SWATTING INCIDENTS: WHAT TO KNOW

WHAT IS SWATTING?

"Swatting" is the act of making false emergency calls, often to 911 or other emergency services, with the intention of triggering a significant response from law enforcement, particularly specialized units like SWAT (Special Weapons & Tactics) teams.

The term itself is derived from the acronym SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics). SWAT Teams are often used by law enforcement agencies to handle high-risk situations. **Swatting threats have been on the rise in recent years,** leading to increased community concern and a robust and coordinated response by the FBI, other federal agencies and organizations, and state and local government and law enforcement.

WHY DO PEOPLE UNDERTAKE SWATTING?

Swatting can occur for several reasons, to include:

- Sparking a law enforcement response to waste or tie up police resources
- To target a specific group, individual, community, or location
- To shut down a facility
- To instill fear in a community
- To provoke a police response that may result in confrontation or innocent people getting injured.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF EVENTS THAT PEOPLE CALL IN THROUGH SWATTING?

Bomb threats   Mass shootings   Hostage-barricade crises

HOW DO PEOPLE DO SWATTING & WHY ARE THEY DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY & CATCH?

Perpetrators often use anonymized services — Voice-over Internet Protocol (VOIP) or specific tools on the internet — so it looks like their calls are coming from different locations around the world. Perpetrators are able to make dozens of calls that can impact dozens of institutions in multiple states in a very short time period. These calls can take months to identify the origin and perpetrator, if they are discovered at all.

WHY ARE SWATTING INCIDENTS DANGEROUS?

During a hostage-barricade crisis, for instance, police will prepare for a strong, proactive engagement, putting innocent lives at risk by virtue of a fake phone call. Authorities have become far more sophisticated in their response in the last 20 years, now assessing the credibility of the threat before evacuating facilities. Our recommendation is that schools and other potential targets run emergency response protocol tests so that an incident itself is not the first time law enforcement, faculty, staff, and parents are encountering the situation.

COMMITTING TO ACTION

If you or your institution are the victim of a swatting call, please follow any instructions from law enforcement, and, when you can do so safely, notify your local suspicious activity reporting authority, to include your security director and the Secure Community Network via our incident reporting mechanisms, the **Duty Desk phone line 844-SCN-DESK (844.726.3375) or SCN's incident reporting form on our website**

If you become aware of a swatting incident in progress, please **notify SCN via the Duty Desk phone line 844-SCN-DESK (844.726.3375).** SCN is in regular communication with federal, state, and local law enforcement and intelligence agencies and has experience tracking and managing incidents like swatting in real-time. Informing SCN can be an important step in mitigating danger or harm in the event of an incident at your organization.

WHAT NOT TO DO

While it's natural to be concerned, a community victimized by a swatting incident should not bombard a facility or law enforcement with phone calls inquiring about the incident, which only serves to further the purpose of the swatting by wasting or tying up resources better utilized to execute a planned response. Concerned members of a community should not rush to the location of the swatting location of the swatting, as this can complicate the response, force law enforcement to coordinate around their presence, or possibly put them in danger.

Organizations responding to swatting incidents should always act in coordination and cooperation with law enforcement and security organizations with expertise in receiving and managing these incidents. Publicizing the incident or sharing more information than law enforcement is prepared to share with the public risks further complicating their response, putting law enforcement and innocent people in danger, and stoking fear and concern that may invite phone calls or additional people at a location that is already challenging and risk-laden.