

Metal Detector Design Considerations - June 2023

1. When looking at the cost alone of running a metal detector or similar type program, schools must look beyond the initial cost of the equipment itself as it can be misleading. There are additional costs beyond the equipment associated with staffing personnel to operate the detectors, initial and ongoing training of that staff to properly run the detectors, ongoing maintenance of the detectors, long term replacement costs of the detectors, etc., etc. Additionally, there are other issues to consider as well, such as:
 2. How much time will be required to get students screened through the detectors and into their classes on time without disrupting educational programs?
 3. How many security staff will be required to operate the detectors at morning student arrivals?
 4. How many staff will be needed to continue to run the detectors throughout the school day?
 5. How many will be needed to staff the detectors during after-hours activities and evening events until the building is closed?
 6. What type of training will be provided to employees operating the detectors?
 7. In addition to orientation training on operating the detectors, what type of specialized initial and ongoing training will be provided on recognizing concealed weapons, monitoring for methods that could be used to circumvent the detection systems, etc.?
 8. Is the school willing to operate the detectors on a 24-hour/7-day-a-week basis? Or, as has been done in some schools with metal detector programs, will the detectors only be used at the time of school opening and then shut down later in the morning, missing tardy students and others who come in the school later in the day?
9. Will all school employees also be subject to detector screening?
10. Will all parents and other visitors be screened on a regular basis?
11. Will the detectors be operated during all after-school activities, evening/night education programs, athletic and activities group practices, athletic events, plays and musical performances, etc.?
12. Will individuals participating in all community meetings and activities that are operated at the school be screened?

13. The failure to run a 24/7 metal detection or similar program creates an opportunity for persons to enter the school during non-detection operation times and store weapons in the building, if that was the person's objective. As such, the perceived "guarantee" of safety is false. Detectors may serve as a risk-reduction tool, when properly deployed, but like any other single strategy they cannot offer the 'guarantee' that some perceive.
14. Even a well-run school detector program is not 100% foolproof. Any security technology is only as effective as the human element behind the equipment. The first and best line of defense against school violence is a well-trained, highly alert school staff and student body, and that the most common way we find out about weapons in schools is when students report such information to adults they have relationships with and trust.
15. Schools considering metal detectors or similar may have more success by conducting random metal detector operations by using handheld devices versus stationary detectors. Random metal detector sweeps could be conducted randomly with school buses, at school entrances, during the school day, at after-school events, and in a manner to keep students off guard. A random metal detector program could also serve as an alternative approach to stationary detectors that bypasses some of the implementation obstacles listed above.
16. The key for districts considering the use of detectors is to consider the limitations of such a program in an honest and direct manner, rather than allowing technology companies, the school-community, etc. to market detectors as a "cure all". It should be clear that metal detectors and similar technology are only one component in a comprehensive school safety program, not a solution for school safety.