



# America's Maginot Line

*Why our focus on secondary locking devices  
makes us more vulnerable to threats*

By Lt. Joe Hendry, CLEE

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THE FIRST TIME I EVER observed a secondary locking device, it was at the State Fire Marshal's Academy in Ohio. I was teaching an ALICE Instructor course, and a student in the class brought a device he had made to help secure a door. During a break, he demonstrated the device, and yes, it did what he said—it secured the door using the bottom of the door and wall.

It had a few steps to install, and at the time, with Sandy Hook only four months in the rear view mirror, looked to be an impressive device. Several educators and law enforcement officers in the class remarked that they liked the device. I was non-committal but felt it might bear looking into given the concept failure of lockdown in the building breach at Sandy Hook. Looking back, the irony of the device, the location, and my naiveté has not been lost on me.

During the past two years, I have learned more about codes, doors, locks and devices than I ever thought I would need to know as a police officer. Learning the reason behind code development, door and lock manufacturing, visual communication design, and tactical civilian and law enforcement response to threats has become a way of life. As a law enforcement expert in the field of active threat response, I'm repeatedly asked for recommendations on what secondary locking device to purchase for buildings. My original thought of, "These might be the answer to our prayers," to, "These may be the worst idea we have ever had," evolved as I studied and learned.

I've come to understand why code exists for fire and life safety (lessons unfortunately learned in the loss of lives) and realize that most people inventing devices and purchasing them are so narrowly focused on one single event that they do not look at the overall picture of causality, training, the threats, and fine motor skills in a crisis. It has always been a question of, "What can we do now?" over the reasoned, "What should we do in the future?"

Since then I have seen several devices in buildings, watched the training and installation videos, talked with educators and law enforcement that have them and watched them be installed by those folks tasked with using them. There are more than 20 separate devices on the market, with each manufacturer making claims about their devices and against others. It has become apparent over the last year and a half that several of these devices are deadly and increase the number of potential casualties instead of mitigate them. The devices are so narrowly focused in scope they fail to address evolving threats in the terrorism and active threat field.

Unfortunately, this thought process has been in the American education

system for more than 20 years. Lockdown tactics (closing drapes, color coded cards, turning off lights, getting down on the floor, remaining quiet, not moving, and only relying on a locked door) were developed for drive-by shootings in the 1970s. They were never meant to stand up to a threat for more than a few seconds and were never meant for contact with the actual threat. Added to this problem is that we have never developed infrastructure to allow for the tactic to be remotely successful in the case of a determined attack.

The argument that “no locked door has ever been breached by an active threat” is a red herring. Any police officer will tell you locked doors are breached all the time. The fact that the threat chooses the time, the place, and the victims makes this argument even more absurd. Why would someone, whose intent is to kill large numbers of people, select a location and time when you are most secure. Or do they?

The FBI study (Blair, J. Pete, and Schweit, Katherine W. (2014). *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000 – 2013, Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington D.C. 2014*) states that more than 50 percent of these types of attacks occur in the classroom or hallway. The attackers are obviously inside the building, which means conventional wisdom about concentric rings of security in building design does not appear to apply for many of these events.

About a year ago *Campus Safety* magazine published an article I wrote titled, *Physical Security: Are We Protecting People or Trapping Them?* A portion of the article dealt with perimeter fencing and lack of egress for evacuation and lack of ingress for emergency responders. This issue has already come to the fore in several published open source articles about the attack in Chattanooga, Tenn., and how perimeter fencing affected the Marines’ response.

According to the *New York Times*, the gunman went out through the back

of the building and into the fenced-in motor pool area, where “two service members attempted to provide cover and assist the military personnel attempting to get over the fence.” If this had been a fenced-in educational facility, the casualty rate would have been considerably higher.

For the past two years, the debate has raged back and forth about secondary locking devices for use in lockdown. I would argue that we are going a lot further toward trapping occupants than we are in saving them. Here are just a few problems with secondary door locking devices. They have not been independently tested or studied by uninterested third parties. Some issues that should disqualify devices from deployment include:

- ▶ use of the floor as a mooring point for the device, requiring more than one step or fine motor skills for installation
- ▶ not being removable by fire or law enforcement personnel from the ingress side
- ▶ devices being easily accessible to potential threats inside the classroom or office.

Devices that use the floor as a securing location are easily defeated by day-to-day foot traffic. Gravel, dirt, wax, water, salt, etc. will accumulate in the mooring hole. Since most threats are internal, a few stones placed in the hole will instantly set up the location for failure. Devices that require balancing the device, sliding it on a door or under it, opening a door to install (the first recommendation from the Sandy Hook Commission was to move locks inside the door to avoid this problem!) twisting handles, spinning rods, and dropping or placing pins into holes or brackets are all fine motor skills.

