

IACLEA Position Statement

Lockdowns vs. Containment (Shelter)

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The term “lockdown” generally refers to an emergency protocol to prevent people from entering or leaving a facility. A lockdown is defined as an emergency course of action ordered by a person or persons in command, such as law enforcement personnel, to contain a problem or incident within the area of origin by controlling the movement of people. When considering a lockdown of campus facilities, campus authorities must take into account the severity and urgency of the problem or threat and the imminent danger to persons on the campus.

There are important distinctions between the ability to lock down a secondary or elementary school and the ability to (or practicality of) lock(ing) down an entire campus. Secondary schools are typically self-contained in one building, which can be quickly locked down by securing all means of exit. College/university campuses, on the other hand, usually contain many buildings and various types of facilities spread out over many acres of land. The college/university campus usually includes a number of roads, pathways, and some thoroughfares that the campus may share with the municipality in which it is located. Each individual campus has unique security challenges based on location, design, student population, and available police and security capabilities. Most campuses are intended to have an open atmosphere and the size and complexity of most campuses are similar to that of a town or small city. In some cases, campuses are spread throughout a city, making it very difficult to centralize security procedures. Therefore, the ability of campus authorities to “lock down” an entire campus and restrict the free movement of people is difficult, if not impossible.

When one speaks of lockdowns on college/university campuses, the need for such emergency action would generally arise in a single building or facility that is the area of origin for a problem or critical incident. Public Safety professionals on campus may utilize lockdown in an emergency action in one building or facility where a problem(s) was occurring. In most cases, a campus-wide lockdown is not practical. Many considerations may come into play for campus authorities in deciding whether to lock down a building, suggest a “shelter in place,” or close an entire campus. For example, large universities have facilities that provide services to the public, such as libraries and hospitals. A decision to contain an area, or completely close a campus due to a potential emergency necessarily involves many considerations, resources and complexities.