

# Swatting: The Most Annoying Trend

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This past summer we saw many incidents of swatting happening at institutions of higher education in Wisconsin and across the country. Swatting is defined by the FBI as placing a 9-1-1 call to report a fake emergency to get emergency response.<sup>1</sup> Some of the Wisconsin technical colleges were impacted by hoax bomb threats and this type of swatting can cause serious disruption to the campus environment. Some of these hoax calls resulted in building closures, evacuations, and cancellation of classes. Twenty eight (28) states reported swatting calls during the two months of September and October 2022 alone.<sup>2</sup>

There is a lot of debate about why Swatting numbers are increasing. Many of the hoax bomb threat calls this past summer and fall ended up originating from Ethiopia. Swatting calls happen for varied reasons. Some calls are placed with the intention to disrupt testing, and some are intended to test police response when planning for a more serious criminal or terrorist incident. Most of the time, the reason isn't obvious, and the intent isn't discovered until after the situation is over.

So what do we do about this trend? The top action item for the Colleges is to ensure employees know what to do if they receive a call reporting a situation such as a bomb threat. Plans should define what employees, who receive a call, should listen for, what they should ask, and who they should report the call to? Many of the colleges have information on a bomb threat response in their Emergency Procedure Guides and it is timely to review what is already in place.

A question I would pose to decision makers is, do you know the levels of threat and what type of response is necessary for each level of threat? If decision makers don't have a solid answer, there are great resources available through the Office of Bomb Prevention (OBP). OBP is currently offering a short, free, online class through FEMA called AWR-945 Bomb Threat Assessment for Decision Makers.<sup>3</sup> In this course, instructors define levels of threat response and practice with scenarios and help determine what the best course of action is for the college.

Don't forget to practice your response. You can do this with your Emergency Response team or Emergency Operations Center staff. You can talk through your response as a college or conduct a tabletop exercise on this scenario. DMI is available to host a tabletop exercise at your location if you would like assistance.

There are many more resources on bomb threats, prevention and preparedness available. Two excellent sources of information are CISA's (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) "What to do guide on bomb threats"<sup>4</sup> and the FBI's flyer on "Bomb Threat Guidance."<sup>5</sup> Both are linked at the bottom of this article for your review.

It is likely swatting calls will continue to be a concern for institutions of higher education across the nation in the future. The Colleges can best ensure the safety of all people on campus by having a good plan in place, making information available to employees that explains what to do if they receive a call, and have decision makers trained and ready to handle an appropriate swatting response.

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References:

- <sup>1</sup>FBI, "Don't make the call: The New Phenomenon of Swatting"  
<https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/stories/2008/february/swatting020408>, 2008.
- <sup>2</sup>Amy Rock, "School Swatting: why it's so dangerous and how to combat it",  
<https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/podcast/school-swatting-dangers/> Campus Safety Magazine, 2023.
- <sup>3</sup>FEMA Office of Bomb Prevention (OBP), "Bomb Threat Assessment for Decision Makers 23NV-0222 BTA DM", <https://cdp.dhs.gov/training/course/AWR-945>.
- <sup>4</sup>FBI, "Bomb Threat Guide", 2016. [Bomb Threat Guide - FBI - 2016](#).
- <sup>5</sup>CISA, "What to do if there's a Bomb Threat", <https://www.cisa.gov/what-to-do-bomb-threat>, 2022.