

# Massachusetts Bomb Threat Response Guidance

**For local police, fire and school officials.**

- Although no bomb has ever been found in a Massachusetts school after a communicated threat, **take each threat seriously.**
- Every school should have a **Bomb Threat Response Plan** as part of an **All Hazard Plan.**
- Use these guidelines to review and revise the bomb threat response section of your All Hazard Plan.
- Every bomb threat is unique and should be handled in accordance with the needs of the facility.



**This information has been approved by:**  
Fire Chiefs' Association of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Police Chief's Association  
Massachusetts Major City Chiefs  
Mass. Association of School Superintendents

**MASS. STATE POLICE BOMB SQUAD**  
**DEPARTMENT OF FIRE SERVICES**  
Stephen D. Coan • State Fire Marshal

## **Medium Risk**

- Search more controlled areas such as classrooms.

## **High Risk**

- Search additional locked and controlled areas such as the roof and utility areas.

## **Suspicious vs. Unattended Items**

- An unattended item is not automatically a suspicious one. Circumstances make an item suspicious, such as: out of context, making a noise, visible wires, or placement witnessed.

## **If a Suspicious Item Is Found**

- **Do not** touch, tamper with, or move the item.
- Immediately report item to the unified command.
- Public safety controls the scene if a suspicious item is found.
- Refrain from using radio communication in close proximity to the suspicious item.

## **School Personnel**

- When search is initiated by Site Decision Maker(s), make a quick and complete visual scan of the workplace and any other common areas assigned.
- Conduct a 360 degree visual scan of your room for anything unusual.
- If anything unusual is noticed, move people away from the potential hazard and immediately report the location of the object to the Site Decision Maker(s).

## **Shelter-in-Place/Evacuation Decision Tree**

It is important not to reward threatening behavior, so unless a threat assessment warrants evacuation, consider search, shelter-in-place, or limited evacuation alternatives first.

- Consider shelter in place and conduct a search for a low risk threat.

- Partial evacuation depends on the specificity of the threat (if the threat specifies an area, can evacuate just that area).
- Full evacuation – when a suspected item is located or there is a high risk threat.

## **When Evacuation Is Initiated**

- Never pull the fire alarm unless there is a fire. Other means should be used to communicate the evacuation.
- Everyone should take their personal belongings with them when possible.
- Evacuate to a safe and controlled area.

## **Continuing Actions After Evacuation**

- Debrief emergency services and assist in coordinating further actions.
- Take accountability and report.
- Open media, medical and family areas and provide regular briefings.
- Police/fire/school officials coordinate on what can be released publicly. Often the specifics of a threat may need to be kept quiet to aid the investigation and to prevent copy cats.
- As appropriate, determine reoccupy or dismiss action. Time of day and specificity of the threat may dictate this decision. Be cautious about dismissing school as this may reward the threatening behavior.
- School and public safety officials communicate with parents.

**A bomb threat is a violation of MGL C269, S14.**

**Note:** This document is based on the **Bomb Threat Guidance** flier issued by the FBI and the DHS Office for Bombing Prevention in 2013. For more information, contact the DHS Office for Bombing Prevention at [OBP@DHS.gov](mailto:OBP@DHS.gov)

**Massachusetts State Police Bomb Squad**  
978-567-3310 • [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs) 10/14

## If a Threat is Received

- Conduct a Threat Assessment.
- Execute appropriate actions outlined in your Bomb Threat Response Plan.

## Planning and Preparation

### **Planning Considerations**

- Coordinate with local law enforcement and first responders to ensure smooth handling of a bomb threat.
- Every school should have an All Hazard Plan. The Bomb Threat Response Plan should be part of the All Hazard Plan.
- Fire, police, and school officials are required by law to meet before school starts each year to review and revise this plan.
- Update primary and secondary contact names and info every year, or when personnel change.

### **Preparation Considerations**

- Control building access.
- Implement strict master key control.
- Inspect incoming parcels.
- Safeguard confidential material.
- Keep exits unobstructed.
- Ensure adequate internal and external emergency lighting.
- Utilize electronic surveillance.
- Have building floor plans for first responders to help with searches.

## Threat Assessment

Threat assessment is the **most important** step when responding to a bomb threat. It will determine what other actions to take including the level of public safety response, the scope of the search, whether or not to evacuate the building(s), or to dismiss school.

Each incident is unique and all circumstances must be evaluated by the police/fire/school assessment team. All threats must be carefully evaluated.

### **Low Risk Threats**

Low risk threats lack realism and pose a minimum risk to the victim and/or public safety. The probable motive is to cause disruption.

- The threat is vague and indirect.
- Information in the threat is inconsistent, implausible, or lacks detail.
- The caller is definitely known and has called numerous times.
- The threat was discovered instead of delivered (e.g., a threat written on a wall).

### **Medium Risk Threats**

A medium risk threat has an increased level of realism and could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic.

- The threat is direct and feasible.
- Wording in the threat suggests that the perpetrator has given some thought to how the act will be carried out.
- Threat may include indications of a possible place and time.
- No strong indication that the perpetrator has taken preparatory steps, although there may be some indirect reference pointing to that possibility.
- Indication that the perpetrator has details regarding the availability of components needed to construct a bomb.
- Increased specificity to the threat (e.g. "I'm serious!" or "I really mean this!").

### **High Risk Threats**

A high risk threat is specific and realistic and appears to pose an immediate and serious danger.

- The threat is direct, specific, and realistic and may include names of possible victims, specific time, or location of the device.
- The perpetrator provides his/her identity.
- Threat suggests concrete steps have been taken toward carrying out the threat.
- Perpetrator makes statements indicating they have practiced with a weapon or have had the intended victim(s) under surveillance.

### **Site Decision Maker(s)**

- Immediately contact local law enforcement and fire to initiate the threat assessment team and to request response.
- Mobilize the building emergency response team(s).
- Communicate with school personnel about bomb threat.
- Limit access to building.
- Decide, with threat assessment team, on appropriate action or combination of actions:
  - Search: The scope of the search is dependent on the threat assessment.
  - Shelter-in-place: partial or full
  - Evacuation: partial or full

## Public Safety Response

- Police and fire must respond to the school as part of the threat assessment team.
- Notify regional response team (if one exists) and State Police or local Bomb Squad if needed, based on threat assessment.
- The State Police Bomb Squad is always available to provide guidance.
- Explosive detection canines may be used for low, medium and high risk threats at the discretion of the threat assessment team and the EK-9 handler.

## Searching the Building

### **All Risk Levels:**

- Always conduct a search.
- Search common areas first (hallways, cafeteria, gym, bathrooms, library).
- Search exterior areas second.
- Search team should include police/fire/school officials.