HOMELAND SECURITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

Exterior Access Control

Figure 1

Preventing unauthorized persons from entering a school facility is vital to protecting those in the school.[1]

Electronic Access Controls

"Electronic access control(s)" refers to electronic systems such as door access cards and key fobs. Electronic door locking systems allow administrators to restrict access and reduces the risk of lost or stolen metal keys. Understanding the type of locking system used at a school is very important. Generally, electronic systems offer higher security ability.[1] This type of access control usually provides an electronic sign-in log.

Security Features

One security feature of electronic access controls comes in regard to theft.[2] If an electronic access control is stolen or lost, it is very easy to deactivate the card. This means that even if an unauthorized person were to steal or acquire an electronic access control, they may not be able to access the school with it. It is also difficult to duplicate an electronic access control, as opposed to a metal key which can be duplicated at a hardware store. Electronic access controls can also be useful to provide to substitute teachers and other temporary employees.[4] Certain models can be programmed to restrict access into the school building to certain times and days of the week, and select which areas of the school building the employee or worker has access to, in order to maintain the security of the school.

As stated in a recommendation report from the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, also known as NCEF, "Electronic controls are not needed at every door but can be used selectively."[4] Electronic access controls should be used only at key points to enter the school. While it is not recommended that electronic access control be used on every door, a school can use them to restrict access to certain areas.

Exterior Hardware

Emergency doors should only be used during an emergency. These doors are designed to allow persons to exit, but not enter a building.[1] To this end, it is recommended that any hardware on the exterior of the door be removed or made resistant to unauthorized entry. The door hinges should not be exposed to the outside or they should have tamper resistant protective hinge coverings. This ensures that an unauthorized person cannot enter through an egress only door. It is recommended that all schools meet with their local Police and Fire Departments before making any changes to emergency and egress only doors.

It is also recommended that exterior doors not be propped open.[3] By leaving a door propped open, an unauthorized person can easily gain entrance into the school building. This puts the safety and security of the school and anyone inside at risk. School policies should be developed with the help of local Police and Fire Departments. It is important to foster a school culture where all doors remain closed and locked.

Certain types of door handles, such as those shown in Figure 2, can be very easily chained shut or secured from the outside.[1] The ability to secure a door shut from the outside, especially an emergency exit, can create a barrier to first responders trying to get inside. It can slow down the response of emergency services if they have to cut a chain before they can enter the building, or be

Figure 2

used to prevent people from leaving the building. This technique was used during the Virginia Tech shooting.[5]

The shooter was able to chain the doors of Norris Hall shut, preventing students from being able to escape and keeping law enforcement from being able to enter the building. Figure 3 shows the recommended door configuration.

It is recommended that all schools meet with their local Police and Fire Departments when making decisions about physical security. This can ensure that all physical security changes adhere to fire codes and do not impede the ability of emergency services to respond to an incident.

References:

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Figure 3

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