Stopping school threats at the door
Examining access control technologies that can keep faculty and students safe

Our world is full of threats. The buildings and systems we interact with everyday are designed to limit our exposure to the risk of fire, bodily harm and other such threats. We tend to take for granted many of the safety features afforded us by these systems, but nevertheless they influence our daily lives.

Established fire and life safety codes ensure buildings are designed and systems are in place so we can quickly and safely exit during a fire. Security and access control systems protect our students from the threat of bodily harm. Each guideline, regulation and system was put into place with good intention However, in some cases, these systems can conflict with one another as the facility and staff grows. For example, how do you allow authorized staff to move freely through your facility, accessing areas that are restricted to the general public, but still allow egress during an emergency? Are you vulnerable to an attack from a disgruntled staff member, student, or stranger off the street? How effective is your access control system if staff or students are propping open doors? Can we put controls in place, but still meet ADA requirements?

We give these threats little thought until the unthinkable is broadcast on national news and then we scramble to ensure our faculty and students are not exposed to such a threat. Managing these conflicts with technology can provide a safer environment and peace of mind. The days of locking all the doors and handing out keys are gone. Access control systems with anti-tailgate technology, door prop alarms and automatic door operators compliment electrified door hardware products. These products can provide greater protection, more conveniences and avoid the unimaginable.

Delayed Egress

Although use of delayed egress in education facilities is typically restricted by life safety codes, under certain circumstances, exceptions can be made, especially when it is used to protect the occupants. Delayed egress exit devices prevent exit through secured openings, controlling foot traffic to a specific corridor that is monitored by security personnel. Delayed egress can be combined with electric latch retraction and automatic door operators for access control, which will allow staff to move freely throughout the facility, while controlling visitor and student foot traffic.

Playgrounds with emergency exits gates opening near a busy street would be cause for concern. Life safety codes may restrict traditional locking of these gates and weatherized delayed egress may be an acceptable application but be aware that you may need to get approval from the local fire marshal or other AHJ (Authority Having Jurisdiction). Weatherized delayed egress would provide a loud, local alarm, encouraging a child to move away from the area, while alerting staff that a child is attempting to exit through the gate. The 15-second delay provides staff time to react before the gate unlocks and helps to avoid a dangerous situation. All delayed egress,

even exterior weatherized systems, must be tied into a fire alarm override, providing safe, un-delayed exit during a fire emergency.

Anti-Tailgating Solutions and Door Prop Alarms

Access control systems and temporary visitor badges have become common in most school districts, but regardless of the campus size, anti-tailgating technology can be used to control access to only authorized personnel to restricted areas. Anti-tailgating systems sound an alarm if someone attempts to follow an authorized employee through a secure door which may contain sensitive material, expensive equipment, or personnel or student records. Even the most sophisticated access control system is defeated by someone propping open a door, yet a simple door prop alarm can eliminate this threat and ensure the systems are used as intended. An easy-to-install, battery operated door prop alarm, that has the ability to pre-select the amount of time a door can be held open and can sound an alarm if the door is held open longer than desired, is a great deterrent for propped open doors. The alarm is silenced when the door is closed, preventing the need for the key-holder to attend to the door.

Electrified Dogging for Lockdowns

Unfortunately, it is an accepted fact that occasionally schools have to go on lockdown. What "lockdown" means varies depending on size, number of doors~~,~~ and the type of facility. Some define a lockdown as securing all exterior doors, while some also include all classroom doors and possibly the cafeteria, library~~,~~ and gymnasium. Regardless of how many doors get locked, one key question remains foremost in the minds of administrators, facility and security directors: What is the safest, fastest, easiest and most cost effective means of locking down our campus? There are many answers to this question; however, one way that has been overlooked by many security door consultants is the use of panic exit devices with electrified dogging.

When installed throughout a school facility, the use of electrified dogging accomplishes several things. It allows all of the devices to be "energized" by one control switch that can be located in a centralized area of the building. This action keeps the doors in push/pull configuration via the electronics. In case of a required lockdown, one of several switches located throughout the campus can be activated to de-energize all devices. All panic devices revert to secure mode, effectively preventing entry at every door equipped with this type of device. You should be aware that add-on mechanical options like hex or cylinder dogging may jeopardize the effectiveness of the lockdown system.

When electric dogging is applied to classroom doors, it removes the need for a teacher, perhaps in the height of a crisis, to remember where the key is and how to lockdown a device on a classroom door. The administrator, taking the responsibility off the shoulders of the education staff, makes the decision and takes action to lockdown. When used on places of assembly such as gymnasiums and auditoriums, electrified dogging exit devices can be tied to a timer. The timer allows the doors to be dogged for

push / pull operation during a specific after-hours event, such as a basketball game or theater performance.

Allowing technology to help people enter a building and ensuring it is secure once everyone exits is a convenient alternative to traditional hex key or cylinder dogged exit devices that require someone to remember to dog and un-dog each and every door during every event.

Coordinating the Right System into a Kit

Ensuring all the pieces of technology will work together is key. Manufacturers along with some dealers will create a kit with best-in-class products, configured with wiring and riser illustrations to fit your application. Be careful of specification writers who supply only a list of products without a wiring diagram or how the items are integrated together.

Failing to install the items correctly can create years of headaches and wasted money. Ensure the supplier understands your need, has the best-in-class products to stand the test of time and make sure they can support the installation with wiring diagrams, riser illustrations and technical support.

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