ew nightmares could be worse than the sound of gunfire within a school or a young student screaming that someone (or several people) with guns have been seen walking down a corridor toward a classroom. Truly, we live in troublous times, and school safety has become a more complex challenge for school administrators and teachers. While we continue to rely on divine guidance and protection, God also rewards diligence in those who plan for trouble. Jesus clearly advised His disciples about what they should do—flee into Judea—when they saw “the abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15-20, KJV) and admonished them to be ready for the unexpected thief (Matthew 24:43-46, KJV). This article will share some ways that schools can better prepare themselves for threats from human agents bent on violence and mayhem.

For a Christian school in a quiet neighborhood, facing an emergency such as school violence and terrorism may seem unimaginable. But even these schools may be faced with the unthinkable, and all schools can prepare their personnel for quick and useful actions, even under conditions of shock and terror. How? By making good plans and then practicing these plans until everyone who might be affected is ready to respond, and the environment is prepared for secure shelter. This principle has guided attempts to prevent loss of life in school fires. Such efforts have paid off—during the years 2002-2005, although there were 6,560 structural fires in educational buildings in the U.S. that caused $99 million in damage, there were no deaths reported in these fires.1 During the same period, however, 121 children, teachers and others died in school-related incidents of violence.2 Not all of these incidents receive national attention; therefore, many adults are unaware of the prevalence of such threats.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is
actively researching primary and secondary school-related homicides and has concluded that: (a) most violent deaths occur during transition times such as the start or end of the school day or during a lunch period; (b) homicides are more likely to occur at the start of a school term; (c) nearly half of the perpetrators gave some type of warning signal (threat, note) prior to the event; (d) among students who committed a school-associated homicide, 20 percent were known to have been victims of bullying, while 12 percent were known to have expressed suicidal thoughts or shown suicidal behaviors. These findings suggest that being aware and alert to threat signals can facilitate early intervention, which can help prevent school-related violence.

Increasingly, state and municipal laws are requiring all schools—private and public—to prepare for emergencies involving human threats to the safety of children and employees. They are similar in intent to regulations that require schools to conduct fire drills and comply with fire-prevention regulations. These laws are important safeguards for Christian schools and should not be viewed as unwarranted government interference in religiously affiliated schools. Further, many resources have been created to help schools develop emergency-operations plans. Many of these have been posted on the Internet, making them available worldwide.

**Initial Steps Toward Readiness**

As a first step, it would be wise to make contact with local emergency-management resource persons who work with the community. These are usually experienced first responders such as law enforcement, fire services, and emergency medical personnel. Many school administrators already have a coopera-
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and available assets and resources, the planning team can develop an emergency-operations plan. In making your plan, consider the location of nearby roads, neighboring commercial or civic facilities, parks, and other schools. If you had to evacuate your students and staff, where would you send them?

Be sure to put the plan in writing, and include specific information about everyone’s tasks and responsibilities during a variety of emergency conditions. The National School Safety Center’s manual, *What If? Preparing Schools for the Unthinkable* (see resource list), provides detailed guidance for developing such a plan.

Because of the possibility of targeted violence in schools, the emergency-operation plan should include how to determine the appropriate response to a spoken or written threat. The National School Safety Center recommends the creation of a threat-assessment team to guide the most appropriate response. The FBI has also created a guide to effective prevention and intervention in the case of a school threat (see sidebar on page 9). Threats should be taken seriously. A trained counselor should be available to help assess the level of risk in incidents involving threats.

Once the plan has been developed, it must be communicated to several groups of people. Not only teachers and staff, but students, too, must be given instruction regarding specific and immediate actions to take when the school issues an emergency alert. This can be done through a combination of announcements in assemblies and classrooms, and emergency lock-down drills. Posted directions in all classrooms and offices are helpful tools.

Parents also must be briefed on the elements of the plan to keep their children safe and informed of school expectations for their involvement. In the event of a threat of a school shooting, local law enforcement will create a perimeter around the school and will not permit parents and bystanders to enter the unsafe building until it has been secured. Parents need to know where they can go to receive further information about their child(ren). This place should be a safe area a short distance away from the school property. If children must be evacuated, parents must be directed to the location where their child(ren) can be picked up. The school can also take a leadership role in providing education for parents in how to ensure family readiness for emergencies. Many resources exist for families through Red Cross materials, local government brochures, and FEMA modules. If a wider emergency, such as a terrorism incident or a community-wide disaster occurs during school hours, such as happened in the World Trade Center bombing, families need to have agreed-upon contact points and know how to reassemble in safe locations outside the immediate area.

If your school doesn’t presently have a school safety committee, creating one is an important initial step.
ASSESSING SCHOOL HAZARDS

Preliminary Steps – Obtain answers to these questions:
1. What hazards are listed in emergency plans for your community? This list may be available from the police or fire department or a nearby government office. Such lists relate to general environmental and manmade risks.
2. What hazards are structural – related to your school building(s)? These relate just to your immediate building environment.
3. What hazards may relate to your neighborhood? Are you situated next to a busy highway? Is your neighborhood at high-risk for property and personal-injury crimes? Are you located some distance from emergency responders who might provide assistance?

Weather-Related Hazards
1. Flooding.
2. Earthquakes.
3. High winds (cyclone, tsunami, cumulus downburst, hurricane, tornado, severe thunderstorms).
5. Winter storms.

