



State of New Hampshire

DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY



Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

www.nh.gov/hsem

Robert L. Quinn
Commissioner

Robert M. Buxton
Director

March 15, 2023

Dear Town and School Officials,

Thank you for your participation in the After-Action Review for the December 8, 2022, school threat hoaxes.

We compiled the notes from your survey responses, the online facilitated review and the post review survey as a way to highlight the strengths, observations and suggestions for improvement.

We hope you find the attached report useful to help all our agencies work better together and improve communications and education.

Together, we can all make our schools safer through these processes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Buxton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" and "B".

Robert Buxton
Director
New Hampshire Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management



HOMELAND SECURITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from School Active Shooter Threats

Published: March 15, 2023

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Overview

This document is intended to assist New Hampshire (NH) communities in striving for excellence with providing school safety and preparedness by analyzing the incident that occurred on December 8, 2022, and:

- Identify strengths to be maintained and built upon,
- Identify potential areas for further improvement, and
- Recommend areas for further follow-up actions.

On Thursday, December 15, 2022, an after-action meeting was conducted virtually and consisted of an introduction, breakout sessions, a round-table report out from the breakout groups, and a round-table discussion of lessons learned that included key takeaways. The breakout sessions focused on discussing four areas that were identified as trends based on survey responses: initial notification of the incident, response actions, messaging and reunification, and growth opportunities. Facilitators were not limited to only discussing those areas with their groups and were, in fact, encouraged to have other relevant conversations based on participant feedback.

The following breakout groups were utilized during the after-action meeting:

- Local Public Safety, facilitated by Director John Scippa of the NH Police Standards and Training Council.
- Schools, facilitated by Director Justin Cutting of the NH Division of Fire Standards and Training & Emergency Medical Services.
- State Partners, facilitated by NH Fire Marshal Sean Toomey of the NH Division of Fire Safety; and
- Communications Centers/E9-1-1, facilitated by NH Statewide Interoperability Coordinator John Stevens of the NH Division of Emergency Services and Communications (DESC).

The suggested actions in this report should be viewed as recommendations only. In some cases, communities may determine that the benefits of implementation are insufficient to outweigh the cost. In other cases, communities may identify alternative solutions that are more effective or efficient. Each community should review the recommendations and determine the most appropriate actions and resources needed for implementation.

Incident Description

Overview

The NH Department of Safety (DOS) received notification of multiple active shooter threats at schools across the state just before 10AM Thursday, December 8, 2022. The calls, which were all similar in nature, have been determined to be a hoax. Several communities across New Hampshire received these threats and those were:

- Claremont – Stevens High School
- Concord – St. John Regional School
- Dover – Dover High School
- Franklin – Franklin High School
- Hudson – Alvirne High School
- Keene – Keene High School
- Laconia – Laconia High School
- Lebanon – Lebanon Middle School
- Littleton – Littleton High School
- Manchester – Memorial High School¹
- Portsmouth – Portsmouth High school
- Whitefield – White Mountains Regional High School

¹ HSEM did not learn about the incident at Memorial High School in Manchester until after the after-action meeting.

Open Source Media

Press Releases

12-8-2022 11:00 AM: [NH Department of Safety Monitoring Active Shooter School Threats](#)

12-8-2022 5:59 PM: [Multiple Active Shooter Threats at NH Schools Determined to be Hoax](#)

Social Media

12-8-2022 10:23 AM



NH Homeland Security and Emergency Management ✓

Published by SocialPilot · December 8, 2022 ·



The Department of Safety is aware of multiple active shooter threats that have been made at schools throughout the state. Multiple state agencies are assisting local law enforcement agencies with these initial investigations.

At this time these reports are believed to be a hoax. The New Hampshire Information Analysis Center is heavily involved in coordinating these investigations.

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NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

Incident Analysis

Overview

For the purpose of this document, the following sections will be broken down into themes that were captured during the data collection portion of the after-action process. The themes identified included: notification of the incident, response to the incident, reunification, internal and external communication procedures, and the planning/recovery process for all hazard school-based incidents.

