

BULLETIN NO. 13

Video Intercom Access Control Systems



The ability to control who is admitted into school buildings forms the foundation of an effective visitor management program. Video intercom systems that allow interaction with campus guests and remote operation of door locks have become increasingly popular. However, these systems are only as effective as the people operating them.

The following best practices should be implemented to fully realize the benefits of any video intercom access control system:

Door Configuration – The video intercom call box is typically located outside the school, adjacent to the primary entrance. Main office staff should screen guests via this system while the guest is still outside. Ideally, the main office should be adjacent to the primary entrance, requiring visitors to pass through the main office after granting access. As an alternative, the call box could be located inside a vestibule, if present, that allows visitors to enter, but the interior doors remain locked until access is granted.

If the office is not directly connected to the primary visitor entrance, visitors should be escorted to the office or monitored by a video surveillance system to ensure they go directly to the office.

Interaction – Multiple office staff members should be trained to operate the system, including instructions on how to interact with visitors. Staff members should only admit individuals who have a business or educational need to enter the building. Staff members who are assigned to this role should be trained in proper screening procedures and should not automatically admit anyone. At a minimum, visitors should be asked to state their name and the purpose of their visit. The video capability of the system should be used to look for suspicious behavior, potential “piggy back” entrants, and to confirm the identity of known individuals. In no case should a visitor be granted access without staff member interaction. If upon interaction the staff member is hesitant in any way about admitting the visitor into the building, they should contact the building administrator for further instruction or interaction with the potential visitor. Admittance to a school by visitors and the general public is a privilege, not a “right”, and access can be denied if deemed necessary to ensure the safe and orderly operation of the school.

If possible, all visits should be confirmed before granting access, either by cross checking against a prepared list of expected visitors or by communicating with the appropriate staff member. If the main office is not adjacent to the entrance, visitors should be instructed to go to the office. All visitors during the school day should register and receive a date and time visitor badge. Sometimes a driver’s license or car keys are left as a deposit for the return of the badge upon leaving the school.

Staffing Considerations – A staff member should always be available to operate the video intercom system. Backups should be trained and designated to fill in as needed. This responsibility should not be delegated to students volunteering or otherwise working in the office. Additional stations could be installed in other offices, allowing other staff members to operate the system from their desks.

Other Issues – Signage should be prominently displayed in parking areas, directing visitors to the controlled entrance. Additional signs should be posted near the call box to instruct visitors on intercom operation as well as convey general information on the school’s visitor policy.

The Iowa School Safety Coalition was formed in December 2012. Participating organizations include Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Iowa State Fire Marshal, Iowa Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Emergency Management Association, Des Moines Police Department, Iowa State Education Association, Iowa Association of School Boards, School Administrators of Iowa, American Institute of Architects – Iowa Chapter, EMC Insurance Companies.

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In the event a visitor becomes violent or breaches the entrance, staff should be trained to quickly announce a lockdown. A panic button should also be installed to communicate to other offices or configured to function as an intruder alarm to broadcast a unique but easily understandable warning to the entire school with no delay.

Each school building is unique, and security measures should be customized for each building's unique needs and challenges. Assistance from a professional security consultant can help you determine reasonable security and access control solutions for your district's specific needs.

For additional information or questions, please contact one of the following:

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