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National Trends and Best Practices in Court Security and Emergency Planning

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Recent court security events and weather-related emergencies has given us all a heightened awareness of the importance of planning for the unexpected. Court security planning and emergency preparedness helps court staff, with the help of bailiffs and warrant officers, approach the danger in a systematic, calm, controlled manner.

By the end of this sessions, the participants will be able to:

1. Identify trends and issues in court security;
2. Describe primary steps to consider in preparing their court for the unexpected; and
3. Reflect on action steps they should take when returning to their cities.

Court Security and Emergency Management Program

The mission of NCSC is to improve the administration of justice through leadership and service to state courts and courts around the world. Through original research, consulting services, publications, and educational programs, NCSC offers solutions that enhance court operations with the latest technology and provides information on proven "best practices." NCSC's Court Consulting Services has extensive experience in conducting security assessments and assisting jurisdictions in developing practical security and emergency preparedness plans for courts throughout the nation.



Maryland Circuit Court Engulfed in Flames

Reduce the Effects of Disruptions

As recent headlines have shown, any court, anywhere, may be threatened or closed by violent individuals, civil disturbances, bomb threats, fire, extreme weather, or a natural disaster. NCSC can help your court protect its assets and people, identify gaps and vulnerabilities, mitigate risk, and assure the continuity of operations and essential functions in the event of a disaster through the design and development of Emergency Preparedness Programs or program components.

Court Security

- Design, develop, assess, and enhance security plans through comprehensive strategic analysis that integrates personnel, procedures, technology, and operations
- Identify assets and loss impact
- Identify and analyze threats and vulnerabilities
- Assess risk and recommend priorities for asset protection
- Include facility and perimeter security plans as an annex to a comprehensive continuity of operations plans
- Identify solutions, costs, and benefits
- Design and develop internal and external emergency communication systems and procedures

Emergency Management encompasses five key components:

- **Program Management** - Considers all internal and external policy and guidance
- **Prevention** - Risk management activities such as asset identification, and security
- **Preparedness** - Continuity of Operation Plan (COOP), Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP), Evacuation Plans and Procedures, and Disaster Recovery Plans
- **Response** - Implementation of COOP/OEP/Disaster Recovery plans, Go Bags, and deployment of Emergency Response Teams
- **Recovery** - Returning systems, operations, and personnel to normal operating status

Test, Training and Exercises (TTE)

Includes testing equipment and information systems that support the court during a disaster, training all staff in security policies and procedures, disaster preparedness, and response activities. TTE should take place once a year and anytime the program is modified.

NCSC can help you design, develop, and deliver these programs.

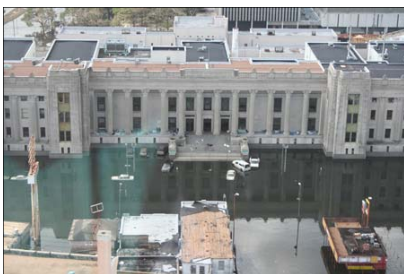


Tornado Destroyed Tennessee Courthouse



Some of NCSC's Success Stories

Project Sites	Project Descriptions
Florida	General Physical Security Reviews of Ten Court Buildings in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court – Dade County (Miami) Florida
Georgia	Fulton County Superior Court (Atlanta) Georgia – Conducted Post March 11, 2005 Incident Courthouse Security Reviews and Sponsored Training Courses on Personal Safety and Courtroom Security
Kansas	Developed of Statewide Standards for Security, Emergency Preparedness, Disaster Recovery, and Response to Pandemic Flu
Maryland	Administrative Office of the Courts, Conducted Statewide Security Assessments of 37 Circuit and District Courthouses and Sponsored Personal Safety Training at Maryland's Annual Conference of Judges
New Jersey	Conducted Personal Safety Training for Judges and Court Staff in Essex and Middlesex Vicinages
Puerto Rico	San Juan, Puerto Rico, Conducted a Security Assessment of the Supreme Court Buildings and Judicial Campus
Texas	Harris County (Houston) Texas – Assessed Six Urban Courthouse Buildings and Identified Security Related Governance Issues
Washington	Snohomish County (Everett) Washington – Conducted Security Reviews of Three Courthouse/Multi-use Buildings
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Security Assessments • Personal Safety Training • Courtroom Safety Training • Bomb Threat Training • Emergency Management • Disaster Recovery Training • Court Security Officer and Bailiff Training • COOP Development • Co-sponsored Two National Security Summits • Go Bag – Your Emergency Preparedness and Personal Security Advice Pamphlet • Presentations at National, Regional, and State Conferences



