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Court Security Guidelines

Michigan State Court Administrative Office



TABLE OF CONTENTS
MICHIGAN COURT SECURITY GUIDELINES

Introduction and Application of Guidelines 2

SECTION 1
Administrative Guidelines

1.1 Written Court Security Manual 3
1.2 Standing Committee on Security 4
1.3 Court Security Coordinator and Emergency Services Coordinator 4
1.4 Reporting of all Security Incidents to SCAO 5
1.5 Security Training For All Court Employees 5

SECTION 2
Access Control Guidelines

2.1 Limited Access–Main Entrance and Exit 6
2.2 Employee Identification Cards 6
2.3 Locking Mechanisms 7

SECTION 3
Physical Facility Guidelines

3.1 Facility and Office Design 8
3.2 Installation of Physical Barriers 8
3.3 Secure Parking 9
3.4 Holding Areas 9
3.5 Environmental Controls 10

SECTION 4
Security Guidelines

4.1 Screening for Weapons 11
4.2 Signs Announcing Weapon Screening 11
4.3 Intrusion and Duress Alarms 12
4.4 Testing of Security Equipment 12
4.5 Caller ID on Phones 13
4.6 Security Policy Restricting Weapons 13
4.7 Use of Force Policy 13



INTRODUCTION AND APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES MICHIGAN COURT SECURITY GUIDELINES

Introduction and Application of Guidelines

Michigan Courthouses represent justice under law and reason. Court facilities must be as safe and secure as practicable for all those who visit and work there.

The Court Security Guidelines balance many competing concerns. It is recognized that there has been an increase in violence in our society and that courts deal with emotional issues. It is also recognized that the diversity of the court system—urban and rural, large and small—affects the ability of communities to meet the financial burden of providing security. The Guidelines attempt to balance the diverse interests in each community by the use of local court security advisory committees for each trial and appellate court. The committees will be comprised of a broad range of interested community parties, and will examine each court's security needs, including the facilities and the resources available, and adopt a plan that addresses the unique needs of that court.

These Guidelines are not mandates. Rather, they are goals to which courts and local communities should aspire to ensure safe access to all. Each court should review its security operations and security plan **annually** in order to improve and update both.



1.1 WRITTEN COURT SECURITY MANUAL

All courts should have a written court security manual that contains the following elements:

- **A physical security plan** that addresses landscaping, parking, interior and exterior lighting, interior and exterior doors, intrusion and detection alarms, windows, fire detection and protection, and auxiliary power.
- **Routine security operations.**
- **Special operations plans** that address high-profile trials, emphasizing security and emergency responses.
- **Emergency procedures** that address evacuation, medical emergencies, bombs and bomb threats, hostage situations, escapes, assaults, utility failures, fire, natural disasters, chemical or biological threats, civil disturbances, and the use of universal precautions.
- **A response plan** developed in conjunction with emergency first responders.
- **Lock-down plans** that address situations where safety requires all doors to be locked and all public and staff to remain in place (e.g., hostage and weapon incidents).
- **Essential services contingency plans** that address the need for a backup system to coordinate and run essential court services if a court facility is damaged or otherwise unsuitable for use. This plan should also include providing local law enforcement with addresses and telephone numbers for judges and the court administrator.
- **A plan** for backup and recovery of court records in the event of fire, flood, or other disaster
- **Protocol** for providing building and floor plans to emergency responders for use in training for and in emergencies.
- **Incident reporting procedures.**
- **Mail-handling procedures.**
- **Threatening or inappropriate correspondence.**
- **Court security officer qualifications and duties.**
- **A high risk trial plan.**

Discussion: The manual should be distributed to all affected court staff and updated annually. However, to maintain security, certain sections of the manual may require limited distribution.



1.2 STANDING COMMITTEE ON SECURITY

Each court should have a standing committee on court security. The chief judge or the court administrator should chair this committee, which should include the Court Security Coordinator and Emergency Services Coordinator, representatives from all court divisions, representatives from the sheriff department or other law enforcement agency that provides security for the court, and representatives from the funding unit.