Manmade Hazards
1. Violent crime: roving gangs, civil unrest, crime against persons or property (school shootings/bombings, rape, mugging, arson, burglary, kidnapping, student strikes/riots, threats of violence).
2. Pandemic or food poisoning.
3. Nearby commercial or industrial hazards: fuel storage or gas station, nuclear power plant, chemical plant, transportation-related risk of hazardous material spills.
4. Nearness to high-voltage electrical lines or underground gas lines.
5. Threat of terrorism (including bio-terrorism) or political conflict.

Building-Related Hazards
1. Soundness of roof (snow load capacity and wind resistance), walls (unreinforced masonry may collapse in earthquake or high winds), and other structural components.
2. Electrical/chemical fire or gas explosion.
3. Lack of sheltered areas for refuge from high winds.
4. Blocked or inadequate avenues for rapid evacuation of a building.
5. Storage and use of hazardous materials such as laboratory chemicals and cleaning supplies.
6. Overgrown shrubbery that could provide cover for criminals.
7. Unregulated access to school property.

Hazard Identification
1. Do systematic and regular “walkarounds” to look for potential hazards.
2. Prepare a map of the school and school grounds that notes potential hazards and location of utilities, emergency equipment, and supplies. The map should also identify evacuation routes and open-air assembly points away from school property, as well as “first-responders” in the local community (fire, police, ambulance, utility companies).
3. Prepare a hazard-analysis worksheet to index school risks. A sample worksheet is shown on page 9. All hazards whose analysis yields a “Medium” or “High” Risk Priority should get attention within the school’s emergency operations plan.
4. Once hazards have been identified, develop an action plan that deals with prevention, roles and responsibilities of participants, dissemination of information, appropriate response, and update and testing of the action plan.
Practice the Plan

No matter how good the plan may be, only by practicing it will students and staff learn well what to do in the case of an emergency. Therefore, regular drills for school lockdowns should be scheduled. An emergency manager can advise how to conduct drills (for securing classrooms) and school-wide lockdown exercises for sheltering and securing the entire school family. Such lockdowns are learning opportunities in which things in the plan that did not work well can be identified and improvements made. Different hazards should be dealt with in such emergency exercises, including how to safely evacuate several school buildings at the same time.

Administrators can involve students in emergency preparations. In the U.S., Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training is now being recommended for all communities. The required 20-hour program prepares volunteers to do light search and rescue, give first aid, and follow directions to safely assist emergency responders. Many schools, both private and public, are now making such training available to their junior high and secondary students, forming school-based CERTs. Such

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### SAMPLE RISK INDEX WORKSHEET (add items as needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAZARD</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>MAGNITUDE</th>
<th>WARNING</th>
<th>SEVERITY</th>
<th>RISK PRIORITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severe Winter Storms</td>
<td>4 Often</td>
<td>4 Catastrophic</td>
<td>4 Minimal</td>
<td>4 Catastrophic</td>
<td>3 High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(without power loss)</td>
<td>3 Occasional</td>
<td>3 Critical</td>
<td>3 6-12 hours</td>
<td>3 Critical</td>
<td>2 Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Seldom</td>
<td>2 Limited</td>
<td>2 12-24 hours</td>
<td>2 Limited</td>
<td>1 Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Never</td>
<td>1 Negligible</td>
<td>1 24+ hours</td>
<td>1 Negligible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure Fire</td>
<td>4 Often</td>
<td>4 Catastrophic</td>
<td>4 Minimal</td>
<td>4 Catastrophic</td>
<td>3 High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Occasional</td>
<td>3 Critical</td>
<td>3 6-12 hours</td>
<td>3 Critical</td>
<td>2 Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Seldom</td>
<td>2 Limited</td>
<td>2 12-24 hours</td>
<td>2 Limited</td>
<td>1 Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Never</td>
<td>1 Negligible</td>
<td>1 24+ hours</td>
<td>1 Negligible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>4 Often</td>
<td>4 Catastrophic</td>
<td>4 Minimal</td>
<td>4 Catastrophic</td>
<td>3 High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Occasional</td>
<td>3 Critical</td>
<td>3 6-12 hours</td>
<td>3 Critical</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1 Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Never</td>
<td>1 Negligible</td>
<td>1 24+ hours</td>
<td>1 Negligible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**FEMA.** IS 362 *Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools.* Available at http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is362.asp.


**Red Cross.** “Preparing for Events, Terrorism.” Available at http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.d229a5f06620c6052b1ecfb43181aa0/?vgnextoid=fd71779a32ecb110VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD&vgnextfmt=default.


**Adventist Risk Management, Inc.:** Contact John Dougan at jdougan@adventist.risk.org for information regarding a variety of safety measures for schools.
students are an asset to any school. This is a good way to teach them a service orientation as they obtain practical knowledge and skills that will be of lifetime benefit. CERTs are trained through programs sponsored by the Citizen Corps (see sidebar on page 9).

**Summary**

While violence from manmade causes cannot always be predicted, it’s possible to take steps that ensure everyone is ready to respond if such a crisis strikes your campus. Working in cooperation with local emergency response professionals in the local community, Adventist schools can develop School Safety Committees that arm themselves with knowledge about preparedness, assess the assets and hazards, and prepare an emergency operations plan. Further, they can involve older students in service by training them to become members of Student Emergency Response Teams.

Calling on God for courage and wisdom to do such preparedness is an appropriate course of action for believers, combined with prayers for divine protection in the perilous times around us. As Christ assured His disciples prior His crucifixion, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NKJV).  

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**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

4. Go to http://training.fema.gov/IS/crslist.asp for further information about the Independent Study Program (click on ISP). To receive a certificate, students must provide a U.S. Social Security number, but the ISP training is available (without certification) to anyone with access to the Internet.
5. The text credited to NKJV is from The New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Publishers. All rights reserved.