

# SHERIFF & DEPUTY

A Resource for Sheriffs, Deputies, and Other Public Safety Professionals  
VOLUME 70 | ISSUE 1

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### ALSO INSIDE:

Cigarette Smuggling:  
Where There's Smoke ..... **pg22**

Trump's Top 5 'Wins'  
for Law Enforcement ..... **pg46**

2018 Winter  
Legislative & Technology  
Conference Preview ..... **pg54**

Truckers Align  
Against Trafficking ..... **pg74**



## PROTECTION FOR PRAYER

New app helps houses of worship plan for safety

By Becky Lewis

To help houses of worship (HOWs) plan and prepare for emergencies, in late 2016, the Justice Technology Information Center (JTIC) at the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) released a new app, Safeguarding Houses of Worship (SHOW), to help HOWs assess their risk factors and start a draft plan that can be expanded and customized to meet their specific needs.

Distributed to vetted public safety professionals, the SHOW app can be a way for local law enforcement agencies to connect with HOWs in their jurisdictions. Whether the agencies choose to work with HOWs on a one-on-one basis or hold local workshops/planning meetings to discuss the need for a safety plan, the availability of the app helps law enforcement agencies work with HOWs to make communities safer.

SHOW guides users through a series of questions designed to assist in evaluating the current safety and security posture of a house of worship's campus, as well as prioritizing threats and making recommendations for improvement. Template text provides assis-

tance in developing job descriptions, policies, and procedures; the template text can then be revised, expanded, and customized. Users are cautioned that safety plans are living documents that a HOW should periodically review and update as needed.



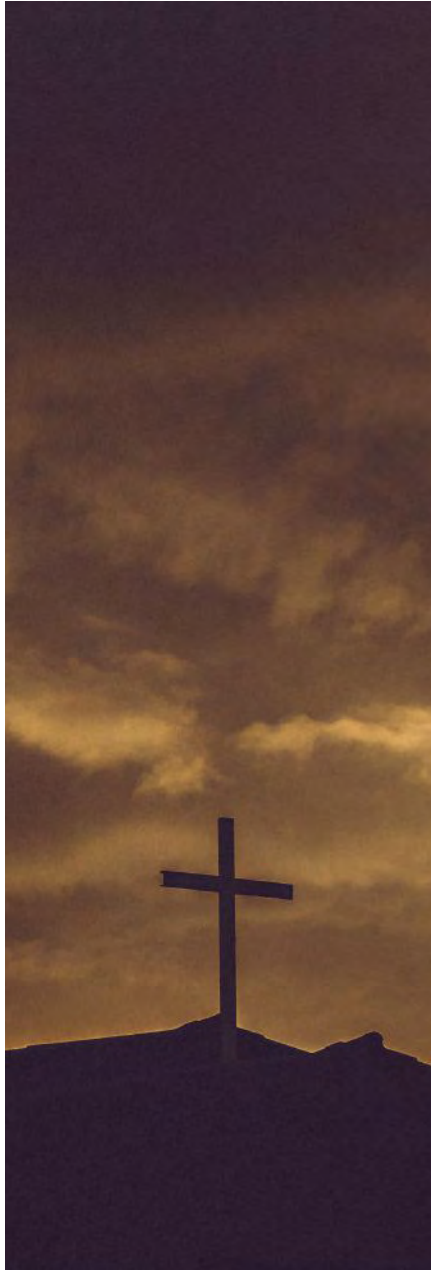
SHOW walks the user through a series of questions and answers, marking a floor plan with critical points such as gas and water shutoff valves; taking an inventory of emergency management skills in the congregation; and implementing recommendations on training for dealing with medical incidents, serious weather situations, and missing children. It also asks users to weigh risks from specific hazards such as earthquakes, wildfires, and proximity to a potential hazard such as a dam or nuclear facility. It also offers a glossary of relevant terms, and sample forms for handling a bomb threat, stocking a medical trauma kit, and so on.

The app builds, and expands upon, design principles used by JTIC in creating School Safe—JTIC's Security and Safety Assessment app for schools, which was released in October 2015 to assist schools with performing security assessments of their campuses. NIJ and JTIC were working on the development of the school app in Oc-

“The app builds, and expands upon, design principles used by JTIC in creating School Safe.”

tober 2014 when Todd Coleman, a reserve deputy sheriff in Columbia County, Georgia for 15 years, approached them with the idea to create a tool for HOWs.

Coleman is a scientist who has worked in law enforcement for more than 20 years and attends church in downtown Augusta, Georgia. When his congregation decided the time had come to create a safety and security plan, members scoured the internet for a tool that would help them develop one, and although they found a great deal of resource material, they couldn't find a tool that would help them create a plan. Ultimately, the congregation wrote a plan without such assistance, but Coleman couldn't help thinking that there were other HOWs that might find the task too daunting to start without electronic assistance, leading him to approach JTIC. JTIC ultimately hired him as a consultant on the SHOW app's development.



When SHOW launched, the Columbia County Sheriff's Office became one of the first agencies in the country to start heavily promoting the app to houses of worship in the area, with Lt. Dan Hendricks as the point person. Those efforts started in early 2017, when Sheriff Clay Whittle invited leaders from HOWs throughout the county to attend a presentation on SHOW. Hendricks has coordinated follow-up efforts ever since.

“Sheriff Whittle has always been big on community-oriented policing, and he want-

ed to be a part of this effort right from the start,” Hendricks says. “Although not all of the HOWs asked for it right away, [worship leaders] emailed or called me later, and about 40 HOWs have already downloaded the app. We're pretty pleased with that number, and hope it continues to grow.”

Hendricks says that some HOWs have used the app to review existing security plans and help them fill in gaps, while for others, it has been a primary resource in creating extensive emergency and security plans. One of the individuals who has used the app is Pastor Eric Kennedy at Stevens Creek Community Church, which has two locations in Augusta. Kennedy not only used SHOW to help create a security plan, he also invited other local worship leaders to come to his office and look at the HOW's efforts on a large screen.

“We wanted to give other HOWs that might be intimidated by this a chance to see how it works. We wanted them to be able to learn from us and see how beneficial it could be to them, and how easy it is to use,” Kennedy says of the meeting. “I had taken over the safety team at our church about a year ago, and we've been growing and making some changes. When SHOW became available, we bought a tablet and then took the time to go through our facility and apply the information that fit. Now we have a plan that we use to train new team members and to document those trainings.”

Kennedy adds that he wanted to start the Stevens Creek Road campus on SHOW as soon as he heard about it since the sheriff's office advocated for it. For his part, Hendricks not only coordinated the efforts in Columbia County, but has also answered questions for sheriff's offices and HOWs from other parts of the country that saw a news report on the project that aired on WJBF-TV in Augusta. He is happy to continue doing whatever he can to keep HOWs informed, equipped, and safe, whether they're located in Columbia County or elsewhere.

For more information and instructions on obtaining the app, visit [www.justnet.org/resources/Houses\\_of\\_Worship.html](http://www.justnet.org/resources/Houses_of_Worship.html). ★

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