

Protection of a (medical) facility against a mob attack

It is extremely difficult to protect a facility that is attacked by an angry mob. Most public places are built so that they are open to the public and welcome and friendly. This makes them easy targets that are difficult to protect even if the facility has security in place. There are however a few measures that can be considered to pre-empt and prepare for mob attacks. In the majority of cases, the mob seeking justice, will not be armed with formal weapons but will vent their anger by sheer number of people using improvised weapons. In war and conflict zones however, there is a high likelihood that attacker will carry firearms and/or explosives.

The main risks to be considered are:

- Fire and arson
- throwing of rocks
- attacks on vehicles
- attempts to enter into the premises
- physical attacks
- intimidation and spreading fear

To counter these main risks, the following measures should be considered.

Compound and organisational assessment

A security risk assessment of the entire facility should be implemented. This should focus on:

- Characterisation of the facility.
- Evaluation of the facility's physical protection system.
- Site survey to promote swift threat detection, delay and response.
- Estimate performance against specific threats.

Thoroughly evaluate your own system so that assets and people are equally protected, and to consider what vulnerabilities exist given the defined threats. This should be done by a company who is familiar with the context and has a proven track record of providing high quality services.

In practice, what does this mean? Basic principles:

- Perimeter and facility must be protected to detect and delay forceful entry.
- Access points to the perimeter and facility should be protected by steel gates that cannot be penetrated by persons (or by vehicles)
- An access control system should be in place to allow only authorized persons to enter.
- Any potential vulnerabilities of the perimeter and/or building should be evaluated, and appropriate actions taken, for example: Securing of windows, air ventilation ducts, rooftop etc.
- Threat-specific emergencies plans are developed and practiced periodically by all staff.
- Coordinate with law enforcement to ensure that, in case of emergency, they can and will respond swiftly.
- Collaborate with communities as well as community leaders, strengthen acceptance and build trust relationships.

Community strategy

It is important to understand that the core source of organisational safety and security comes from the community. This has to be achieved through regular community liaison, ideally weekly meetings, to gain an understanding of what the community knows about the programme, the level of service delivery and any potentially negative areas that the organisation should work on to enhance acceptance.

This strategy can be further assisted by organising regular visits to the facility by key stakeholders such as religious leaders, community representatives, schoolteachers etc.

Guards and perimeter

- Seek to surround your premises with a non-intimidating way to separate the perimeter from its surroundings.
- Try to ensure that this wall or fence blends in with the security measures taken by surrounding compounds so that your compound does not stand out as a “fortress”.
- Have a solid entry control system in place where guards can control the flow of people entering the compound.
- Have a system in place where the main entry point can be closed off with a solid gate.
- In cases of heightened threat, close off all secondary entry points and focus your security personnel at the main gate.
- Have an alarm system in place that can be triggered by the guards in case there is a threat such as a mob gathering at the gate. This could be a formal alarm (sound and light) or a simple system where each guard carries a whistle.
- Train guards in crowd control as well as de-escalation techniques.
- Ensure that vehicles are safely parked inside; however, the vehicles must always be parked with the front facing outwards to ensure a rapid exit if required.
- Consider asking the community to assist with groups of community members to help monitor the facility.

Emergency contacts

- Ensure that you have a list of emergency contacts immediately available including:
 - police
 - Fire Brigade
 - quick reaction force of the security company
 - ambulance services
 - community leaders
 - religious leaders
 - Media
- Appoint a senior person to reach out to these emergency contacts as soon as a mob starts gathering.
- Especially community and religious leaders should be called to seek to calm down angry crowds.

The process of actor mapping will be beneficial in focusing on who should be the priority points of contact and influence

Consider installing an alarm that, when activated, can alert the community to a problem.

Fire and arson

- ensure that all buildings in your compound are equipped with firefighting equipment.
- Fire extinguishers should be available inside the building and fire buckets filled with water or sand placed at the outside.
- Ensure that all personnel are trained to use this equipment.
- Fuel must be stored away from buildings and vehicles.
- Store all flammable materials such as vehicle and generator fuel / gas bottles for in a well locked/ventilated building.

Rocks and other projectiles

- Instruct guards to make rounds around and inside your compound and remove all rocks and other materials that could be used as projectiles.
- Consider putting blast film on the inside of the most exposed windows so that hurled projectiles do not result in flying fragments of shattered glass.

Lockdown

- Train staff in lockdown procedures as soon as they hear the alarm system.
- Do regular dry runs of lockdown procedures.
- Consider especially how to assist people with disabilities as well as other vulnerable people during a lockdown procedure.
- Designate buildings that are most secure in case of an attack.
- Appoint lockdown wardens for each building who have clear tasks to ensure that all people are safely inside and doors are locked.
- Equip designated lockdown buildings with solid doors with bolt locks and/or metal grills.
- Always ensure that there is an escape route in case of fire.
- Instruct staff to take off all identification that identifies them as staff of the facility.

Compound escape

- Ensure that alternative escape routes are identified and are physically accessible to staff.
- All compound occupants must conduct evacuation drills on a quarterly basis.
- Pre-identify safe 'MOVE TO AREAS'.

Physical attacks

- Ensure that first aid kits are available and strategically placed within the building.
- Staff must have basic first aid training and practice incident response
- Especially the buildings that are designated as lockdown buildings should be equipped with sufficiently large first aid kits able to deal with multiple victims.
- Ensure that your security guards have access to 1st aid materials and firefighting equipment.

After-care

- Ensure that you have psychological care available to all those that have been affected.
- Advise people that were specifically targeted to take individual security measures and support them in doing so.
- Learn lessons together and debrief individuals as well as teams on what went well and what could be improved.
- Involve the community including religious leaders to condemn any attacks and invest in your (renewed) acceptance-based security strategy.