Discussion: The court should regularly and frequently review security measures to stay current with changing events. The security committee should be charged with the development of a practical safety and security process and with updating emergency policies and procedures. The committee should also conduct an annual security audit of the court facility and the surrounding area.

1.3 COURT SECURITY COORDINATOR AND EMERGENCY SERVICES COORDINATOR

Each court should appoint a Court Security Coordinator and an Emergency Services Coordinator.

Discussion: Each court should have one person, the Court Security Coordinator, who is responsible for maintaining the court's security procedures and coordinating training for court staff. The court also needs an Emergency Services Coordinator who would be the liaison with the local Emergency Services Board. The Emergency Services Coordinator ensures that the court's contingency plan is carried out in any emergency. The same person could serve as Court Security Coordinator and Emergency Services Coordinator. However, it is important to establish a clear line of authority to activate emergency/security responses, such as evacuation.

In a facility with multiple courts, the courts should, if possible, have one person handle these duties for all the courts. If the court shares the facility with non-judicial agencies, the court should cooperate with the local funding unit and the other agencies to coordinate security and an emergency plan. In any shared facility, the chief judge has ultimate authority and responsibility for the security of areas the court uses.

The name(s) and contact information for court security and emergency services coordinators should be provided to the State Court Administrative Office and appropriate local law enforcement and emergency services personnel.



1.4 REPORTING OF ALL SECURITY INCIDENTS TO SCAO

All courts should immediately report all security breaches to the law enforcement agency with local jurisdiction. All courts must also report all security incidents to SCAO and their funding unit's risk management department using the Court Security Incident Reporting Form.

Discussion: Because security is so important for the courts, security incidents should be reported accurately whenever they occur. This compiled data will allow the SCAO to recommend system-wide remedies to lessen the occurrence of security incidents.

Definition: "Incident" is defined as a bomb threat, escape, or other serious situation that disrupts court services.

1.5 SECURITY TRAINING FOR ALL COURT EMPLOYEES

All court employees should receive security training when hired and should receive supplemental training annually.

Discussion: Court staff need to know what is expected of them at all times. Security procedures should be reviewed annually with all staff. A mandatory training program should be established to include regular in-service security training.



2.1 LIMITED ACCESS–MAIN ENTRANCE AND EXIT

It is recommended that the court limit access to one main entrance and exit; however, all entrances should have weapon screening. *Everyone entering the court must pass through a screening process.*

Discussion: Limiting access/egress to one area allows better observation and detection and reduces the cost of weapon screening equipment and staff. If the staff and judiciary use a non-public entrance, provisions need to be made for weapon screening at this entrance. Entrances without screening should be locked and equipped with an alarm and a sign reading, “Emergency exit only; alarm will sound.”

Courts with loading docks should make arrangements with all suppliers to provide necessary identification for drivers and to notify the court before making deliveries. The loading dock area should have personnel and equipment available to screen all incoming materials. All packages, including UPS, Federal Express, and USPS, should be x-rayed.

Prisoner transport/access areas should be secured and used for prisoners only.

Multi-use buildings create special problems. Courts should make all reasonable efforts to reach agreements with all entities sharing a building. If the court cannot agree with other tenants and the funding unit, the court needs to clearly define and secure its space. Anyone entering the court area should pass through a single point for observation and screening.

2.2 EMPLOYEE IDENTIFICATION CARDS

All court employees should wear a visible identification card.

Discussion: To be able to identify legitimate workers from visitors and others, employees should wear a pictured ID at all times. This ID may also be used as a key card for access to offices, etc. The ID should only show the employee’s first name.



2.3 LOCKING MECHANISMS

All locking mechanisms should be as sophisticated as electronic access cards or better.