Overall Incident Strengths

- Of the 11 schools then-known to be involved in the threat hoaxes, those who participated in the after-action process following the incident expressed that they followed their emergency operations plans and initiated response actions, as necessary. Those schools stated staff responded appropriately.
- Many of the organizations (police, fire, SAUs, state) followed their established channels (e.g., social media, mass notification systems, text, phone, email, news release, etc.) to release information and amplify messages sent out by other organizations.
- Organizations said overall rapid response contributed to incidents being over quickly.
- Collaboration and teamwork worked well between first responder organizations and schools.
- Messaging was timely, both internally and externally.
 - Most schools felt they put out messaging to staff, students, and parents quickly.
 - At the state level, all primary stakeholders were notified within minutes and the first notification to the public came in less than a half hour.
 - Knowledge was shared that the calls appeared to be hoaxes.
 - Immediate communications were made among police, fire, and schools in some jurisdictions.

Notification

Observations

- A potential need for a notification system at the state level to all agencies that would be part of a threat response.
- Dispatchers' ability to share/verify information that is coming in from a call impacted the response to the threat. Asking additional questions seemed to have helped in determining the validity of the threat.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Utilizing additional alerting capabilities, such as NH Alerts and Mutualink.

- Consider adopting a protocol in the instance a call comes directly into a dispatch agency instead of directly from E-9-1-1.

Response

Observations

- Lack of pre-incident planning impacts the ability of first responders and schools to obtain resources, whether it be people, information, or plans, from various organizations.
- Inability to communicate in plain language when working with different organizations and also when distributing clear messaging to the public.

Suggestions

- Local first responders should have an understanding of all mutual aid agreements and memorandums of understanding and/or agreement, and ensure a plan is in place if those resources are already in use elsewhere.
- As part of the NH School Safety Preparedness Task Force Report issued in 2018, recommendation 17 suggested that agencies, “Develop predetermined response to active shooter incidents for first responders and dispatchers to reduce response times by increasing efficiency, coordination, and addressing anticipated problems.” Law enforcement should ensure their community has these predetermined response cards.
- The NH School Safety Preparedness Task Force also recommends, “Increasing warm zone EMS training for first responders, including, fire, EMS, and law enforcement to enhance the ability of all responding entities to work together, ensuring a seamless and safe response.” Fire departments should ensure their staff have warm zone EMS training. The Awareness level course is available asynchronously via the Division of Fire Standards and Training & Emergency Medical Services website:

<https://nhfa-ems.com/>

- Stakeholders should take a variety of different emergency management related courses, including but not limited to IS-100, IS-200, ICS-300, IS-362, IS-700, and IS-800. These courses can be accessed online:

<https://schoolsafetyresources.nh.gov/incident-command-national-incident-management-system-training-fema-february-2019/>

Reunification

Observations

- Inconsistent training and preparedness for reunification of students with families as well as inaction to put a reunification plan into action.

Suggestions

- Schools and local first responders should complete trainings and exercises that address reunification to increase awareness.
 - NH HSEM has a school reunification game that is available for download online:
https://prd.blogs.nh.gov/dos/hsem/?page_id=9758
 - The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center (REMS TA Center) has an asynchronous course online that takes between 30 and 45 minutes. This course can be accessed online:
<https://rems.ed.gov/trainings/CourseReunification.aspx>
 - The REMS TA Center has a downloadable family reunification training package which includes a PowerPoint presentation and Tabletop Exercise and can be accessed here:
https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/Zip%20Files/Family_Reunification.zip

Communication

Observations

- Lack of efficient, clear, concise and timely information sharing.

Suggestions

- Schools should contact local police directly with any information about suspicious activity and utilize the “See Something, Say Something” program. “See Something, Say Something” materials can be ordered through the NH Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management’s Community Outreach Office online at:
https://prd.blogs.nh.gov/dos/hsem/?page_id=5661
- Law enforcement should report information regarding active threats to the NH Information and Analysis Center (NHIAAC) by calling (603) 223-3859 or emailing NH.IAC@dos.nh.gov.
- Determine who to authorize to manage social media and designate someone to push information to the public. Ideally that person would be a public information officer whose primary role in an incident is public messaging and the media. If there is no designated PIO, someone who is not a direct first responder should be trained to fill the role, e.g., the town administrator or an administrative assistant. The NH School Safety Resource Center has a webpage with numerous FREE public information training courses that individuals can take:
<https://schoolsafetyresources.nh.gov/public-information-officer-resources-nh-hsem-december-2022/>
- The NH School Safety Resource Center provides scripted messaging to schools. This messaging can be downloaded and customized ahead of an event, so it is ready to push out quickly during an incident. Access this resource online:
<https://schoolsafetyresources.nh.gov/scripted-messages-and-emergency-notifications-nh-hsem-november-2022/>