New Orleans Courthouse after Hurricane Katrina

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Atlanta, Georgia Courthouse Shooting

Essential Ten Elements for Effective Courtroom Safety and Security Planning

As determined by the Joint Committee on Security and Emergency Preparedness of the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators in October 2003

1. Operational Security: Standard Operating Procedures

This is one of the most critical deficiencies in the state court system today. Standard Operating Procedures are not being followed and for full safety, there needs to be 100 percent compliance.

2. Facility Security Planning: The Self-Audit Survey of Court Facilities

This point emphasizes the need to know the strengths and weaknesses of the physical structure of the courtroom to best protect the people inside.

3. Emergency Preparedness and Response: Continuity of Operations

At any moment, courts can be affected by natural or unnatural disasters; however, they must continue to operate and serve the public in such an event. There needs to be a greater awareness and identification of command structure, protocols, and communication routes for such emergencies and responses.

4. Disaster Recovery: Essential Elements of a Plan

The point emphasizes the need to ensure that adequate procedures are in place to recover lost or vulnerable information in the event of an emergency.

5. Threat Assessment

The federal government currently has an effective threat assessment protocol in practice. However, for security and safety purposes, state courts need to begin identifying serious threats so they may prepare for the proper protective action.

6. Incident Reporting

States must develop an appropriate incident report form that allows for capturing data on items such as intelligence and funding needs.

7. Funding

This is another critical deficiency facing the court system today and for years past. Equipment can be bought at moderate costs but without the trained personnel, the equipment is of little to no use. In addition, many state court administrators are troubled by the lack of federal funds. While much money is appropriated for homeland security, very little is dedicated to state courts.

8. Security Equipment and Costs

State courts must have updated and readily available information on what technology is available to them and how much it costs.


9. Resources and Partnerships

Strong and effective partnerships among state courts, law enforcement, and county commissioners must be developed to ensure successful security operations.

10. New Courthouse Design

As new courthouses are being constructed, this point emphasizes the opportunity to ensure that up-to-date physical safety measures are included in the design stage.

More on the National Summit on Court Safety and Security (www.ncsconline.org)

The NCSC has secured support and participation of members of Congress, Department of Justice officials, and state and county court officials, as well as members from public safety and state and local governments, in the National Summit. NCSC president Mary McQueen, who has been a strong and vocal leader of the state court community, has promised her members and the communities they serve that the outcome of the Summit will not only provide best practices for improving safety and security, but also use the power of its participants to call for necessary funding to implement such plans. 

Court Building Color Codes

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and many professional emergency responders strongly suggest, as much as possible, communication during an emergency should be clear, understandable, and simple. Presently, state and local courts use many different warning systems and language to advise court building occupants what to do during an emergency. The decision whether to stay or leave a court building during an emergency often can be the difference between life and death.

Realizing that clear communication and understandable, simple instructions are vital, in any building emergency courts have been advised by the NCSC to use universal color codes and practice drills to augment their existing evacuation procedures. Using the same color-coded language, followed by verbal instruction as necessary, in every court building will ensure that judges, employees, jurors, building tenants and the public will understand and react properly to emergencies.

- **Code Yellow – Situational Awareness**
 - Cautionary: Be aware and prepared to react to danger.
 - A dangerous situation may be developing in the court building.
- **Code Red – Imminent Danger**
 - Stay put! An active shooter is in the court building or there is a hostage situation.
 - Get into an emergency protective posture or in a safe haven.
- **Code Green – Emergency – Evacuate Building**
 - Listen to instructions from your floor warden.
 - Report to your assigned location away from court building.
- **Code Blue – Emergency Team Responding**
 - An emergency team is responding to or is in the court building.
 - Wait for further instructions from officials.
- **Code White – Administrative/Informational**
 - Return to normal operations.
 - All is well.

Source: NCSC “Steps to Best Practices in Court Security” publication is available on: ncsc.org