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Myths (and Facts) about Classroom Barricade Devices

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The following myths and facts about classroom barricade devices were presented at the annual conference of the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM), where I represented the Door Security & Safety Foundation in an effort to help each state fire marshal understand the safety concerns associated with the use of secondary locking devices.

NASFM members approved a resolution at the 2015 conference, supporting its Classroom Door Security Checklist. These documents are available on the Foundation's website, doorsecuritysafety.org; on NASFM's website at firemarshals.org; or by visiting iDigHardware.com/schools.

1. MYTH: The benefits of barricade devices outweigh the risks.

FACT: The perceived benefit of barricade devices is the relatively low cost; most ranging from \$50-\$150, and the easy procurement and installation. The school custodian could buy a slide bolt or padlock and hasp at the hardware store and accomplish a similar level of security. Historically, fire marshals have not allowed these security methods, because they're not code-compliant. Some jurisdictions are continuing to enforce current

codes that do not allow these devices, and some are being pressured by school districts and politicians to put the codes aside in favor of security.

2. MYTH: Emergency responders can easily defeat a barricade device.

FACT: I'd like to know how emergency responders are going to gain access to a classroom once a barricade device is in place. There have already been school shootings where the intruder brought materials with them to barricade the doors, including the incidents at Virginia Tech, the

West Nickel Mines schoolhouse, and Platte Canyon High School. At Platte Canyon High School, explosives were used by emergency responders to gain access to the classroom, and a student hostage was killed by the shooter during the chaos. After the West Nickel Mines shooting at an Amish schoolhouse, several news reports discussed law enforcement officers' concerns that they are not equipped to overcome classroom barricades.

3. MYTH: Some agencies recommend barricading with furniture; barricade devices are a better option.

FACT: A classroom barricade device may be easier to install than using furniture to barricade the door, but it may also be easily installed by an unauthorized person to secure a classroom and prevent access by school staff and emergency responders.

A 2007 study called *Barricaded Hostage and Crisis Situations in Schools: A Review of Recent Incidents*, examined 19 hostage situations that occurred in schools between 1998 and 2007. In 16 of the 19 cases, the perpetrator was



Photos courtesy of Lori Greene

MYTH 2



MYTH 2

a student at the school—the threat was already in the room. A barricade device available to anyone in the classroom could make these crimes easier to carry out, or could even encourage criminal acts.

4. MYTH: School shootings are very common and should be the main security concern for schools.

FACT: Statistics for school shootings are quite subjective. Some lists include gang-related shootings on school grounds, suicides, and accidental discharge of weapons. Other reports include only random shootings inside of the building, and omit suicides, gang related incidents, and deaths resulting from interpersonal conflicts.

In 2012, the year of the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, there were seven K-12 school shootings in the U.S. All of the school shooters were students except for two. The other casualties—three deaths and six injuries—were the result of students who brought guns to school.

While each incident is tragic, the statistics show that school shootings, although widely publicized, are very rare.

In comparison, the incidence of non-fatal victimization at school is very high. According to the National Center for Education, in 2012, students ages 12–18 were victims of more than 1.37 million nonfatal victimizations at school, including 615,600 thefts and 749,200 violent victimizations; 89,000 of which were serious violent victimizations.

5. MYTH: The risk of fire during an active shooter situation is low, so code requirements are not a priority.

FACT: Barricade devices are installed during a lockdown, so some may consider them safe for this limited period. One of the problems is that there are currently no widely-used standards for school security, and schools frequently call lockdowns for events that do not involve an active shooter. There are many situations that could require

an evacuation while a school is in lockdown, and doors must provide free egress to facilitate evacuation.

I don't know of a barricade device that meets the current model code requirements for fire protection, accessibility, or egress—particularly when installed along with existing latching hardware.

6. MYTH: Lots of other states are allowing classroom barricade devices.

FACT: Although there are a few states where barricade devices have been allowed either by the state fire marshal or because of political intervention, there are many states that have issued directives addressing their requirements for code-complaint hardware.

In Minnesota, I found the rationale requiring code-compliant locks very compelling given the fact that the state is the location of the 2005 school shooting at Red Lake High School, where a 16-year-old killed seven people and wounded five others.

Although the classroom doors were locked, the shooter broke the glass and gained access to the classroom by turning the inside lever. And yet, Minnesota has not responded to this incident by choosing inexpensive security over free egress, fire protection, and accessibility. There are glazing products and films that will delay access to the inside lever, and would be a much more logical solution than installing a barricade device.

7. MYTH: Fire marshals do not have authority over barricade devices that are not permanently attached to doors.



Photo courtesy of Wayne Ficklin

FACT: How many fire marshals would allow this chained and padlocked panic hardware (above) in an occupied school? This photo was taken after the end of the school day, but while the school was occupied for an event. The fire marshal has the authority to order the chains and padlocks removed, even though they aren't permanently attached. Why would classroom doors be any different?

8. MYTH: Locksets do not provide enough protection against active shooters.

FACT: There are many locks that provide the necessary level of security and meet the model code requirements for egress, fire protection, and accessibility. These products are certified to meet recognized industry standards for security and durability and are listed for use on a fire door assembly. In some cases, schools looking to use barricade devices already have locking hardware but may not have distributed keys or established the protocols for lockdown.

In addition to standard mechanical locksets, there are also electrified locks available which can be locked using a fob, a code, or from a remote location. All of these classroom locking products will allow free egress at any time.

The Final Report of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission states: "The testimony and other evidence presented to the Commission reveals that there has never been an event in which an active shooter breached a locked classroom door." A holistic approach must be taken for classroom security including training, drills, key distribution, and impact-resistance of glazing adjacent to the hardware, and there is no reason to sacrifice life safety in favor of security.