Having to use fine motor skills in a crisis has never been recommended. Fire training and active threat training are all about the use of gross motor skills in crisis by civilians. I have now had two locations tell me they bought devices (the devices are



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different) based on the manufacturer telling them how easy they were to use. When these facilities use the devices in lockdown training, they are experiencing high failure rates due to the minimal amount of stress being applied by being in a drill. One school resource officer told me their device installation rate is so bad that a recommendation from the school administration has been to train “trusted” students to use the device. I explained this would be a poor decision based on the fact that most of the threats in educational facilities are students.

Several secondary locking device vendors have made claims that these devices are barricades and meet the Department of Homeland Security recommendations for the “Hide” or “Lockdown/Barricade” portion of Run, Hide, Fight or ALICE Training. They do not.

A barricade is the use of environmental items to “block or defend with an improvised barrier.” Examples

of this include desks, chairs, chairs, etc. Barricading tactics are meant to be portable and not location- or device-dependent. These devices meet the definition of a lock “to fasten or secure (something).” They mirror current devices in use, such as carriage bolts, flush bolts, surface bolts, etc.

The reason so many devices do not meet code requirements for fire or life safety is that they prevent evacuation, require fine motor skills to install or remove, and require special knowledge. Ask yourself this question: if the devices were legal under current code, like many vendors advertise, why would it even be necessary to have legislation or approval to allow them?

Barricade devices violate several training principles for active threats. Everyone should be trained in all options. This includes training using environmental items to barricade. Several locations with devices have come to rely upon the device and not lifelong, portable learning skills. Obviously, you



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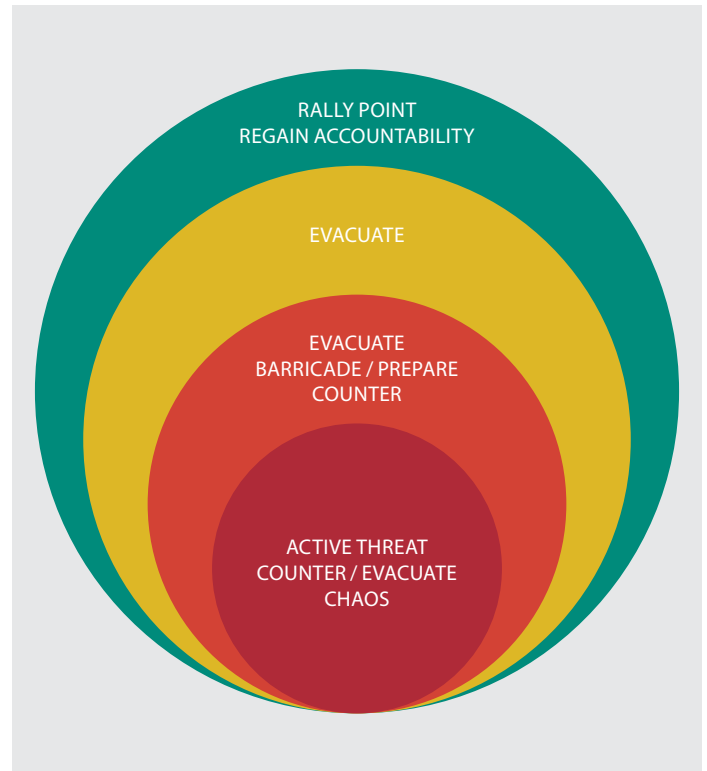
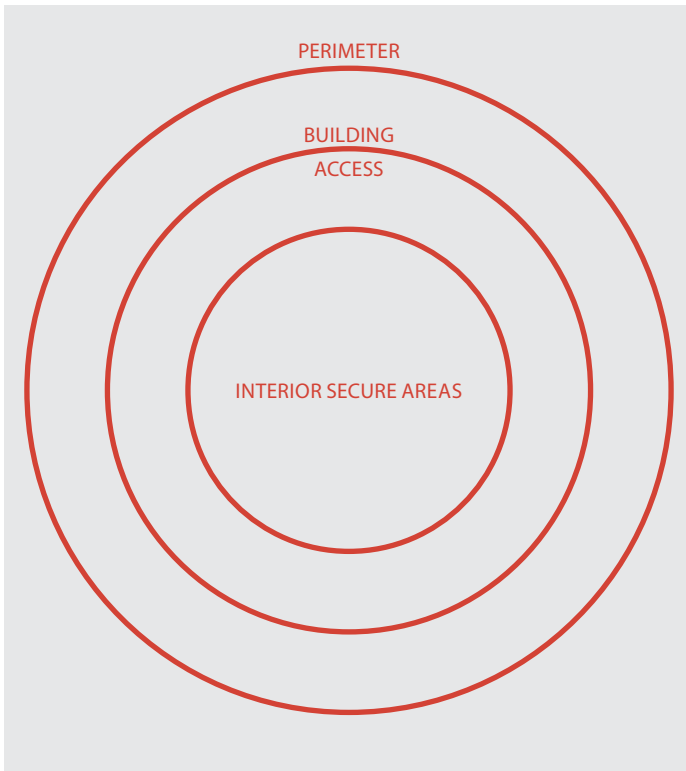
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Illustrations courtesy of Lt. Joe Hendry, CLEE

