

SAFE (School Action for Emergencies)

June 2009

The SAFE Program

SAFE is an acronym for *School Action for Emergencies*. It is a national program that was developed by the RCMP following the shootings at Columbine and Dawson College. Through SAFE, schools and law enforcement agencies are working together to improve response to high risk incidents in schools.

The RCMP and police have gathered key information on all Island schools and put it into a provincial database. This information may include aerial photos, floor plans and emergency procedures in the school. In the event of an incident, police have this information at their fingertips.

The three school boards have developed lockdown policies that outline procedures for their schools to follow in situations where students need to be kept safe inside the school.

PEI is the first province to implement the SAFE program in all schools.

Lockdown Exercises

A lockdown is an exercise to keep students safe inside a building. It is practised regularly similar to a fire drill.

During a lockdown exercise, the classroom doors are locked and no one is permitted to enter or leave the building. Students are asked to sit or lie quietly on the classroom floor in an area that is not in view of the window. Lights are turned off and windows are covered if it is safe to do so. Cell phones are also turned off in order to prevent cell phone towers from jamming. Procedures are in place for students who may be in an area outside the classroom such as the washroom, cafeteria or outdoor phys ed class.

A school would be locked down in any high risk incident that could put students and staff in danger. This may be an incident that involves an accident in the school, a hazardous chemical spill, severe weather warning, or an intruder on the property.

Established lockdown procedures enable emergency personnel to respond quickly and effectively in high-risk situations because they have quick access to good information. Students, school staff and emergency responders test the plans regularly. As a result, students know what to do and parents know what to expect.

Parent Involvement

Parents should be aware of what their child is expected to do in a lockdown and how they can communicate with the child and the school. They should reinforce the student's responsibility to prepare for emergencies in advance and follow directions during an emergency. Parents should pay attention to any anxiety a child feels about these exercises and report this to the principal, special education teacher or school counsellor.