



SWATTING: CRITICAL TRAINING AND MITIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Swatting is a dangerous and malicious act where individuals make false emergency calls to provoke a significant police response, sometimes involving SWAT teams. This tactic endangers the targeted individuals, puts law enforcement officers at risk, and diverts critical resources from real emergencies. Swatting incidents have contributed to deaths, such as a man who died of a heart attack in 2020 when police responded to his home for a fraudulent report of active violence, and police shot and killed a man during a Swatting Incident in Kansas in 2017 that resulted in a settlement of \$5 million.¹⁻²

Swatting Incidents will likely continue, as some persons or groups are willing to receive payment to launch swatting attacks.³ Furthermore, the FBI has warned that those who commit these acts have and will continue to illegally access smart devices and camera systems so they can livestream the police response to bolster their harmful activity further and potentially increase the social media following of their platforms.⁴

It is imperative that the Chief of Police provide guidance to their officers and dispatch personnel concerning Swatting with a focus on understanding its frequency, recognizing the potential indicators, and the appropriate actions to be taken when responding to seemingly in-progress, potentially violent, or barricaded person incidents. Furthermore, the Chief of Police should consider how to engage the community in building resiliency against Swatting Incidents to protect officers and the community better. This bulletin guides how law enforcement officers can effectively respond to Swatting Incidents and outlines critical considerations to mitigate risk.

Considerations When Developing a Training and Swatting Mitigation Program

1. Ensure all officers and dispatchers understand Swatting. Swatting involves providing false information to emergency services, suggesting a serious threat is occurring, such as an active shooter, bomb threat, or hostage situation. The goal is to elicit a rapid and overwhelming police response. Swatting can lead to confusion, potential injury, or even fatalities for both the targets and responding officers.
2. Inform officers and dispatchers of some of the potential indicators of a Swatting Incident, such as but not limited to:
 - a The incident involves a violent act or barricaded person but is only being reported with one phone call as opposed to numerous 911 calls.
 - b The incoming telephone number is spoofed, blocked, or otherwise appears to be incorrect.
 - c The call is received on a non-emergency and non-recorded dispatch line.
 - d The caller's tone and the background noise appear inconsistent with the claimed emergency or threat.
 - e The caller is unable to answer details such as their full name, phone number, or current location. Persons committing a Swatting Incident may attempt to provide descriptions of buildings found through images on social media or the internet, and such sources might provide incorrect information.

- f The caller mispronounces the name of the town, street, or specific building name of where the incident is allegedly occurring.
 - g The caller uses specific gun models, makes, or names or terminology to identify the weapon being used in the attack.
- 3. Provide guidance on some investigative strategies or actions that can be initiated when responding to a possible Swatting Incident when feasible. Some considerations:
 - a Ask the caller about the color of the residence or types and the color of vehicles associated with the location of the reported incident.
 - b Evaluate, if feasible, background noise during the call to see if it's consistent with the usual background noise associated with the reported area of the incident.
 - c Absent an exigent need to act, attempt to initiate contact with someone through a landline or other phone associated with the premises call history.
 - d When receiving a high-risk call, encourage dispatchers, when possible, to attempt to verify the threat by asking detailed questions and cross-referencing information with known databases.
 - e Direct dispatchers, whenever possible, to gather as much information as possible about the caller, including their location, contact details, and any background noise that may provide clues about the call's authenticity.
- 4. Include Swatting Incidents in various agency programs as actual training scenarios, tabletop exercises, or "What if" discussions. For example, when conducting use-of-force training, develop a scenario involving officers who are dispatched to a residence for people who have been shot, but one of the scenarios involves a Swatting Incident. The scenario might include officers arriving and finding no activity whatsoever, and officers should be encouraged to consider that the incident might be a Swatting Incident. Some considerations to include in the training evolution:
 - a Discuss with officers what options exist, the possible need to make immediate entry to protect life or provide care for others, whether attempting to establish contact with occupants is appropriate, or other actions as deemed necessary. A key takeaway from the training event should be assisting officers in developing a decision-making process when confronted with potential Swatting Incidents.
- 5. Contact your local FBI Office to gain access to the FBI National Swatting Repository, which was created in 2023.⁵ The database was created to enable law enforcement to voluntarily report Swatting Incidents and utilize the information to stay informed of these events.
- 6. Include Swatting in the agency Call Response Guidelines Policy. A sample is available.
- 7. Include ambush prevention strategies with all personnel and review the MSI Law Enforcement Bulletin, [Ambush Attacks: Mitigation Considerations](#).
- 8. Discuss the prevalence of Swatting Incidents with other local first responders, such as Fire, EMS, and OEM.
- 9. Include the subject of Swatting as a task in the agency field training program.

