

# PROTECTING STUDENTS THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND RECORDS TOOLS

Oxford County is a rustic area best known for its lakes, covered bridges, and ski resorts, located along the western border of Maine. Despite its rural setting, the region shares national concerns about school violence.

"There's a trend of school shootings going on nationwide," said Oxford County Sheriff Wayne Gallant. "We came to the conclusion that no one is immune to an act like that."

School officials and local law enforcement decided to create a response plan to help them react to an active-shooter incident at an Oxford County school. After more than a year of training and preparation, the county hosted a mock school shooting drill along with 16 local agencies to test the abilities of everyone involved.

The drill was modeled after the 1999 school shooting that occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. Thirteen people were killed and 21 wounded before the two student gunmen turned their weapons on themselves. Gallant said that the Columbine incident changed the way law enforcement agencies react to school violence.

"The past trend was that you waited for a team [of specialists] to arrive," he said. "We learned that you can't do that any longer; now, we automatically go in with a team of officers."

Each of the 1,200 students at Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School was given advance warning, parents were told about the drill, and teachers were taught how to put their classrooms in lock-down mode.

A janitor with extensive knowledge of the building was given the role of mock shooter. Local fire departments and law enforcement agencies gathered at the scene, while nearby Stephens Memorial Hospital and the area's ambulance services prepared to attend to volunteers assigned to act as shooting victims.

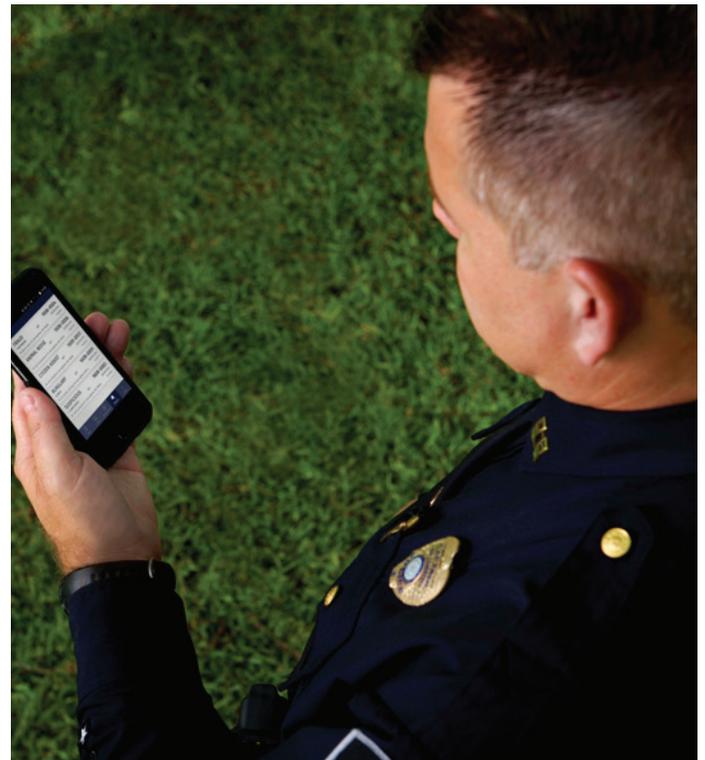
As law enforcement personnel entered the building to apprehend the mock suspect, the unexpected happened. The police entry team realized that its radios could not transmit through the school's walls,

leaving the team unable to communicate with officers outside the building.

"It was such a large building that the radios just would not transmit," Norway Police Chief Robert Federico said. "Our only communication was a cell phone. Just one person could hear what was taking place."

The sheriff's office was able to overcome the communication problem using Spillman Flex's Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) solution and Mobile Voiceless CAD module.

An officer inside the school used his cell phone to call the Oxford County Regional Communications Center. As he described the situation, the dispatcher entered the information into the Flex CAD. Officers equipped with the Mobile Voiceless CAD module were able to access that information immediately using the patrol vehicles' laptops. This allowed them to learn details about the suspect's whereabouts



and the victims' conditions, even though radio communication was hampered.

"We were able to easily communicate back-and-forth and give dispatchers a heads-up on things that they needed to know," Gallant said.

Gallant said his deputies used Flex's Mobile Messenger feature to communicate instantaneously with others at the scene. The instant messaging functionality enabled officials to relay messages over the internet without tying up the limited radio frequencies in the area.

For officers entering a building, the ability to quickly access information about the premises is essential. Using the Premises and HazMat Information module, officers entering Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School were able to view a detailed, electronic image of the school's floor plan.

Without the Flex system, Gallant said, the floor plans would have to be printed out in advance or downloaded onto individual laptop computers.

"That would be difficult, it really would be," he said. "With Flex, [the information] is right there, readily available, and accessible immediately."

Federico also agreed that the ability to easily access information helped make the drill a success.

"It's not like you're relying on one person with a binder, and hoping

that person is not on vacation in Florida or something," he said. "We found out how versatile the entire [Flex] system is."

School administrators worked hard to maximize the drill's benefit to its students, Oxford Hills Vice Principal Jan Gauger said. Letters were sent home to parents, informing them of the drill and asking them to ensure that their teens came to school that day. As a result, she said, attendance on the day of the drill was higher than on any other early-release day in the school's history.

Students spent their time in lock-down learning ways to prevent bullying, harassment, and violence in schools. After the drill, students were able to ask law enforcement officers questions and express their concerns.

"The kids were very positive. They said things like, 'I'm really glad the school cares enough about us to do this kind of thing,'" Gauger said.

Since the success of the school drill, the Oxford County Sheriff's Office has used Spillman software to develop action plans for several other emergency scenarios, Gallant said.

It's rare for small communities like those in Oxford County to be on the forefront of technology, Federico said. He hopes to see other neighboring agencies adopt Spillman Technologies' software in the future to allow for even greater regional interoperability.

"This is the biggest innovation for our law enforcement that has come along in years," he said. "We're like kids in a candy store."

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#### ABOUT SPILLMAN

For more than 30 years, Spillman Technologies has provided public safety professionals with innovative software solutions and reliable customer service. Today, Spillman's integrated public safety software is used by more than 1,500 sheriff's offices, police departments, communication centers, fire departments, and correctional facilities nationwide..



4625 Lake Park Blvd.  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84120  
800.860.8026  
info@spillman.com  
www.spillman.com