



Campus Lockdown Policies vs. Fire and Life Safety Codes: Are They Compatible?

by John Bernhards

The term “lockdown” is broadly used within the education sector to describe a series of security measures undertaken during an emergency for purposes of preventing intruders, armed or otherwise, from leaving or entering a school building or campus facility. Discussion continues

At the invitation of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), representatives of the APPA Standards and Codes Council participated last December in the NFPA School Safety, Codes and Security Workshop, which was held at the University of Maryland’s College Park campus. More than 60 NFPA fire

and life safety professionals, campus and school public safety officials, and representatives from national and international standards setting bodies and public interest groups were present for the event.

The workshop participants took stock of the current building, life safety, and fire codes provisions for egress. Also identified were lockdown best practices and lessons learned from the Sandy Hook School shootings,

among other incidents. Additionally, participants discussed and reviewed, in detail, the protocols currently in place within the first responder community for purposes of dealing with armed intruders on campus. Among the key areas for discussion were the following.

Multiple Hazard Planning Concepts in Schools: Most of the current code

provisions in building, fire, and life safety codes address fire events. Among educational facilities, approximately 70 percent of all fires take place within K-12 school buildings, while approximately 12 percent occur on college and university campuses. When it comes to school life safety, however, many schools and campuses are now implementing not only fire drills, but lockdown drills as well. Additionally, where schools are prone to natural disasters and related risks, there is a growing mandate for “shakeout” or earthquake drills, not to mention flood drills.

Some jurisdictions are paring back the frequency of fire drills as required under NFPA 101 to accommodate these other drill requirements. The workshop revealed that there is growing concern that different and multiple drill procedures may lead to confusion among students and other occupants and therefore compromise safety in the event of an actual emergency.

Locking Hardware: A growing concern among fire and life safety professionals is the increasing number of “lockdown” door locking mechanisms and systems that are entering the marketplace and fail to meet egress compliance requirements, or may be unintentionally designed to obstruct such requirements. Workshop participants identified the need to ensure that innovations and new approaches to locking hardware are



to evolve among security consultants, members of law enforcement, and school administrators with regard to standard lockdown procedures and related best practices. What is less understood however, is the impact and potential conflict of lockdown measures on legally adopted, binding, and enforced building and life safety codes.

encouraged but thoroughly evaluated to ensure fire and life safety is not compromised. This concern will most certainly be an area of consideration and focus for NFPA Technical Committees.

Fire Alarm Activation and Delayed Response: Another area of concern is whether allowances should be made within current fire and life safety codes to support delayed response for evacuation, in the event a school building fire alarm is pulled or activated. The argument for allowing “delayed response” is that it would enable public safety personnel on school property to substantiate that a fire or related conditions exist, and to do so prior to sounding the audible alarm and evacuating occupants from the school building. This topic is of great debate among fire and life safety officials and security professionals and deservedly so.

Tools, Procedures, and Resources Required of First Responders When

Facing an Armed Intruder Situation:

The workshop sought to identify the basic building/fire code provisions that must be understood by first responders, as well as first responder protocols that must be understood by fire and life safety codes and standards developers. There was consensus among participants that greater clarity and adoption of general procedures were needed with regard to responder communications technologies, school building entry and access, and student evacuation safe areas.

Outcomes and findings from the workshop discussions will be circulated to APPA and other workshop participants, as well as to other stakeholders, and will be considered for use by NFPA Technical Committees. A workshop report is being developed by NFPA. The APPA Standards and Codes Council will announce the availability of the report when published early this year.

Additionally, to facilitate further understanding and dialogue among APPA members on this important topic, the APPA Standards and Codes Council will organize a conference session at APPA 2015, to be held August 4-6 in Chicago. Council members and fire safety experts will be on hand to highlight the report’s findings. The session will allow APPA member institutions to identify chief report recommendations and best practices for discussion and implementation on their respective campuses, as relevant fire and life safety code language is developed and adopted. ☺

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