

News Release

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Willis Unveils Security Risk Management Program for Public Schools

New York, NY, July 2, 2007 – School security can no longer be ignored or taken for granted. Recent events have demonstrated that security and crisis management are at the forefront of the challenges faced by the education sector. Large-scale school violence, largely unheard of before the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, now looms as a major threat to children in our public schools.

To help school administrators address the financial and human challenges of such incidents including preventative and incident management advice from top experts in the field of security consulting, Willis, the global insurance broker, has developed a Security Risk Management Program for Public School Districts. It is geared to the specific threats and exposures faced by public K-12 institutions and it demonstrates to the community that school administrators are genuinely concerned about safety, are accountable, and have the best interests of the students, staff members and community at heart in managing a serious crisis.

Commenting on the program, **Lisa Zanutelli**, Executive Vice President, Special Contingency Risks Practice at Willis said, “School security is something that is not only important to local communities, but to the national and global communities as well. With the introduction of the Security Risk Management Program, Willis hopes to alleviate some of the burden that these communities would face in the event of a crisis.”

Escalation of frequency and severity of school violence is causing administrators in even the safest of schools and communities to reassess the security risks they face, while staff members, students, parents, politicians, lawyers, and the media want to know what school officials are doing to assure an effective response.

A high price is likely to be paid for failure to effectively manage a threat or crisis. Not only can a traumatic event emotionally affect a school and community for a long time, but lawsuits alleging negligence in the handling of an incident can consume time and money. Negative media coverage can be equally detrimental to a district’s reputation.

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Not immediately obvious are the financial costs of getting a district back into its everyday operation after a traumatic event. These costs include counseling for students and employees, extra security and extra transportation charges if a school building is unusable. The district may need additional substitute teachers. There are also students' or employees' medical expenses and EMT charges that may exhaust other sources. Moreover, schools may need to confront the question of who pays for the help needed by a grieving family that has lost a child or family member due to a violent act at the school. These costs, which can include extended counseling and other support, can easily amount to millions of dollars.

Efforts to improve a school district's ability to respond to a crisis are more favored by staff members, parents, the media and a judge or jury if administrators have worked with experienced security and counseling professionals. When it comes to accountability in education, an administrator's willingness to open the school door to specialists will typically provides enhanced credibility and, potentially, reduced liability.

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