

Thinking High Holiday Security & Preparedness

The ongoing military conflict between Israel and Hamas lead to disturbing attacks on Jewish institutions abroad. While there are *no specific threats to U.S. Jewish institutions or individuals*, out of an abundance of caution, JCRC-NY recommends that Jewish institutions increase their levels of vigilance. This is especially true during the High Holidays, when people know that Jews congregate. As a general rule, synagogues should:

- **CREATE A CULTURE OF SECURITY.** Institutions shouldn't merely subcontract security. Even buildings with well-trained security personnel should expect that staff and constituencies should be part of the security equation. Everyone should have heightened vigilance in times like these. For tips on security awareness, [click here](#) and the ADL's [Guide to Detecting Surveillance of Jewish Institutions](#) and [18 Best Practices for Jewish Institutional Security](#).
- **BE IN CONTACT WITH YOUR LOCAL POLICE.** Someone (or more than one) should have ongoing personal relationships with key police personnel. They should know you, your building and your organizational activities.
 - Discuss your security procedures with them and ask them for suggestions for improvement.
 - Inform them of the dates and times of your services, regular events and special events.
 - Police coverage on the High Holidays
 - Special attention is given to a synagogue based on an assessment of the current threat balanced by the availability of resources. In some jurisdictions it is a longstanding practice to assign police personnel to synagogues during services. In others, patrol cars are directed to visit synagogues at regular intervals. Discuss your situation with local police officials as soon as possible so that they have time to make their assessments and to secure the resources that they need to protect you.
 - In some instances the traffic conditions surrounding services warrant police attention.
 - Some police departments allow private parties to hire uniformed officers for events. For more information click on our [contact form here](#) and someone will get back to you.
- **REVISIT AND REVIEW YOUR SECURITY PLANS AND PROCEDURES.**
 - **ACCESS CONTROL.** Did you hear the one about a pro-Israel organization visited by a middle-aged, well-dressed woman saying that she wanted to make a contribution? They opened the door for her and a dozen protesters rushed in. Nine of the invaders were arrested. Are you vulnerable to such antics? Take the time to review your access control procedures. For more information and guidance see JCRC-NY's [Sample Building Access Policies & Procedures](#) (PDF).
 - **BOMB THREATS.** Review your bomb threat procedures and make sure that your staffers (especially those who answer the phones) know what is expected of them. For a range of resources from top agencies, including the FBI and the DHS guidance [click here](#).
 - **SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES.** Is your staff aware that they should be on the lookout for suspicious packages? For USPS guidance [click here](#).
 - **ACTIVE SHOOTERS.** See both quick pocket-card and in-depth resources from DHS, FBI and other agencies [here](#).
- **ASSESS YOUR CYBERSECURITY.** Over the past month the websites of several Jewish-affiliated organizations were hacked. Protect your organization. See [Cybersecurity for Jewish organizations 101: an update](#) and how to have inexpensive and effective backup and other plans at [Resources to prepare your organization's technology for a disaster](#).
- **QUESTIONS?** [Click here](#) to send questions, comments and suggestions or are interested in a webinar or conference call on High Holiday security.

[Click here](#) for an excerpt on High Holiday preparations from [Emergency Planning: Disaster and Crisis Response Systems for Jewish Organizations](#), published by Jewish Federations of North America, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and JCRC-NY. Reading this overview will help your congregation to make the best use of the template. **Turn the page for JCRC's High Holiday Security Thinkplate®: 2014.**

During the High Holidays regular worshipers are joined by those who might not know your facility and may not be known to you. For example, they may not know the “back way out”. On the other hand, unscreened strangers present security risks. These realities must become part of your security and emergency planning. Use the template below to help you to identify best practices.

Advance Preparations

Security committee/subcommittee

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role. Are the members of the security/house/building committee/security subcommittee prepared to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ work with appropriate synagogue staff (rabbinic, administrative, custodial, etc.) and outside agencies to complete a hazard analysis of your facility (see below); ○ discuss the response strategies for various hazards and recommend options for likely problems (e.g., fire, bomb scare); ○ develop policies and procedures to ensure that your synagogue has the balance of being warm, welcoming and secure; ○ assess the staffing requirements, recruit volunteers and authorize the hiring of regular and temporary staff, as necessary; and ○ determine the most appropriate ticketing, credentialing and/or screening methods for your synagogue? • Focus. Can the members of your committee/subcommittee focus on security and emergency planning without being “distracted” by the other important elements of High Holiday planning? • Authority. Have you developed a process to develop a consensus around the committee/subcommittee recommendations? Does the committee/ subcommittee have sufficient authority to implement their recommendations? 	<p><i>Notes:</i></p>
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Hazard Analysis

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All-hazards approach. Have you considered an “all-hazards” approach, including: terrorism, fire, severe weather, natural disasters, etc.? • Partnerships. Have you contacted your local law enforcement and emergency management agencies to determine the most likely risks? • Alerting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you subscribed to security, natural disaster 	<p><i>Notes:</i></p>
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<p>and other emergency alert systems provided by governmental agencies? Will someone be monitoring for alerts over the High Holidays?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If there is a possibility of severe weather in your area during services, will someone be monitoring an NOAA radio or a customizable weather alert? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Profile. Are there any risks unique to your congregation, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prominent location; ○ prominent rabbinical or lay leadership; ○ prominent congregants; and/or ○ controversial programming? 	
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Halachic considerations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have you asked your rabbi whether you can use equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ as a screener/deterrence (e.g., metal detectors), or ○ if a life/safety issue should arise, e.g., flashlights, bullhorns, defibrillators, cell phones, communication equipment? ● Are there ways to operate certain equipment in halachically acceptable ways? ● Have you checked with your rabbi to make sure that any procedures are consistent with the halachic standards of the congregation? 	<p><i>Notes:</i></p>
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Preparing your building(s) & spaces