- Utilize pre-existing mass notification systems.
- Participate in regular stakeholder meetings, trainings, and exercises on a variety of hazards. The NH HSEM School Readiness Program staff is available to facilitate school-based trainings and may be requested by completing a form online:
https://prd.blogs.nh.gov/dos/hsem/?page_id=14139
- The HSEM Training and Exercise Unit can assist with planning Workshops, Tabletops, Functional, and Full-Scale Exercises for community responder agencies for all-hazard threats, including those that involve schools. These trainings and exercises for first responders can be requested by emailing exercisetraining@dos.nh.gov.
- Self-conducted tabletop exercises also are available online for download from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Campus Resilience Program Exercise Starter Kits. This resource can be accessed online:
<https://www.dhs.gov/exercise-starter-kits-esks>
- A stakeholder working group including the New Hampshire Department of Safety Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and the Division of Emergency Services; along with the NH Department of Education should be developed to investigate and understand the potential use case of NH Alerts for communicating with stakeholders regarding an active threat in a community.

Planning and Recovery for All Hazard School-Based Incidents

Observations

- Inconsistency in engagement of appropriate stakeholders in initial planning efforts.
- Unfamiliarity with all available local and state level plans, which include schools' emergency operations plans, mass casualty incident coordination plans, and the state's mass fatality plan.
- Inconsistent follow up in providing mental health care for the school population.

Suggestions

- During the planning process, schools should collaborate with local public safety, emergency management, and public health officials. Utilizing the annually required drills is a great opportunity to foster this partnership. The School Safety Resource Center has a published flyer (*revised August 2022*) that reviews emergency response drills in schools:
<https://schoolsafetyresources.nh.gov/fire-drills-and-all-hazard-response-drillsexercises-in-schools-nhfmo-august-2019/>
- Ensure all plans are reviewed and updated as necessary. Make plans available to all staff that would use them during an emergency. Ensure necessary memorandums of understanding/agreement are in place which outline roles and responsibilities regarding plans.

- These plans include but are not limited to school emergency operations plans; local mass casualty incident (MCI) run cards, rescue task force, law enforcement response to active threat incidents (e.g., run cards); state-level MCI coordination, mass fatality, reunification, and any other necessary active threat plans.
- NH RSA 189:64 requires all public, chartered public, and non-public schools to develop a site-specific school EOP. Each school shall review its plan at least annually and update the plan, as necessary, and shall submit the updated plan to the director of NH Homeland Security and Emergency management, Department of Safety by October 15 each year. The School Readiness Program has Liaisons that can provide technical assistance in the development, implementation, and review of school emergency operations plans. Additional information regarding school EOPs can be found online:

https://prd.blogs.nh.gov/dos/hsem/?page_id=2529

- Complete free training offered by FEMA: IS-362.A: Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools. This course covers basic information about general school preparedness such as developing, implementing, and maintaining a school EOP. This course can be found online:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-362.a&lang=en>

- If a school determines additional mental health resources are necessary, the NH Disaster Behavioral Health Response Team is available to assist schools in addressing the issues that arise due to school-based critical incidents. A plan was revised in June 2022 and can be found online:

<https://schoolsafetyresources.nh.gov/responding-to-critical-incident-in-schools-a-behavioral-health-plan-nh-dhhs-november-2021/>

- New Hampshire Rapid Response continues to provide mental health crisis services via phone, text, and chat for children and adults who may be experiencing a mental health or co-occurring substance misuse crisis. Rapid Response is available 24/7 365 days/year. Additional information can be found online:

<https://schoolsafetyresources.nh.gov/the-national-988-suicide-crisis-lifeline-is-here-adding-to-nhs-robust-crisis-landscape-nh-dhhs-july-2022/>

Conclusion

Multiple lessons were learned from this real-world incident. Many of the areas for improvement came directly from the staff involved in the incident, while others came from facilitators and/or note takers involved in the after-action process. This report includes suggestions for improvement and may include additional planning activities, training, drills/exercises, or equipment and supplies.

This document can be used to further refine emergency operations plans, procedures and training. Plans should be updated to reflect lessons learned. Subsequent trainings, drills, and/or exercises should address areas for improvement identified within this report. As school planning and preparedness efforts continue, do not hesitate to request further resources from the NH Homeland Security and Emergency Management's School Readiness Program via email at schoolreadiness@dos.nh.gov or by phone [603-271-2231](tel:603-271-2231).