

Violence in schools – including numerous shootings — has educational organizations across the country struggling with the question of the need for armed security.

A violent act at a school is almost always going to be one of the worst tactical situations you can create. It's a close, crowded area where 99.9 percent of the people are innocent bystanders.

In November of 2015, a student at University of California Merced stabbed and injured four people. He was shot dead by armed university employees. There is no doubt the actions taken by the armed security person on the campus saved lives, but it just didn't happen because the security person was armed. There was proper training, preparation, experienced personnel, communication and a plan in place for the threat. All of this came together. It just didn't happen because someone on the campus had a gun.

The only viable reason to consider arming a security staff at your educational institution is to be ready and committed to the use of deadly force in a situation when it's called for.

Is your organization willing to make that call? Before making the decision, GuideOne Insurance recommends you discuss the issue at length with your security team or safety committee and local law enforcement agency. Most police, sheriff and state agencies are interested in working with educational organizations regarding any security issue.

If you don't have a security team or committee in place, don't even consider putting together an armed security force — it's just one element of a comprehensive security plan.

Topics to Discuss When Considering Armed Security

- What risk is your organization facing that justifies this level of security?
- Has faculty, staff or another representative of your organization received threats?
- Do you have a high-profile student?
- What other steps have you taken to prevent or reduce a violent incident from occurring at your facility?
- Do you have an unarmed security team already in place?
- Do you have a relationship with your local law enforcement agency?
- Does your state have a law prohibiting weapons, including concealed weapons, from being brought into schools?
- Be aware that security personnel who are to engage should be better trained and well paid. They also could pose higher risk (as they can use excessive force) or fail to prevent what they are hired to protect, etc.

What Risks Are You Creating By Having Armed Security?

- Shootout in your school

- Innocent bystander is killed by your security force
- Deadly force is taken when it isn't called for
- Loss of students due to new policy
- Lawsuit against the school and the security personnel
- Realize an armed security force will not prevent a violent incident from occurring at your facility.

Arming Your Security Force

If your organization decides it wants to pursue an armed security force, here are some tips for your security plan:

- If you don't know where to start, hire a security consultant to help you assess your school's security risks. Be sure to hire a reputable professional who maintains proper credentials. You may be able to obtain recommendations from your local police agency, school system, or area businesses.
- Discuss all aspects of your plan with your local law enforcement agency.
- Create a written security plan that includes a violence response plan. Armed security response is only one part of a response plan.
- Have a process and procedure for third party investigation of an officer involved shooting. (Keep in mind this process can be quite expensive. Estimates are \$200,000 - \$700,000 for an investigation of a shooting by qualified outside investigators.)
- Notify your insurance company of your decision. Your insurance carrier will have underwriting requirements and will adjust the premium in accordance with the risk involved.
- Post notices that you are using armed security officers.
- Create and publicize that weapons are not allowed to be carried on your grounds by anyone other than your security officers. Your security personnel should know the location of every weapon on campus and who has access to it.
- If an administrator knowingly allows a volunteer or employee to carry a weapon onto the campus to provide armed security, the administrator may be held as a representative of the school. Actions taken by both the administrator and the armed individual could cause the school liability for negligence and civil damages. Loss of life or injury caused by an error in using the firearm could result in criminal prosecution for those involved.
- Know your state laws regarding the type of weapon your security force can carry. Many states require an armed security force to be specifically registered and/or licensed by the state.
- A background check must be performed on anyone who will be armed. No one should carry a fire arm on your campus that has any history of violence.
- All armed personnel should undergo regular training and weapons qualification. Most states require qualification with the type of weapon used at least once every six months.
- Identify an appropriate location to secure weapons when not in use. At a minimum a firearms safe with extremely limited access must be required.
- Your organization is responsible for the actions of the security force.

Using Contracted Security Personnel May Be the Best Option

The responsibility of being a weapon-carrying member of your security team is not small. GuideOne Insurance feels the best plan may be to utilize a private security guard company.

- Appropriate security personnel are trained and supervised on a daily basis in their jobs.
- There's no substitute for the experience that a security officer gets on the street dealing with people on a regular basis.
- Hire security personnel from the upper level of the candidate pool, such as former/retired law enforcement personnel. They have undergone extensive training and screening, and they provide a very favorable impression to employees and visitors.
- Security officers are not only trained how and when to shoot a gun, they're trained to learn how not to shoot one.
- Don't pay below industry average. In many instances the security officer at the front desk is the first impression a client gets of your school and you want to make sure they look professional and provide a professional appearance. Prior to 9/11, security professionals were treated more as a commodity, and firms paid as little as possible to hire a security officer firm. Since then, however, it is more important to have a well-trained security professional with a professional appearance.
- Properly trained security officers in the field are accustomed to dealing with violent situations and threats. The first reaction is not to pull out a weapon; it's the last resort.