Oregon Pacific District Church Safety Team Guidelines

1. Purpose

The Oregon Pacific District encourages every local church to take reasonable steps to provide a safe and welcoming environment for worship, ministry, and community activities.

Church safety includes preparing for medical emergencies, fires, natural disasters, threatening behavior, violence, and other situations that could place individuals at risk. These guidelines are intended to help local churches establish appropriate safety procedures while recognizing differences in church size, facilities, staffing, and available resources.

The purpose of a church safety team is to protect people, aid during emergencies, and support the ministry of the church. Safety teams are not intended to function as law enforcement agencies.

2. Local Church Responsibility

Each local church is encouraged to establish a written safety plan approved by its church board and implemented under the direction of the lead pastor. The plan should identify a safety coordinator and describe how the church will respond to emergencies. Churches should review their plans with local law enforcement and fire or emergency medical personnel when practical.

The district may provide guidance, resources, and training opportunities, but responsibility for implementing local safety procedures remains with the local church, subject to applicable denominational governance requirements.

3. Safety Team Organization

A church safety team may consist of church staff, board members, ushers, greeters, medical professionals, and other qualified volunteers.

Recommended responsibilities include:

- Identifying potential safety concerns and notifying appropriate personnel.
- Assisting with medical emergencies, evacuations, and sheltering procedures.
- Monitoring entrances and helping maintain safe access to facilities.
- Supporting the safety and reunification of children and vulnerable individuals.
- Communicating with emergency responders.
- Documenting safety incidents.

Safety team members should receive appropriate screening, orientation, and training based on their responsibilities. Team members should not act as law enforcement officers or undertake responsibilities beyond their training or legal authority.

4. Emergency Planning and Training

Each church is encouraged to develop written procedures addressing fire, medical emergencies, severe weather, earthquakes, threatening individuals, and violent incidents. Plans should include procedures for contacting 911, notifying church leadership, assisting individuals with disabilities, and accounting for children during emergencies.

Safety team members should receive periodic training. Churches are encouraged to provide CPR, AED, first aid, emergency communication, and de-escalation training when possible. At least annually, church leadership should review its safety plan and determine whether additional training or changes are necessary.

These recommendations are consistent with CISA's guidance for houses of worship, which emphasizes coordinated planning, clear responsibilities, emergency procedures, and the protection of children.

5. Firearms and Armed Security

The Oregon Pacific District recognizes that churches may have differing perspectives on whether firearms should be permitted or whether armed individuals should serve in a designated security role.

However, possession of a concealed handgun license does not, by itself, establish that an individual is qualified to provide armed security for a congregation.

The district recommends that local churches not establish or authorize armed safety teams without first obtaining legal review, consulting their liability insurance carrier, and coordinating with local law enforcement.

This recommendation is based in part on concerns raised by law enforcement regarding armed individuals during an active threat. Responding officers may have difficulty distinguishing an armed volunteer from a perpetrator, potentially increasing the danger to everyone involved.

Before authorizing armed security, churches should address:

- Compliance with applicable Oregon firearm laws.
- Whether private security certification requirements apply.
- Written confirmation of appropriate insurance coverage.
- Required training, screening, supervision, and authorization.
- Coordination with responding law enforcement.
- Additional restrictions applicable to schools, preschools, and childcare facilities.

No church safety team policy should be understood as granting an individual authority to carry a firearm where prohibited by law. The distinction between privately carried firearms and church-authorized armed security should be addressed explicitly in each local church's policy.

6. Oregon Legal Considerations

The following statutes and regulations should be considered when developing a local safety plan.

Law	Relevance
ORS 166.250	Unlawful possession of firearms, including certain concealed-carry circumstances.
ORS 166.291–166.292	Requirements and procedures for Oregon concealed handgun licenses.
ORS 166.360–166.370	Definitions and restrictions involving firearms in public buildings and school facilities.
ORS 166.377	Authority of certain educational governing boards to restrict concealed handgun license holders on school grounds.
ORS Chapter 181A	Private security regulation, certification, and certain exemptions for volunteer services.
ORS 329A.263	Emergency plans and staff training for certified and registered childcare facilities.
OAR Chapter 414	Licensing, safety, and operational requirements for childcare and preschool programs.

Oregon law includes an exemption from certain private security regulations for qualifying volunteers serving nonprofit events. However, churches should not assume that every volunteer safety team or armed security arrangement qualifies for that exemption.

Similarly, the firearm restrictions applicable to schools require careful attention to the legal classification of the facility. A church building is not automatically treated as a school simply because it offers children's ministry or preschool activities, but neither is it consider private property when school meetings or activities are hosted at the church.

7. Preschools, Daycares, and Other Children's Ministries

Churches operating or hosting preschools, childcare programs, private schools, or similar ministries should address those programs specifically in their safety plans. These ministries may be subject to additional licensing, staffing, emergency preparedness, and firearm restrictions.

Under ORS 329A.263, certified and registered childcare facilities must establish emergency plans and provide staff training. Oregon's childcare regulations include additional requirements depending on the type of program and license.

Churches should ensure that:

- Emergency plans account for children during regular weekday operations as well as church services.
- Staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities for evacuation, sheltering, and parent reunification.
- Safety procedures comply with the program's licensing requirements.

- Any proposed armed security arrangement receives specific legal and insurance review for facilities serving children.
- Independently operated programs using church property have clearly defined safety responsibilities.

8. Insurance and Liability

Before establishing a formal safety team, each local church should consult its liability insurance carrier regarding coverage, exclusions, and any requirements for training or supervision. Churches considering armed security should obtain written clarification concerning coverage for authorized volunteers, employees, or contracted security professionals. Churches should not assume that general liability insurance automatically covers security activities or coverage for all local church operations.

9. Incident Reporting

Any serious incident involving violence, threats, weapons, significant injury, or emergency law enforcement response should be documented by the local church. Emergency services should be contacted immediately when appropriate. The lead pastor should notify the district superintendent or designated district representative following a serious incident.

The church should also follow applicable insurance notification requirements and any legally required reporting procedures. Incident documentation should be factual, handled confidentially, and preserved in accordance with applicable law and insurance requirements.

10. District Support and Review

The Oregon Pacific District may support local churches by providing sample emergency plans, identifying training resources, and facilitating conversations. The district's role is to encourage responsible preparation and provide assistance while recognizing that individual churches have different circumstances and needs.

Questions to resolve

- What coverage or liability exposure does the district have when a local church authorizes armed security?

Documents for further review

The primary references are the Oregon firearms statutes, Oregon private security statutes, Oregon childcare rules, and CISA's security guide for houses of worship.