

We need to do this right.

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As I'm reading the open source material on the German plane crash, I keep returning to one thought: Someone developed a fail safe way to keep people out of the cockpit, without adequately thinking about what would happen if the threat was already in the cockpit.

When I shared this observation with Lori Greene, she asked if I would write a guest blog post for iDigHardware.com on an issue that she has been discussing for several months – [secondary locking devices for doors](#). I have studied the codes and the reasons why we have the fire and life safety codes. Most of the current code requirements came from lessons learned with loss of lives. We have built much of our infrastructure to mitigate casualties during a fire. Because the codes and training have been so successful since 1947, I believe that many people fail to understand why we practice fire response and enforce the codes. One only needs to do some minimal research to see the huge number of deaths from fire pre-1947.

Active shooter and terrorism are not new threats. What has become evident since Sandy Hook is the sudden awareness that lockdown training is inadequate, our infrastructure is easily breached and we have given the bad guys a twenty-year head start in planning. National recommendations from the federal government changed in June of 2013 on how to respond to these events. The same recommendations had been pioneered by the ALICE Training Institute in 2002 – if evacuation was not possible, the secondary response should be to barricade the location using environmental items and be prepared to use counter measures should the lockdown location be breached.

All of the tactics were developed to be non-linear and non-location-specific. The tactics applied whether you were in a school, church, mall, industrial plant or office setting. Even though evacuation became the primary response and upgrades to locations were needed in order to facilitate the response, some companies began to use the barricading recommendations to market products designed to act as secondary locking devices for doors. Many of the products are marketed as being endorsed by the ALICE Training Institute or the Department of Homeland Security / Department of Education (Run, Hide, Fight). No such endorsement of these products has ever been given, nor are they compliant with the recommendations of these organizations.

As law enforcement and educators assessed their doors, they quickly became aware that their entire facility was not appropriate for lockdown utilization because the doors, locks, and walls were easily compromised. What should have been a national wake up call to improve infrastructure in educational buildings turned into a vendor-driven arms race, pitting fire and safety codes against an unregulated product. Suddenly, fire inspectors were being portrayed as being “against safety” when they prohibited these devices.

In some jurisdictions, police were pitted against fire personnel. This becomes even harder to fathom given that code-compliant locks and doors already existed that would solve the problem. If the door is the problem, you need a better door! Companies began popping up all over the country, many of them selling a single product built around whatever door their home school district might have purchased.

Some fire inspectors and code enforcement officers have been accused of just trying to “defend their turf,” as one vendor told me while trying to convince me to endorse their product. What these officials are doing is looking past the initial feel good of the devices and actually viewing them in the prism they view critical response; if it requires more than one motion and you have to remember it (the device), then it does you no good because fine motor skills become non-existent in a crisis.

While I’m certain that many of these products were developed to keep people safer, it is unlikely that they have been independently tested for effectiveness, utilization by occupants under stress, or studied for flaws to see if they can be used against the very people they are supposed to protect. In fact, several of the locking devices are marketed as hanging next to the door ready for use, as shown in the online installation videos.

Given the fact that most threats in education are already in the facility because they are students, easy access to a secondary locking device gives them the means to secure the classroom and terrorize the occupants. We are re-creating the Nickel Mines incident all over again, but making it easier for the bad guys to barricade. Of the more than 20 secondary locking devices I have seen or been told about, only two have the ability for law enforcement to ingress the room. We are providing the instruments of our own destruction without foresight.

The real solution is one involving fire, police, building inspectors, design experts, and architects. We need to design a building blending all the concerns and change code requirements to require better doors, better locks, better walls, better glass and better evacuation routes without making it look like a prison. We need to train in a realistic way with all building occupants, taking into account age and skills.

We are not going to “gadget” our way out of this problem. It requires planning and infrastructure change. Getting legislators to understand the gaps in school safety and put up money to improve infrastructure is critical. We can adapt existing buildings and improve them in ways that do not require occupants to use fine motor skills in the initial steps of critical response (dropping a pin into a hole is a fine motor skill under stress, in just the same way finding and putting a key into a lock is a fine motor skill under stress). New code requirements, folding fire and safety concerns into the building code itself is the long-term solution for new structures.

Because the threat is already in cockpit...and we need to do this right.