TESTIFYING AGAINST BARRICADE DEVICES IN SCHOOLS

Door Security & Safety Foundation Represented at Ohio Hearings

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The Ohio Board of Building Standards held two hearings to gather testimony regarding the use of barricade devices in schools, before releasing its final report July 24.
The code development process is a time-tested method of updating model codes to address new technologies and lessons learned—often because of tragic events. These codes are modified by a consensus process, which incorporates the perspective of multiple parties to help shape the new code language and look at the issue from all angles.

A disturbing trend is beginning to emerge—the use of legislation to address what should be handled by the code development process. The Door Security & Safety Foundation recently worked with other industry members and code officials to share our insight with the Ohio Board of Building Standards, where a law was recently passed which requires the Board to adopt rules for the use of barricade devices in schools.

A barricade device is a secondary locking device used to lock a classroom door from the inside during an active shooter incident. While at first glance this might seem like a cost-effective way to provide security, there are many safety concerns. In addition to the code-compliance issues*, one of the primary concerns is that a barricade device can be used by an unauthorized person to lock the door and secure a classroom to commit harm, preventing access by staff and first responders. Although some barricade devices have a means of releasing them by sliding a special tool under the door, many of these devices have no way to release them from the outside.

The situation in Ohio began when a community organization, intent on securing classroom doors in their school district, raised $30,000 to purchase a barricade device for each classroom. When the district was told that they could not install the devices because they do not comply with current Ohio codes, local legislators were engaged by parents and school districts to create bills that would prohibit the fire code from prohibiting the devices.

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### CODE REQUIREMENTS

- The model codes require latches on egress doors to be retracted with one operation, with no key, tool, special knowledge or effort. Operable hardware is typically required to be mounted between 34 inches and 48 inches above the floor, although some codes and standards exempt locks used only for security purposes from the mounting height requirement.

- Accessibility standards require hardware to be operated with no tight grasping, tight pinching, or twisting of the wrist, and also require the bottom 10 inches of the push-side face of a manual door to be flush and smooth with no protruding hardware.

- Some classroom doors are fire doors, and products used as part of a fire door assembly must be listed for that purpose. To date, there are no known barricade devices that have been listed for use on a fire door. In addition, some retrofit classroom security products are designed to inhibit latching so that the outside lever can be left in the locked position. Fire doors must close and latch, and are not allowed to be equipped with a device that prevents positive latching.
The language of the bill was changed several times and was eventually rolled into the state’s budget bill which was passed a few days later, despite the efforts of many to explain the safety concerns to Ohio state legislators.

Meanwhile, the Ohio Board of Building Standards conducted an examination into the state’s current building codes and fire codes, to determine whether code changes were warranted. Two hearings were held—the first was for invited speakers in involved in codes and law enforcement to share their insight with the board. The second was a public hearing, where anyone was allowed to speak; the door and hardware industry was represented by five speakers at the second hearing.

Additional speakers included code officials, manufacturers of barricade devices, state education and public safety agency representatives, and the public.

At the second hearing, one of the speakers was former Superintendent of Chardon City Schools Joseph Bergant. Chardon High School was the location of a school shooting in 2012, where three students were killed and three were injured by another student. Bergant discussed lessons learned during and after the shooting, and told the Board and the audience to “expect the unexpected.”

He described different types of incidents that schools may face, including bomb threats, fires, bus accidents, and tornadoes, as well as school shootings. He stressed relationships, pre-planning and drills, and a holistic approach involving all stakeholders with different perspectives. “Gadgets and gimmicks aren’t gonna do it,” he emphasized.

With regard to locking of classrooms, Bergant explained that Chardon High School’s classroom doors were equipped with standard classroom function locksets, which have a key cylinder on the outside only. This lock function requires teachers to open the door, and possibly even enter the corridor, to lock the door. After the shooting, Chardon’s classroom locks were re-keyed, keys were issued to all teachers, and the current policy is that the outside lever is always kept locked so doors are immediately locked when they are closed.

When asked by the Board if he would support the use of barricade devices, he said that he would not, because emergency responders would not be able to enter the room to assist occupants. He also talked about the need for egress/evacuation, and concern that students could use the devices for unauthorized lockdown. According to the AIA Ohio News, Bergant said, “In a lot of situations, people need to get out of the building in some capacity. There have been situations where kids have locked other kids in classrooms. I have huge anxiety with that. If the teacher is not in the room, what do you do?
Somebody could barricade themselves in a room and kill everybody."
The outcome of the Board’s research, entitled Ohio Board of Building Standards Classroom Barricade Forum Report, is an important piece of research for any jurisdiction considering the use of barricade devices (the report can be downloaded at www.iDigHardware.com/schools). The report describes the initial adoption of the Ohio Building Code, shaped in part by the Collinwood, Ohio, school fire which resulted in the loss of 175 lives. This was one of several high-fatality fires which prompted the public to push for improvements in school building safety systems, and motivated the adoption of building codes to address construction type, provisions related to building heights, egress requirements, exit enclosures with fire doors, and other safety requirements.

