

# The Challenge of Life Safety

By Jerry Heppes Sr., CAE

**Why does life safety so often get violated by security?** Is it because life safety is undetectable; that one doesn't realize that an opening will provide life safety measures until it is needed?

Perhaps, however people seem to anticipate a security breach before it happens. People add a padlock to the rear door because it leads into an alley and they are concerned about a break-in. For some reason they can visualize a break-in but not a fire, where egress is critical to save lives.

In the health industry, there has been a movement the last few years toward incorporating preventative strategies to avoid sickness and diseases. We are told to eat healthy, incorporate good nutrition, and stay in shape. Nutrition experts talk about creating "health cells" to protect us from unwanted health challenges, and there are hundreds of supplements on the market to improve our health at the cellular level. However, you can't feel "health cells," so in reality, you can't feel prevention.

Life safety falls into a similar category—you can't feel it until you need it. That makes our jobs in this industry particularly difficult as we provide solutions to prevent disaster—an intangible concept. Unfortunately, this concept is now rearing its head in our children's schools. Last month, the Ohio legislature passed a bill authorizing the use of barricade products. The issue arose after one of the school districts purchased these products and was being prevented from using them by the state fire marshal.

The Ohio Building Standards Board reviewed the issue and received testimony from many in our industry, including the Door Security & Safety Foundation (DSSF), which provided extensive information to the Board addressing the code violations of these products. The Builders Hardware Manufacturers Association (BHMA) and the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) provided testimony and information as well.

In the end, the debate was usurped by legislation passed by the state representatives and signed by the governor. The battle will continue in Ohio and other states and is such a concern of NASFM that DSSF delivered a presentation at their recent annual meeting.

How could this possibly happen? Well how about this for a reason? While writing this article, I received the following article in my daily update from the Security Industry Association: *Study Finds School Shootings, Mass Killings are "Contagious."*

According to the article, a new study found that "mass killings and school shootings spread 'contagiously' where one killing or shooting increases the chances that others will occur within about two weeks."

The study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, found evidence that 20-30 percent of such killings—defined as four or more deaths—appear to be the result of "infection." The contagion period lasts about 13 days, researchers found.

Researchers gathered records of school shootings and mass killings from several data sets and fit them into a mathematical "contagion model." The spread they found was not dependent on location, leading researchers to believe that national media coverage of a mass shooting might play a role. On average, mass shootings occur about once every two weeks in the U.S. and school shootings happen about once a month, the study said.

"What we believe may be happening is national news media attention is like a 'vector' that reaches people who are vulnerable," said Sherry Towers, a research professor at Arizona State University and lead author of the study.

Those vulnerable people are those who have regular access to weapons and are perhaps mentally ill, Towers said. Once "infected" with knowledge of a shooting from national media coverage, data shows that a person is more likely to commit a similar crime, *CNN* reported. ■