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Hays County Standard Response Protocol for Schools, Offices

Hays County Courthouse, San Marcos, TX – With several tragic school shootings across the country already this year, Hays County Director of Emergency Services Kharley Smith hopes to ease Hays County parents' concerns by reminding them that a School Safety Protocol program debuted in 2013 has been adopted by every school in Hays County – public and private – as well as many government offices.

“In the wake of a shooting and SWAT standoff incident in western Hays County that required the lockdown of a nearby Wimberley school, then-Precinct 3 Commissioner Will Conley called a meeting of local and county officials to review lessons learned from the event,” Smith said. “And that led to Emergency Management, the Sheriff’s Office and the City of San Marcos Police Department working with all first responders and local school officials to not only have a plan and a standard protocol, but to conduct drills that practice those protocols each year.” The training provided by the Hays County Office of Emergency Management Standard Response Protocol Task Force is based on suggested standard protocol promoted by the “I Love U Guys” Foundation formed after a 2006 school hostage situation in Colorado. The foundation is named after the final text from student Emily Keyes to her family.

The goal of the program is to ensure that all first responders, school authorities, and students understand what is being asked of them given any type of dangerous or potentially dangerous situation – be it an active shooter, hazardous material spill, fire, or weather emergency.

“We wanted to make sure everyone is on the same page with what the terms lockdown, lockout, shelter, and evacuate mean and what each action requires from those affected,” Smith said. “We had amazing cooperation from all the school districts in Hays County, as well as elected officials countywide,” Smith said. “Officials take campus security very seriously and anything we can do to provide safety and security for our children, teachers, administrators and parents is paramount to our efforts.”

In 2014 the task force was recognized for its leadership in child safety by the Texas Office for the Prevention of Developmental Disabilities (TOPDD) with the J.C. Montgomery Child Safety Award for creating response plans for school emergencies, weather disasters and all other contingencies, and training more than 64,000 students, teachers and officials in 2013. The task force conducted 57 lock-down drills in schools in

2013, and according to the TOPDD, “in the face of the many challenges of safety work, they have all shown absolute dedication and robust leadership to safeguard the children of Hays County.”

The training program is the first of its kind to be adopted countywide, according to Smith, and is recognized as a leader because of its robust schedule of training and drills. The task force has since trained at every school campus in Hays County, from kindergarten through high school, and conducts a training refresher and full lockdown drill on every campus, every year – about 70 in total.

“When we all train together we understand more what everyone should be doing to protect themselves and others in a dangerous situation,” Smith said.

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