

# Enhancing Campus Safety and Preparedness:

## 12 Recommendations for Developing Effective Short and Long-term Solutions

The issue of safety on campus has come to the forefront as never before. Senior-level administrators at colleges and universities throughout the United States are responding to the situation with immediacy, care and vision. Many institutions are taking stock of existing life-safety systems, planning and processes as they evaluate what might need to be done to enhance campus protection and overall emergency preparedness. SimplexGrinnell has developed a set of recommendations to help guide the strategies and action planning of colleges and universities as they move forward at this critical juncture.

### 1) Avoid short-term thinking and the impulse to find a single-technological solution

With the heightened focus on campus safety, institutions can expect to be approached by numerous suppliers of products and technologies. While it may be important to implement certain safety enhancements promptly, your decisions should be rooted in the larger overall life-safety picture and its long-term implications.

### 2) Think about your campus in its entirety

Unfortunately, no part of a campus is invulnerable to a threat. In addition to classrooms, residence halls, laboratories and administrative buildings, a robust life-safety protection solution should address outdoor areas such as parking lots, as well as sports and entertainment venues. Today's technologies enable your institution's buildings and properties, including off-site satellite operations, to be networked. With networked systems, a centralized command center can be a valuable asset as an organization directs its response to emergencies and coordinates the efforts of outside responders.

### 3) Emergency response may need to extend beyond the campus

A comprehensive emergency response capability may include notifying commuting staff and students via radio, Amber Alert messages and/or perimeter checkpoints. Emergency response may also involve notification of administration personnel during off-hours and automated email and cell-phone alerts as an event unfolds. Keeping people out of harm's way can be as important as responding to the threat itself.

### 4) Be sure to involve all stakeholders

Many different groups within your institution have a role to play in formulating a plan to enhance campus safety and preparedness. Security, facilities management, information technology, in-house engineering and student housing departments can all contribute valuable input and direction. Faculty, staff and student constituencies should also be involved. It's important to obtain input and buy-in from all these groups, not only in the planning stage but as decisions are reached and implemented. Finally, don't forget students and parents. Keeping them informed of progress will allow you to demonstrate your institution's commitment to safety.

### 5) Actively promote internal cooperation

It will be important to involve senior administrators to help overcome potential interdepartmental barriers that could hinder planning and implementation of your campus safety planning and preparedness effort. From the start, be sure to inform and educate your senior leadership on this initiative. They should be involved in establishing the tone for the program, directing their teams to pull together, and maintaining oversight going forward.

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## **6) Consider a phased approach that leverages your existing fire alarm infrastructure**

For many institutions, funding a comprehensive life-safety solution all at once is unrealistic in the short term. It may be possible, however, to start by implementing key enhancements within a larger, phased program. In particular, adding campus-wide voice notification capabilities to the existing fire alarm infrastructure is considerably less costly than the upfront expense of installing a stand-alone emergency address system. Moreover, it can be accomplished rather quickly. Voice-enabled fire alarm systems have been used for decades to provide mass notification for fire conditions, severe weather alerts, chemical spills and other emergencies. Leveraging your investment in fire alarm to handle indoor/outdoor voice messaging is a practical, cost-effective way to produce a measurable improvement in campus safety.

## **7) Explore alternative funding mechanisms**

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security makes grant money available for campus safety improvements. The costs for enhancing campus safety and preparedness can also be proposed to your alumni for targeted fundraising. Leasing is another potential option that can be considered for financing a campus life-safety initiative. Leasing can enable you to proceed with a campus safety upgrade through the annual budgeting process – without straining the institution’s capital budget.

## **8) Consider code compliance in your planning**

While fire and building codes have been in place for decades, emergency communications systems are subject to emerging standards being developed by industry standards organizations such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Furthermore, some states are requiring fire sprinkler retrofits for dorms, and still others are taking steps to pass laws specific to campus safety. As you plan and implement a life-safety systems upgrade, be sure the suppliers involved in the project are up-to-date on emerging codes and regulations.

## **9) “Future-proof” your investment for expandability**

Ideally, the life-safety systems solution you put in place today should be flexible enough to grow and expand as the campus changes and needs evolve. This flexibility requirement can be addressed in part by standardizing on a scaleable platform that is designed to accommodate expansion. It’s also important to implement technology that is forward and backward compatible, thereby providing long-term protection for the investments you’re making in life-safety systems.

## **10) Don’t overlook training**

It will be important to acquaint students, faculty and personnel with campus safety systems and procedures. Toward that end, it may be useful to add periodic security evacuation drills to your school’s schedule and include explanatory information in campus orientation materials. During regular orientation sessions, residence hall advisors can show students the location of emergency call stations and/or duress buttons in each dormitory and review the appropriate response to emergency sirens, strobe signaling and emergency text message displays.

## **11) Make sure you factor in system maintenance**

Routine inspection, maintenance and repair are fundamental to keeping life-safety systems in top working order for an emergency situation. Such testing is generally mandated by codes and regulations. Choosing a suitable service provider and scheduling regular service activity should be viewed as vital components of your campus safety initiative. It may also be advisable to choose an organization that is able to service multiple fire, communications and security systems, which can streamline the process and provide operational benefits.

## **12) Market your campus safety improvement**

As you strengthen campus safety and preparedness, it may deter the incidence of crime. Information relating to improvements in campus safety can be incorporated into your communications to potential students, parents, faculty and employees. With today's elevated security awareness, your campus safety initiative can definitely be a factor in enhancing the reputation of your institution and attracting students, faculty and staff.