As proof of the success of current codes, NFPA reported in 2008: “There has not been another school fire in the United States in which 10 or more people have died. Between 1994 and 1998, grades K through 12 averaged one civilian death per year, which has been a typical annual death toll for schools since at least 1980. Moreover, these fatalities do not appear to be innocent children but juvenile fire-setters, caught in the fires they set, or adults such as janitors. It is a bittersweet legacy that, after 100 years, we have indeed made progress in improving school fire safety, and the innocent victims of Collinwood, Ohio, did not die in vain” (Grant, Casey C., The Lake View School Fire, NFPA Journal, September/October 2008).

While some proponents of barricade devices cite the reduction in school fire deaths as a reason to relax the egress code requirements, most in the code enforcement community credit strong codes and enforcement for this success. The report discusses the codes that pertain to classroom doors, and the reasons behind each of the requirements, stating in part: “Using devices that require specialized skill or knowledge will interfere with occupant egress, or possibly even prevent it altogether. Therefore, in order to ensure safety for all building occupants, egress requirements must protect and accommodate the widest number of individuals, not only under normal circumstances and at optimal performance levels, but also in times of increased stress where everyone’s ability to perform normal, simple door operations becomes compromised. Understanding potential conditions in emergency situations, the (Continued on page 32)
1958 edition of The Building Exits Code required that, ‘Latches or other releasing devices to open exit doors, or doors in the path of travel to reach exits, shall be of simple types, the method of operation of which is obvious, even in darkness.’” Accessibility standards and fire protection are addressed in the report as well as the egress requirements.

One concept introduced during the second hearing was the idea that during an active shooter situation, the classroom becomes an “area of detention or restraint.” While the code requirements for an area of detention or restraint do allow restricted egress, the report states that these requirements typically apply to occupancies where egress is unwanted, dangerous, or impossible. In facilities where a protect-in-place strategy is expected to be used, there are many additional code requirements to reduce the risk for building occupants. Schools are not typically designed with the added safety features that would be required for an area of detention or restraint, so locking students and teachers in a classroom results in a much lower level of safety for those contained occupants.

Another important consideration addressed by the report was the need for access by emergency responders, which is crucially impeded when a barricade device is installed. Many of these devices cannot be deactivated from the outside, or require a proprietary tool for access. Because of the numerous different barricade devices currently on the market, first responders who are assisting another district may not be aware of the type of device used in a particular school, or how to defeat it. Delayed access caused by barricading of classroom doors with wood, chains, or other objects has already played a role in several school shootings with fatalities.

Based on all of the information presented in the report, the Board concluded that **no changes were recommended to the current building code or fire code at this time.** Unfortunately, the law that was passed by the Ohio legislature a few weeks before the report was released requires the Board to adopt rules for the use of barricade devices. The Board will now be forced to create these rules, which will go into effect in March 2016. Many school districts believed that the new legislation would allow them to immediately begin using barricade devices, but until the Board releases the new rules, the devices should not be used.

On Sept. 2, 2015, the Ohio BBS issued an advisory statement to all Ohio school system superintendents and administrators as well as building and fire department personnel, regarding barricade devices and egress in educational occupancies. The advisory describes the next steps in the process to develop rules for classroom barricade devices, lists the current Ohio Building Code requirements, and states, “Schools are cautioned against purchasing and deploying devices before the rules take effect as some devices may not comply with the new rules.”

This situation in Ohio could set a dangerous precedent of lawmakers getting involved where they do not have the experience to consider all aspects of a code issue. A similar law allowing barricade devices has already been passed in Arkansas, despite strong opposition from the state fire marshal, who is also one of the top law enforcement officers in the state.

While some states have already rejected the use of barricade devices in schools and reinforced their position in support of current model code requirements, a few jurisdictions do allow the devices. It’s important to help code officials, school districts, legislators, law enforcement, and parents understand the risks involved with putting lower-cost security ahead of safety.

In general, the Ohio Building Code (OBC) requires and will continue to require the following for door operation:

**1.** Egress doors should be readily openable from the egress side without the use of a key or special knowledge;

**2.** Door handles, pulls, latches, locks and other operating devices on doors shall not require tight grasping, tight pinching or twisting of the wrist to operate; and

**3.** The unlatching of any door shall not require more than one operation. Doors in the means of egress must be readily openable from the egress side without the use of a key or special knowledge or effort.

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