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evacuation routes. Are the exits clearly marked? Do people know where to find the <i>closest</i> exit, rather than the one they entered? Are your ushers (or others strategically seated around the sanctuary, tent, etc.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ trained to assist people with evacuation or sheltering? ○ Have you made provisions to assist people with disabilities in an emergency? ○ Have you asked your local fire department for suggestions? ○ Should an evacuation be necessary, have you designated areas of assembly both near your building and a few blocks away (in case emergency responders need to move people away from your building)? ○ Have you made an evacuation plan for your building (similar to those in the seatbacks of 	<p><i>Notes:</i></p>
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<p>planes) to help people to know what to do in the event of an evacuation? See a simple example here. Distribute the evacuation plan to every seat or paste them in the back of your <i>machzorim</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access. Have you restricted access to the buildings so that people can only enter through doors with “screeners”? Are all of the exits clear in case they are needed for evacuation? • Equipment. Do you have the equipment that you might need (e.g., metal detectors, flashlights, bullhorns, defibrillators, first aid kit)? Are the batteries fresh or charged? • Ticket sales. Do you use your ticket sales system to check people not known to you? Do you realize that if you take cash from a stranger there is no way to tell if they have given you truthful information (as opposed to a check or credit card, which gives you a measure of authentication)? • Lists. Do you print lists of attendees and distribute them to the appropriate people, especially those “screening” at the door? • Parking. Some synagogues have parking lots adjacent to their building. Have you arranged to send authorized parkers “credentials” to make it easier to identify unauthorized (i.e., potentially problematic) parkers? 	
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Emergency messaging

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the event of an emergency have you designated who will make announcements? • Do you have the means to quickly notify the various services (e.g., main, overflow, junior congregation, childcare) under your auspices that an emergency exists and the appropriate emergency message should be given? • Have you pre-written clear and concise messages? • Have you prepared handouts or seat cards (as the airlines do) with diagrams showing the evacuation routes and outlining emergency procedures? • Have you ordered and installed signs to support evacuation procedures (e.g., place a “ In case of evacuation, meet the Toddlers group here” sign at one end of the parking lot and inform parents to look for it in pre-holiday communications and in their seat card)? • Have you sent out messages (via email or social networking) to your congregants explaining your security procedures, evacuation procedures, etc.? <p>Have you let staff and congregants know in your messaging and pre-holiday mailings and handouts, “If you see</p>	<p><i>Notes:</i></p>
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something, say something”?

Security/Emergency Response Related Staffing

- **Authority.** Do the volunteers, synagogue staff and hired security staff clearly understand:
 - who can give them direction and orders;
 - to whom they report and should report problems or suspicious circumstances; and
 - their job description, duties, responsibilities and your expectations?
- **Policies, Procedures and training.** Do the volunteers, synagogue staff and hired security staff clearly understand your policies and procedures (e.g., access control, evacuation)? Do they know how to screen people for security purposes, while remaining welcoming?
- **Training.** Are they trained to carry out your procedures in situations like a bomb threat, evacuation (fire or other), armed intruder, disruptions? Have the security personnel and volunteers drilled on the multiple, potential hazards? Will they be on the lookout for suspicious individuals or those acting suspiciously (See this [ADL document](#) for clues)?
- **Functions.** Have you analyzed which functional areas must be covered and whether they are best covered by volunteers, existing staff, temporary hires, police, others or a combination? Some examples include:
 - access control and screening;
 - traffic control;
 - training;
 - first aid and/or medical response.
- Have you identified and trained backup personnel for key positions and functions?

Notes:

Coordinating With Your Partners

- Have you identified governmental and non-governmental organizations (e.g., police, fire, office of emergency management, FBI, DHS, American Red Cross) that can help you with your advanced planning and during the holidays?
- Have you had recent discussions with them about your needs and their capacities?
- Have you informed the local police about the schedule of your services and the number of people expected? Do you know what kind of assistance that they might provide?

Notes:

On the Eve of the Holiday/During the Holiday

Staffing

- Are all of your personnel for assigned functions and posts available?
- Is someone responsible for supervision to ensure that your policies and procedures are being followed?
- Is someone specifically designated to call 911 in the event of an emergency? Do they have access to a telephone, if necessary? Do they have access to a panic/emergency alarm button in case they need it? Do they know when they should use it?

Notes:

Building preparation

- Have you distributed your handouts/seatcards?
- Have you printed the necessary maps, lists, emergency contacts and distributed them to the appropriate personnel?
- Has someone toured the building:
 - to ensure that primary and secondary evacuation routes are clear (and not blocked by cartons holding the year-round siddurim or other storage);
 - To check that doors leading to unused areas are locked?
- Have you checked to ensure that the signage around the building(s) and outside areas is clear?

Notes:

Screening

- Do you have the appropriate personnel and/or volunteers in place to screen congregants?
- Do you want to check bags?
- Do you have a policy on how to check *ad hoc* attendees (i.e., those showing up without tickets)?
- Is someone assigned to check if the cars in the parking lot are “authorized” parkers?

Notes: