



Developing a Bomb Threat Annex: Enhancing the Higher ed Emergency Operations Plan

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Our nation's postsecondary institutions are entrusted to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for the students, faculty, and staff who live, work, and study on campus. With possible incidents ranging from active shooter situations to fires, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and pandemic influenza, this is no easy task. These incidents often strike without warning, thus making proactive planning crucial for institutions of higher education (IHEs). Planning for emergencies may be challenging for IHEs because of geography, environment, governance, around-the-clock operations, and the multiage population served.

While the risk and vulnerability for certain types of threats and hazards may be driven by location and other factors, some threat and hazard types, including bomb threats, can universally impact all IHEs. However, in 2022, there was an unprecedented spike in bomb threats targeted at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In the first 3 months of 2022, more than one-third of our country's HBCUs received bomb threats. As a result of these threats, learning was disrupted and critical resources were diverted to emergency response, adding to the burden already placed on overwhelmed campus mental health systems. Considering this rise in bomb threats and the high number of those bomb threats disproportionately targeting HBCUs, additional resources, strategies, and planning are needed to maintain the safety and security of all students, faculty, and staff, regardless of the institution type.

This fact sheet outlines how IHE core planning teams can plan for potential bomb threats through the creation and modification of a higher education emergency operations plan (EOP) that addresses the threat in a Bomb Threat Annex.

Defining a Bomb Threat

The term "bomb threat" is defined as an intent to detonate an explosive or incendiary device in an attempt to cause destruction, injury, or death. According to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, most bomb threats are received via telephone, and at times a threat can be written or a suspicious device and/or package can be strategically arranged to indicate a bomb threat. The practice of swatting — a false report of a violent threat meant to scare the public and exhaust law enforcement resources — has become more common over the past decade. Due to technological advances

in communication, threats can also be publicly announced via email, social media, blogs, and vlogs. By using this advanced technology, offenders can communicate their threats without physically confronting the intended target at the time of the threat or at the time of the assault. Since bomb threats may be sent at any time from anywhere, investigations and response efforts can be more challenging.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP) notes that the threat of a bomb should be taken seriously, regardless of whether a device actually exists. Emergency managers, facility supervisors, and law enforcement will be in the best position to determine the credibility of the threat.

Taking swift action in response to a bomb threat can save lives and ensure the safety of the entire campus community. By developing, maintaining, and implementing a high-quality EOP that contains a Bomb Threat Annex, IHEs can enhance their capacity to prevent, protect the whole campus community from, mitigate, respond to, and recover from a bomb threat.

An Overview of the Process Used to Develop High-Quality EOPs

Higher ed EOPs should be created and revised by a multidisciplinary team using a collaborative process so that they are customized to the individual institution. The [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education \(IHE Guide\)](#) outlines a six-step planning process for IHEs to follow when creating new EOPs as well as revising and updating their existing plans. By using this recommended process, IHEs can align their emergency planning practices with those in place at the Federal, state, and local levels. This approach to preparedness is based on five mission areas: prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

The six-step planning process recommended by the *IHE Guide* relies on input from various stakeholders and collaboration with key community partners to create tailored and comprehensive goals, objectives, and courses of action to respond to incidents. The six steps recommended to develop, revise, or update an EOP are as follows:



- Step 1: [Form a Collaborative Planning Team](#)
- Step 2: [Understand the Situation](#)
- Step 3: [Determine Goals and Objectives](#)
- Step 4: [Plan Development \(Identifying Courses of Action\)](#)
- Step 5: [Prepare, Review, and Approve the Plan](#)
- Step 6: [Implement and Maintain the Plan](#)

Using these principles, the planning team can create a high-quality EOP that includes a Basic Plan section, Functional Annexes section, and Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes section. The plan should outline the purpose, situation and assumptions, concept of operations, assignment of responsibilities, administration and logistics, plan development and maintenance, and authority and references to meet the safety, security, and wellness needs of the entire campus community before, during, and after emergencies.

Six-Step Planning Process for High-Quality EOP Development



Key Considerations for Developing a Bomb Threat Annex

A [threat- and hazard-specific annex](#) describes the specific measures to be taken to address the identified threat and hazard, along with the relevant operational actions, and the individuals responsible for implementing the measures. The development of a Bomb Threat Annex involves an organized process outlining the goals, objectives, and actions that the IHE will take before, during, and after a bomb threat is received. In doing so, emergency managers are ensuring that all necessary precautions will be taken to protect students, faculty, and staff. The inclusion of a Bomb Threat Annex that describes specific procedures within an existing EOP enhances overall efforts to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from adversarial and human-caused threats.

Before

- Define the role and responsibility of each member of the incident response team who is involved in the implementation of the emergency measures before, during, and after the bomb threat.
- Provide training to the incident response team.
- Complete OBP's [Bomb Threat Procedure Checklist](#).
- Conduct a site assessment to identify the buildings and areas on campus that may be more vulnerable to bomb threats.
- Set up an emergency supply kit containing emergency supplies and information about the campus; this step is essential for a rapid response. OBP recommends having electronic or hard copies of blueprints, interior pictures and videos, master keys, flashlights, batteries, local maps, and emergency plans be included in the emergency supply kit to be taken to the incident command post.
- Draft a communication plan to ensure that the entire campus community, including internal and external stakeholders, remains informed during a bomb threat.

- Establish [memoranda of understanding \(MOUs\) and memoranda of agreement \(MOAs\) for collaboration](#) with partner agencies. MOUs and MOAs are agreements between institutions, community organizations, and/or emergency response agencies that outline how they will communicate, collaborate, and respond during emergencies.
- Decide what search methods will be used and how the search will be conducted.
- Determine the location of the Emergency Operations Center, which is sometimes referred to as the Control Center and is a designated location where emergency management leaders coordinate information and resources during an incident.
- Identify the site(s) designated as an evacuation center if an emergency evacuation is needed.
- Ensure that representatives of the campus police and local law enforcement serve as members of the core planning team, as they will have expertise that lends itself to planning for bomb threats.
- Implement the [National Incident Management System](#) to ensure that your terminology is aligned within your institution and with community partners.

During

- Use OBP's Bomb Threat Procedure Checklist to respond to the bomb threat in an orderly and controlled manner with first responders and other stakeholders.
- Conduct a [Rapid Assessment](#) to assess whether a bomb threat is credible. It is imperative that all facts and circumstances surrounding the threat are thoroughly reviewed and evaluated. This information will guide the Incident Commander, with the response team, to make decisions regarding the type and scale of the incident, the response, the activation of additional annexes, and protective actions to be immediately taken.

After

- Assess the well-being of students, employees, and visitors, and identify those who may be missing.
- Provide mental health support to students, faculty, and staff affected by the bomb threat.
- Debrief with the core planning and response teams to determine areas of improvement and successes in activating the Bomb Threat Annex.

RAPID ASSESSMENT

A [Rapid Assessment](#) will help determine the risk level of a threat: low, medium, or high.

LOW RISK

- Lacks realism: a threat that poses a minimum risk to the victim and public safety. Probable motive is to cause disruption.
- Threat is vague, and indirect. Information contained within the threat is inconsistent, is implausible, or lacks detail.
- Caller is definitely known and has called numerous times.
- Threat was discovered instead of delivered (e.g., a threat written on a wall).

MEDIUM RISK

- Increased level of realism: a threat that could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic.
- Threat is direct and feasible.
- Wording in the threat suggests that the perpetrator has given some thought on how the act will be carried out.
- Threat may include indications of a possible place and time.
- No strong indication that the perpetrator has taken preparatory steps, although there may be some indirect reference pointing to that possibility.
- Indication that the perpetrator has details regarding the availability of components needed to construct a bomb.
- Increased specificity to the threat (e.g., "I'm serious!" or "I really mean this!").

