SPANISH FORK HIGH SCHOOL

How AEGIX AIM calmed the chaos during an active shooter swatting hoax.

THE SITUATION

A typical school day in Spanish Fork, Utah became a living nightmare when the police department received a call saying there was an active shooter somewhere at Spanish Fork High School and two students had been shot. Police and school administrators were unaware that they were part of a wave of threats and false reports of active shooters that were pouring into schools and colleges across the country. For nearly 30 minutes, the threat was thought to be very real and was treated as such. This criminal activity is called "swatting" because the goal is to tie up authorities, particularly SWAT teams with terror threats. One of the reasons this was taken so seriously is many of the calls received were computer-generated and use caller ID spoofing to hide their identity. This call was a live, human voice. What the perpetrators of the threat did not know was that Spanish Fork High School had recently been equipped with a new tool to make it extremely prepared to effectively manage worst-case emergencies such as this.

THE SOLUTION

- Only one week prior, Spanish Fork High School finished rolling out and conducting staff training on AEGIX AIM (Active Incident Management), a technology platform with an extremely user-friendly app that keeps students and school employees safe during emergencies. AEGIX approaches incidents comprehensively which includes corresponding and planning with responders, dispatch and incorporating state and local mandates. This enables users of AIM to actively manage incidents while they are occurring. The AIM app can be loaded on computers, tablets and phones and is installed on the phones of all the administrators, teachers and staff at the high school. The Spanish Fork police department, sheriff's department and fire department all are on the platform as well. Within the app, there is a dynamic mapping system that shows the five buildings that make up the campus. Maps are "live" during critical incidents, which dramatically reduces time to incident resolution. When an emergency happens, which can range from an injury in the gym, a flood in the cafeteria or an active shooter, anyone on the system can report the emergency or initiate a lockdown.

- When the police arrived at the school, Principal Matt Christensen opened the app and hit "lockdown." At that moment, everyone on the system heard an alarm on their phones and saw that the school was in lockdown. Teachers knew they needed to push a big button to report themselves and their classroom as "safe" or "unsafe." If they are safe, their classroom shows up on the interactive map as green, if unsafe, it is red. The system also has a unique proprietary chat system that proved absolutely critical during the emergency. This allows first responders, dispatch and everyone on the system to have safe communication with everyone (by individual name) during the incident.

- "We had students who were in other teachers' classrooms and staff who were alone in their offices, stairwells and bathrooms. Teachers and administrators were able to clearly communicate with each other to quickly account for every person on campus. We had one teacher accidently push 'unsafe,' teachers across the hall messaged her through the app to make sure and she immediately changed her status to 'safe,' which she was."

- Officers on the scene had access to all the communication and the interactive maps. They did not have to wait for information to be relayed to them, they could see in real-time which classrooms and buildings were marked as safe. If they were marked as unsafe, the police would know exactly where the source of danger is in the school, saving precious minutes, which can save lives.

- The Administrative Lieutenant at the Spanish Fork Police Department was off-site during the emergency, but was monitoring the situation through the app and used the app to communicate information and instructions. When he was able to confirm that the active shooter threat was indeed a hoax, he sent a message through the AIM app telling them to stay calm, informing them that the threat was a hoax and instructing them that officers would be coming to clear their classrooms and make sure everyone was safe.

OUTCOMES

During the event, students were on their phones where they were seeing false reports and rumors that added to the terror, fear and confusion they were all feeling. Teachers were able to address the false information by showing their phones with the app to students and telling them, "This is what's real, and this is what's happening." This served to calm the students in an extremely high-stress situation.

Principal, Matt Christensen said, *"I have been the school's principal for four years. Although we had published an emergency plan and conducted drills four or five times every year, from day one, I felt there was something off or missing from those plans. We had the standard procedures and instructions for locking classrooms, counting students and making announcements on the PA system, but nothing that would help us know what is happing in the moment, coordinate actions between law enforcement and school administrators or communicate with teachers and staff to effectively manage the chaos. AIM fills all those gaps and more."*

During the lockdown, parents were naturally alarmed. The school received many calls from frantic parents. Administrators were able to see in the app if the student's classroom was marked as safe. They brought peace of mind to parents in the moment by letting them know their child is accounted for, safe right now and not in danger.

Bart Thompson, Assistant Principle said, "I will say, for the 21 years I have been in education, the single most troubling thing to think about is an active shooter. On that day, we didn't know it was a hoax. For 24 minutes, it was real—we had an active shooter and we had deceased students. As an educator and a parent, that day changed me forever. I can't imagine doing what we did that day without the app—the trauma would have been amplified. Things like this have always been a 'what if.' After this experience, I can look a parent in the eyes and tell them we have the tools to keep your students safe."

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