Discussion: Strict control of all locking devices should be maintained. The cleaning staff should not have unsupervised access to the court after hours. Keys and keypad locks are too easily compromised. New locking technology provides better security and easier replacement when compromised. The system should be administered by someone directly responsible to the court administrator or chief judge.

Electronic access cards are given to each employee. This individualized card is programmed to allow access only to certain areas. The access card also provides a record of each employee's movement in the building.

Biometric systems are more secure access devices. These systems rely on some human biology factor, such as retina scanners or voice identifiers for access. Also, a biometric system can be programmed to allow access only to certain areas. The biometric system also records each employee's movement in the building.



3.1 FACILITY AND OFFICE DESIGN

Facility and office design should address security issues. Buildings should be designed so as to protect against attack.

Discussion: New facilities should be designed with three separate zones whenever possible: public zone, private zone for judges and staff, and a secure zone for moving prisoners. These zones should not cross. Additionally, design of offices where staff will be meeting with clients or the public should provide an escape route, either with a second exit or by strategic placement of the office furniture.

Each court should identify any areas, such as courtroom judges' benches, staff workstations, jury box, and public counters that require additional protection. There are options, including bullet-resistant material, that fall within a broad cost range. Courts should also identify what rooms could be used as "safe rooms" where staff can go during an incident.

3.2 INSTALLATION OF PHYSICAL BARRIERS

All courts should make arrangements to install physical barriers around the court building when necessary to limit the approach of cars and trucks.

Discussion: Each court should decide, in cooperation with local law enforcement and the court's funding unit, whether physical barriers are required. Information about where to get barriers and how they will be deployed should be part of any court security plan.



3.3 SECURE PARKING

All courts should have secure parking for judges, staff, jurors, and witnesses who have been threatened.

Discussion: Some security incidents have occurred in parking areas before the victim even reaches the courthouse. Judges and staff, who are vulnerable to attack simply by virtue of their positions, need secure parking. Jurors and threatened witnesses also need secure parking if they are to fulfill their roles in the justice system. However, jurors and witnesses should not park in the judge/staff parking area.

Ideally, parking would be in a fenced area, with vehicle and pedestrian access limited by a gate controlled by a card-key or other access control device. Judges and/or staff should have direct access to secured corridors or elevators from the parking area.

As an alternative, the court may reserve parking spaces for staff and provide occasional patrols. Judicial parking should be in reserved spots adjacent to the building. Signs reserving parking should in no way indicate who is parking in the spots. However, since all courts are not able to secure their parking areas, all staff and jurors should be alert to special circumstances.

3.4 HOLDING AREAS

All courts should have a secure holding area for temporary prisoners.

Discussion: Courts need secure holding areas where prisoners can be locked up and isolated while waiting to appear in court or be returned to jail. Holding areas should:

- Be constructed to lessen the possibility of self-inflicted injury.
- Be inspected daily for contraband.
- Include doors that allow for easy observation.
- Include toilet facilities.
- Be checked by staff every 30 minutes.
- Have CCTV monitoring, if possible.
- Have a self-contained breathing apparatus.

Every court should work with the local sheriff or police to develop emergency procedures for prisoner control and evacuation.



3.5 ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS

All environmental controls in court facilities should be secured, with access restricted to authorized personnel.

Discussion: In order to avoid tampering and sabotage, access to controls for heating, air-conditioning, ventilation, etc., should be limited to authorized staff. Outside air intake mechanisms should also be secured so they cannot be used as access to the building or as a conduit for biochemical attack.



4.1 SCREENING FOR WEAPONS

All courts should screen for weapons at every access point.

Discussion: Weapons screening is an essential part of court security. *All persons entering the court facility should be subject to security screening.*

A proper weapons screening station has:

- Adequate room for people to congregate inside, out of the weather, without being so crowded as to present additional security problems.
- A magnetometer, x-ray equipment, and hand-held magnetometers for backup screening.
- A duress alarm to summon additional help if needed.
- Closed circuit television monitoring of the access point.
- Adequate staffing of at least two trained staff to monitor traffic flow and at least one officer with a weapon to observe and respond to emergencies.
- Access to a private area to conduct more thorough searches using same gender personnel.