Develop a Community Awareness Program

1. Some considerations:

- a Raise awareness about the dangers of Swatting within the community and encourage them to be cautious about sharing personal information online.
- b Encourage community members to protect their personal information and to be cautious about sharing personal information online, including their home address, phone number, and other identifying details.
- c Advise citizens to regularly review and adjust their privacy settings on social media platforms and online accounts to limit the visibility of their personal information.
- d Promote multi-factor authentication for their online accounts to add an extra layer of security and make it more difficult for attackers to access their accounts.
- e Encourage residents to use strong passwords for each of their online accounts and to regularly update their software, including operating systems and applications, to protect against vulnerabilities that could be exploited.
- f Encourage residents to teach their family members about the dangers of Swatting and the importance of not sharing sensitive information.
- g Encourage community members to create a family emergency plan so that everyone knows what to do if police respond to their home. Most importantly, family members should discuss the importance of following the directions given by the police. Ensure that local businesses also discuss Swatting risks with their employees and include Swatting Incidents in their emergency action plans.
- h Inform residents of the importance of good cyber hygiene and encourage them to participate in cyber security awareness training programs to learn about online threats and how to protect themselves and their families.
- i Evaluate the development of a preplanned "Swatting Alert Form" that some agencies in the country have initiated. A sample of such a program is available [here](#).
- j Include in the awareness program [Swatting Calls and Hoax Threats](#) from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Educational Institution Considerations

- 1. Discuss Swatting risks with local school officials, as there were at least 723 Swatting Incidents at K-12 schools in 2023 alone.⁶
- 2. Review additional resources concerning schools and Swatting and develop specific training programs and mitigation strategies for schools:

[CISA: Anonymized Threat Response Guidance for Schools](#)

[School Swatting: Why It's So Dangerous and How to Combat It](#)

[Swatting Incidents: Four Ways to Reduce Widespread Panic, Improve Response](#)

[Can Campuses Stop School Swatting Threats?](#)

Pre-plan a Local Agency Media Response to Swatting

1. It is imperative that local law enforcement be prepared to swiftly provide information to the community when a Swatting Incident takes place. There have been Swatting Incidents in the country where perpetrators also immediately utilize social media to post false images and videos to reinforce further that an act of violence is occurring. Law enforcement agencies should be prepared to provide accurate information very quickly to thwart the disinformation social media campaign that is done in concert with the Swatting Incident. A sample Media Relations Policy is available.

Post-incident Review Considerations

1. After a Swatting Incident, conduct a thorough debriefing with all involved parties to identify areas needing improvement.
2. Update policies and procedures based on lessons learned from the incident to enhance future responses.

Additional Resource Considerations

[MSI Law Enforcement Bulletin: Election Season Critical Safety Planning Considerations](#) (Includes numerous resources concerning Swatting targeting local government officials.)

[FBI Launches National Swatting Database Amid Rising Incidents](#)

[Swatting in the Gaming World and It's Coming for the Rest of Us](#)

[A Computer-Generated Swatting Service is Causing Havoc Across America](#)

[Swatting Calls and Hoax Threats Targeting Faith Communities – U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#)

Sources

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²Davis, A. (2021, July 13). *Swatting Call Leads to Death of Summer County Man Targeted for His Twitter Handle*. Retrieved from WKNN News: <https://www.wknn.com/news/swatting-call-leads-to-death-of-tn-man-targeted-for-twitter-handle/>

³*Everything You Need to Know About Swatting and Swatting as a Service*. (2023, September 23). Retrieved from ODALoop: <https://oodaloo.com/analysis/archive/everything-you-need-to-know-about-swatting-and-swatting-as-a-service/>

⁴Cimpanu, C. (2020, December 29). *FBI: Swatters Are Hijacking Smart Devices To Livestream Swatting Incidents*. Retrieved from ZD NET Tech: <https://www.zdnet.com/article/fbi-pranksters-are-hijacking-smart-devices-to-live-stream-swatting-incidents/>

⁵Kolomdny, L. W. (2023, June 29). *FBI Has Formed a New Database to Track and Prevent Swatting*. Retrieved from NBC News: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fbi-formed-national-database-track-prevent-swatting-rcna91722>

⁶Rock, A. (2024, March 4). *School Swatting Threats: How Common Are They and What Do They Cost Taxpayers?* Retrieved from Campus Safety: <https://www.campusafety.com/news/school-swatting-threats-how-common-what-do-they-cost/132470/>