listed below:

1. Fire alarm will sound as normal.
2. Evacuation is delayed up to an amount agreed upon by the stakeholders. OSFM feels a three-minute delay is sufficient to allow for investigation for smoke and/or fire as well investigation of means of egress on the interior and exterior for signs of suspicious subjects or signs of targeted violence.
3. School staff should be assigned and well-trained in proper investigative processes, whether searching for smoke or fire, or suspicious circumstances (persons, objects, or packages). Staff can be assigned to check the fire alarm control panel or annunciator panel to determine location of activated device and radio to a custodian or another staff member to investigate, while other staff members or school security can investigate for suspicious circumstances.
4. Some form of communication with the rest of the school population should be available to initiate evacuation or announce the all-clear and no evacuation is required. This system must be heard throughout the school building. Therefore, the school should have a functional communications system including radios and PA systems.
5. Teachers and students remain in their classrooms until instructed otherwise, using locking hardware that is code compliant, see accompanying document related to locking here: <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/sfm/Documents/Security%20Locking%20Systems.pdf>
6. A direct connect to the local fire department and law enforcement should be provided so at minimum, during the delayed investigation time, fire and law enforcement are responding to the school building.
7. If it is determined that a security risk exists, the school should follow the protocol it has developed in its Crisis Planning document.

Options for Eliminating Pull Stations in School Buildings

The International Fire Code (2015), Section 907.2.3 for public schools and NFPA 101, Life Safety Code (2000), Section 15.3.4.2.3 for private schools permit the removal of pull stations (except for one pull station at a central location) from educational occupancies under certain circumstances. As long as compliance with Section 907.2.3 (public schools) and Section 15.3.4.2.3 (private schools) is provided, it may be beneficial to remove pull stations from the school building. It should be noted, they must be removed and not just disconnected.