

# **Boardman Police Response to School Incidents - September 22, 2022**

In general, law enforcement agencies keep tactical deployment information guarded so as not to create an immediate disadvantage when responding to a high-risk situation. Because of all the incidents across the world, I felt it important to share some of our tactical responses. To be clear, the Boardman Police Department takes school safety very seriously.

Over the last couple of years, sadly, our agency has had to change the response it has to unplanned incidents at our schools. It is now our policy that all on-duty and available patrol officers will respond to all fire alarm activations (except scheduled fire drills) that take place at our schools within the City of Boardman. Data shows fire alarm activation has been used in some school shootings as a way to draw people out of rooms and into open areas. While on the surface this policy may seem very mundane, the deployment of our officers and the equipment they will be wearing over their traditional-looking uniform may cause additional concern. In recent weeks, we have indeed responded to two of our schools. I was heartbroken when we were done with our response allowing students and staff to resume normal functions to see how upset and scared they were. My agency has worked very hard to build relationships with our youth and not be afraid of law enforcement. For that I am sorry and to be honest rather perturbed that we have had to resort to this. Our kids should not have to be scared.

With the help of CREZ II funding and city funding, I have been equipping our officers with safety equipment to give our officers a fair chance should they face a catastrophic event such as an active shooter situation. This equipment will include ballistic helmets, rifles, and additional external body plating all of which is not meant to look militaristic, rather it is to keep our officers as safe as possible. The helmets and plating are defensive items that add increased protection to the standard armor officers always wear. The rifle is more accurate than a handgun over longer distances and therefore is most appropriate for incidents on large scenes or campuses.

Since our officers will likely arrive before any fire apparatus, it may appear to some that an active situation is taking place, but the reality is it could be just an incidental activation. To echo the words from another colleague, "As the agency head, I fully expect some people to understand our intent with this change while others may be offended by the appearance of our officers on a school campus. Because much of what we do in the law enforcement profession is based on reasonableness, I have come to the conclusion the safety of our youth is far more important than anything else."

We value the partnerships we maintain with Morrow County School District and with Boardman Rural Fire District as all of us want children to grow and develop in safe environments.

Chief Rick Stokoe

## Supporting Documents

Press Release - 09-22-22 228.87 KB