The court's weapons screening policy should include:

- A list of restricted items.
- A secondary screening policy for people who have not successfully passed through after two tries.
- Storage and disposal of confiscated items.
- Protocols for appropriate responses to attempts to bring in weapons and dealing with law enforcement personnel.

4.2 SIGNS ANNOUNCING WEAPON SCREENING

Signs notifying the public about weapons screening should be prominently displayed.

Discussion: The goal of a security system is to deter incidents. Proper signage indicates that the court is conducting weapons screening. Signs should also state that both individuals and their belongings will be searched. This message often will be enough to keep weapons out of the courthouse. The signs should be large, positioned both outside the courthouse and just inside the court entrance, and in appropriate languages. The court should follow the SCAO guidelines for wording and have the chief judge's signature attached.



4.3 INTRUSION AND DURESS ALARMS

The court should have both intrusion and duress alarms.

Discussion: Intrusion alarms are designed to alert the court to unauthorized entry after hours. The alarms can be of several varieties, including space alarms, vibration alarms, and door contact alarms. The alarm system can be set to produce a loud sound to alert the police and deter entry, or alarms can be silent to alert police only.

Duress alarms are designed to signal for immediate help. Recommended locations include: judges' benches and/or staff positions in the courtroom, chambers, cashier stations, probation offices, and any office where staff may meet alone with the public. Key issues with duress alarms are:

- Staff must be trained in both the locations and use of the alarms.
- The alarm should sound at the court's security station **and** at the responding law enforcement agency.
- Clear response protocols must be established with responding agencies. The court should accept only a response protocol that includes immediate assistance and no verification or cancellation by telephone.

Door alarms should also be placed in all exits from the building. Staff sometimes prop doors open for breaks and then forget to close them. Side doors should be marked, "Emergency exit only; alarm will sound."

Court policy should address:

- The process for activating and deactivating the building alarms.
- Response to building alarms after hours and requirements for notifying court staff.

4.4 TESTING OF SECURITY EQUIPMENT

All courts and/or funding units should have a schedule for maintaining and testing all security equipment.

Discussion: Equipment should be properly maintained and tested on a schedule in order to ensure that it will work well.



4.5 CALLER ID ON PHONES

All courts should have “Caller ID” installed on their phone systems.

Discussion: Caller ID will allow courts to identify individuals who call in bomb threats or make other threatening calls to the court. Although Caller ID can be blocked, uninformed users may provide their telephone number to the court. For Caller ID to work, staff will need to be provided with telephones that can display the incoming caller number.

4.6 SECURITY POLICY RESTRICTING WEAPONS

Each court should have a security policy that restricts weapons or other items that pose a security risk in the court facility.

Discussion: Pursuant to Michigan Supreme Court Administrative Order 2001-1, every court must have a security policy that prohibits weapons or other items that pose a security risk in any courtroom, office, or other space used for official court business or by judicial employees, unless the chief judge or other person designated by the chief judge has given prior approval consistent with the court’s written policy. The policy should address whether law enforcement officers may carry their weapons in the court facility, and any restrictions on their doing so. (See Administrative Order 2001-1.)

The policy should also include other potential items that each court determines should be prohibited for security reasons. The policies should be reviewed on a regular basis.

4.7 USE OF FORCE POLICY

Each court should establish a “use of force” policy for court employees providing security.

Discussion: Security employees require specific direction and training on the appropriate use of force. Courts should adopt the policy that is used by the Sheriff department or local law enforcement agency that provides security for the court. If the court employs its own security staff, they should adopt the Sheriff or local law enforcement policy or develop a similar policy. Model policies are available from the SCAO. Sheriff or local law enforcement department policies should govern sheriff-supplied personnel supplied by those agencies.