**Concentric rings of security for exterior threats and crime still need to be used. But we need to expand the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) concept from a traditional picture to a non-traditional concept of response which emphasizes evacuation over lockdown of building occupants.**

can't train students in the use of the device because it will be readily available for them to use in the classroom to commit the very crime the device is supposed to be mitigating.

Devices can also be used to lock out first responders and administrators to perpetrate crimes in the classroom, including the very crime they are purporting to stop. Devices and the skills required to install them are not portable from location to location.

A school secondary locking device doesn't mean a house of worship, a retail establishment, a university, mall, restaurant, or even another school would have the same device. While our fire survival skills and code standards are applicable from location to location, our response skills for terrorism and active threats would be required to change from place to place. That is no way to establish a response policy based in mitigating casualties on a national basis.

The fact is, these devices can easily be used against us. Terrorists and active

threats have already used barricade techniques in Mumbai, Platte Canyon, Beslan, Westgate Mall in Kenya, Moscow, West Nickel Mines, and several others. The use of explosives and fire in several incidents show diversification of tactics by the threats. Trying to have a one size fits all approach focusing on a lockdown, using current buildings and doors that were not designed with the tactic in mind, is the definition of insanity.

From a tactical standpoint, hanging the device next to the door is an invitation to disaster. It gives any threat the ability to secure a room with potential victims inside with little recourse for staff or law enforcement except to breach using physical force. The fact that vendors are touting the devices by posting videos of law enforcement using current assigned tools that cannot breach the door gives threats a tactical advantage in planning and use in a facility that is already a soft target. Telling students not to touch

the device because it is a piece of safety equipment means nothing to individuals bent on mayhem. We should never supply the instrument of our destruction to a threat in such a willing manner.

We need code and building changes that enhance our ability to use lockdown as a secondary response. If this many facilities think they have to purchase devices to put on their doors, it means they have assessed their doors and locks and found them lacking. It means they need a better door or lock—not a barricade device.

We will never gadget our way out of a complicated issue without addressing it from a holistic viewpoint. Fire and threat response need to complement each other through building design. Requiring heavy gauge hollow metal doors or impact-resistant solid-core wood doors, with narrow vision lites offset from the latching hardware, would be a start. Doors with multipoint internal locking systems that secure into the

frame (not the floor) would make the location more secure and would be additionally backed up by barricading tactics employed by room occupants.

Doors that exit directly to the exterior would improve evacuation options (the primary recommended response for all facilities) for building occupants. Study of previous incidents worldwide is showing that evacuation of occupants in the first few minutes of chaos during an event leads to mitigation of casualties. The longer the duration of the event and limiting of options, it becomes more likely there will be an increase in casualties. Evacuating people from the scene causes the threats to have to go into search mode to locate potential victims. This improves the law enforcement response because suspects will spend time searching for victims instead of being in contact with them.

We need to reverse our thought process when it comes to preparing for these types of events. Concentric rings of security for exterior threats and crime still need to be used. But we need to expand the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) concept outside of traditional thinking. With an interior threat, improving and allowing evacuation from the facility using doors and windows increases survivability. It also requires the threats to adjust to our tactics, without granting them control of a facility and persons until they are stopped.

We need to change our thought process on paper from a traditional picture of CPTED to a non-traditional concept of response which emphasizes evacuation over lockdown of building occupants.

Because we have been behind the bad guys for 20 years in building design and tactics, the focusing on gadgets will not solve our problem. Better door, lock and design standards that are part of the solid structure of a building code will mitigate casualties on a national level, rather than creating a patchwork system of devices that have great potential to work against us. ■



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