CSSC

COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY & SAFETY COALITION

Winter Holiday Safety Checklist for NGOs & Houses of Worship

Presented by the Community Solidarity & Safety Coalition (CSSC)

Below are checklists for NGOs and houses of worship/faith-based institutions looking to enhance the safety of programming throughout the winter holiday season. Please note that this list is <u>not</u> exhaustive and is not intended as legal advice. Given the unique nature of each individual institution, CSSC recommends meeting with legal and security professionals to assess specific security needs.

5 Steps for Winter Holiday Safety

1. **Plan Early:** Assess risks, know your venue and coordinate with law enforcement well in advance.
2. **Build Key Relationships:** Connect with local police, emergency responders and partners who can support you before, during and after your events.
3. **Train Your Team:** Ensure staff and volunteers know the plan — **who** to call, **what** to do and **how** to communicate in a crisis.
4. **Stay Alert & Share Info:** Monitor relevant threats. Report anything suspicious. Safety improves when everyone is engaged and informed.
5. **Lean on Others:** Other NGOs and community organizations might have connections, support systems or tools at their disposal – we are in this together.

Before Events

☐ **Establish Open Lines of Communication with Local Law Enforcement:** Advise them of your holiday schedules and high-attendance events. Get to know them before you need them. *Note: Law enforcement does not always need to be present at your function, but it is helpful for them to be aware of an event so that they can respond effectively if necessary.*

☐ **Preparation is Key:** Leadership, clergy, ushers and staff must work together to plan early. Tap into your network, including groups like CSSC, for support.

☐ **Test Your Systems:** Ensure existing safety devices are in good working condition. Test alarms, cameras, emergency communication tools and heating systems.

☐ **Winterize Your Facility:** Verify heating systems work, check weather stripping on doors, and ensure backup power sources are ready.

☐ **Review Emergency Procedures:** Ensure staff, leadership and constituents know their role in security and what to do in the event of an emergency.

☐ **What Else Can I Do?** Keep abreast of trends, possible threats and winter weather forecasts. Share relevant updates with staff.

Managing High-Attendance Holiday Services & Events

- **Control Access Points:** Restrict access to as few entry points as possible, while accounting for emergency and accessibility, so all people entering are greeted and observed.
- **Empower Ushers and Greeters:** Ushers play a critical role in security. They should know suspicious activity indicators and be positioned to spot trouble early.
- **Monitor Weather & Access:** Keep fire lanes and driveways free of snow, ice, and parked vehicles. Ensure emergency responders always have a clear path, regardless of changing conditions.
- **Pre-Registration When Possible:** Visitors should be registered in advance.
- **Welcome Desk or Greeter Card:** Staff a desk to provide an efficient, warm check-in for first-time visitors. If a front desk isn't feasible, consider having greeters provide visitors with a welcome card.
- **Buddy System:** Create a buddy system for ushers or greeters so that there is always support.
- **Plan for Multiple Services:** The winter season often includes numerous services over several weeks. Create a master calendar and ensure security coverage for each service. Develop volunteer rotation schedules to prevent burnout.

Personal Safety for Clergy, Staff & Leadership

- **Situational Awareness:** Know where you are at all times. Know your surroundings. Note exits and if people or objects look out of place.
- **Know Your Exits:** Where are the alternative exits out of your venue? Ensure exits are clearly marked.
- **Prearranged Meeting Point:** Have a prearranged meeting point where staff and others should meet in the event of an emergency.
- **Protocol for an Unruly Individual:** De-escalate where possible. Engage security personnel and follow organization security procedures to address any threats.