

Violent Campus Protests: A Guide for Campus Security

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The foundation of creating a crisis response plan to violent protests starts with a policy and procedure. Every college is required to have a policy on free expression and public assembly. This new required policy was announced in 2019 by the Wisconsin Legislature ([AB-444/SB-403](#)). **To learn more about Public Assembly on Campus with policy examples, [click here](#).**



College campuses have always been sites for social and political protests. While most protests are peaceful and uphold the right to free speech, some demonstrations escalate into violence, endangering students, employees, and the college community. Ensure a robust crisis response plan is in place, specifically addressing violent protests. Include protocols for communication with students, faculty, staff, and the wider community. It's crucial for campus security teams and the college to be prepared to handle any situation.

Maintain strong relationships with campus groups, student leaders, and local law enforcement agencies. Monitor social media and other online forums for signs of potential unrest or planned protests that could turn violent. Identify high-risk events, potential flashpoints, and vulnerable areas on campus. Develop contingency plans tailored to these specific risks. It is important to establish clear communication channels and a chain of command between campus security, administration, student groups, and local law enforcement to ensure a unified response (...think [NIMS & ICS](#)).

Actively monitoring the situation allows you to address potential conflicts before they escalate. Engage with protest organizers to establish ground rules and expectations for behavior. It is important to utilize trained security personnel to calm volatile situations, separate opposing groups, and encourage dialogue. Lastly, focus on communication and problem-solving rather than force.

First Amendment Rights: Uphold freedom of speech and assembly while ensuring safety and order. Furthermore, clearly communicate any restrictions on time, place, or manner of protests in advance. For support during large-scale potentially violent events, coordinate with local law enforcement and even federal agencies.

After a Violent Protest

- **Assess and Debrief:** Thoroughly evaluate the college's response, identifying areas of strength and potential improvement.
- **Investigate Thoroughly:** Collaborate with relevant authorities to investigate acts of violence and hold offenders accountable.
- **Support the Community:** Provide support services to anyone impacted by the protest, including students, faculty, and staff.
- **Learn and Adapt:** Use the insights gained from the experience to refine the crisis response plan, policies, and training procedures for future events.

Campus security plays a pivotal role in mitigating the risks associated with protests on campus. While it is never possible to completely eliminate the possibility of violence, proper strategies, comprehensive training, and strong communication protocols can help protect the campus community and enable peaceful engagement.

Additional Resource: [Campus Protests and Demonstrations: The Role Of Emergency Management \(2018\).](#)

Disclaimer: This article offers general advice and should not be construed as legal guidance. Always consult with legal counsel to ensure actions comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

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