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### What is the right security approach after Virginia Tech?

By Al Edwards - 09.10.2007

WASHINGTON--An internal review of the actions Virginia Tech took during student Seung-Hui Cho's April shootings makes recommendations to boost campus security, but some industry experts question if the right approaches will be taken.

Virginia Tech President Charles Steger requested the report, released in August that includes reviews of the university's security systems, communications and counseling services. It recommends improvements ranging from locks on classroom doors to overhauling the campus communications system.

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The report found that the telecommunications were "stressed" during the three-hour event. The report also recommended that universities develop an emergency plan that focuses on mitigating risk, preparedness, response and recovery.

Elliot A. Boxerbaum, president of Security/Risk Management Consultants, said he is concerned that physical changes to campus security isn't enough and agrees with the report's recommendation of a comprehensive approach.

"I think I'd take a holistic approach," he said. "It's just not a matter of installing systems. There has to be drills, audits of your policies, reviews of your organizational culture and adequate training."

The Virginia Tech shootings have propelled campuses across the country to take a

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second look at security measures. At Wayne State University in Michigan for example, campus officials staged a mock attack to test the university's security and response systems. The university also installed a text-messaging system that sends alerts to students during an emergency. The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology also installed a mass-notification system to quickly gather school officials and to alert students during crisis situations.

Boxerbaum said those reactions are good, but won't necessarily increase safety.

"It's so easy to buy technology thinking you're buying security," he said. "Security technology does not equal security. It's definable and it shows that you spent money to increase security, but I believe that it's short-sighted."

Winthrop University relying on just technology. While the university installed an alert system it is also giving students security cards with tips on how to stay safe and emergency numbers and offering free self-defense and rape awareness courses as part of an overall security plan.

That program makes sense and is a good approach, said William Hawthorne, president of William A. Hawthorne Associates.

"The best element to come out of the Virginia Tech shootings is more awareness of situations that campuses can face," Hawthorne said. "Schools should combine technology with simple solutions such as asking students to be proactive."

Hawthorne said each university must handle security based on individual circumstances.

"After Virginia Tech people were looking for the typical security quick fix that seems to make sense, but that will not solve problems," Hawthorne said. "It seems there is this one-size fits all mentality, but universities must take an evaluative approach of their own processes and I think that is being over simplified."

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