HIGH RISK

- **Specific and realistic: a threat that appears to pose an immediate and serious danger to the safety of others.**
- **Threat is direct, specific, and realistic; may include names of possible victims, a specific time, and the location of device.**
- **Perpetrator provides his or her identity.**
- **Threat suggests that concrete steps have been taken toward carrying out the threat.**
- **Perpetrator indicates that he or she has practiced with a weapon or has had the intended victim(s) under surveillance.**
- **Activate the Evacuation Annex and Lockdown Annex, and follow the courses of action outlined within each when a threat is deemed credible.**
- **Communicate with and warn students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders of the bomb threat.**

- Develop an after-action report to provide an opportunity for everyone involved to (1) identify areas in the current emergency management plan that are in need of improvement, (2) make recommendations to improve it, and (3) capture key lessons learned.

Related Functional Annexes

While developing goals and objectives for a bomb threat, your team may identify which of those are considered functions. Emergency management functions are activities that apply to more than one threat or hazard. Examples of cross-cutting functions that may apply to bomb threats include the following: rapid assessment, deny entry or closing (lockdown), evacuation, and communications and notification. Goals, objectives, and courses of action should also be developed for functions, which will eventually become functional annexes in the EOP. Find information on some of the recommended [functional annexes](#) that may be activated before, during, and after a bomb threat below:

- [Rapid Assessment Annex](#) — how the IHE will determine the appropriate response and take immediate action once notified of an emergency.
- [Deny Entry or Closing \(Lockdown\) Annex](#) — how the IHE will secure buildings and grounds during incidents that pose an immediate threat of violence in or around the institution.
- [Evacuation Annex](#) — how students, faculty, staff, and visitors will safely move from unsafe areas within the IHE's buildings, facilities, and grounds.
- [Communications and Notification Annex](#) — how the IHE will internally communicate, communicate with external stakeholders, and coordinate with community partners during emergencies.

When referencing the above functions in your Bomb Threat Annex, the courses of action do not need to be repeated. Instead, add a note that additional information on a particular function may be found in the corresponding functional annex.

Resources

Further Reading — REMS TA Center

- [Addressing Adversarial and Human-Caused Threats That May Impact Students, Staff, and Visitors](#), Web Page
- [Adding Plans for Lockdown, Denying Entry, and Closing Into School and Higher Ed Emergency Operations Plans](#), Web Page
- [Using Rapid Assessment in Recovery Efforts in Institutions of Higher Education](#), Web Page
- [Ensuring the Safe Evacuation of All Students, Staff, and Visitors](#), Web Page
- [Managing Emergency Communications, Alerts, and Warnings/Notifications](#), Web Page

Training Opportunities — REMS TA Center

- [Developing Emergency Operations Plans \(EOPs\) IHE 101](#), Online Course
- [Developing Emergency Operations Plans \(EOPs\) IHE 101](#), Virtual Training by Request
- [Developing Emergency Operations Plans \(EOPs\) IHE 101](#), Live Training by Request
- [Overview of the Six-Step Planning Process for Institutions of Higher Education](#), Specialized Training Package

Further Reading — Bomb Threats

- [Historically Black Colleges and Universities \(HBCUs\) Bomb Threat Resource Guide](#), Publication (The White House)
- <https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Bomb-Threat-Guidance-Quad-Fold.pdf> Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Bombing Prevention)
- [Bomb Threat Procedure Checklist](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Office for Bombing Prevention)
- [What to Do: Bomb Threat](#), Video (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency)

- [Mass Bomb Threat Postcard](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency)
- [Responding to Mass Bomb Threat Campaigns, TRIPwire Awareness Bulletin](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency)
- [U.S. Bomb Data Center](#), Web Page (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives)
- [Bomb Threat Preparedness and Response](#), Online Course (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Center for Domestic Preparedness)

Further Reading – Violence Prevention

- [Targeted Violence Averted: College and University Case Studies](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services; and International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators)
- [State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training Program](#), Website (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance; and Institute for Intergovernmental Research)

- [Violence Prevention: Resources for Federal, State, Local, Tribal, Territorial, and Private Sector Homeland Security Partners](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security)

Further Reading – EOP Development and Campus Safety

- [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education](#), Publication (U.S. Departments of Education; Homeland Security, led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency; Justice, led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and Health and Human Services)
- [Campus Safety and Resiliency Resource Page](#), Web Page (U.S. Department of Education; and White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities)
- [Engaging College Students in 21st Century Law Enforcement: Final Report](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services)



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