

BUSINESSSAFE

BusinessSafe is designed to aid businesses in protecting the safety and well-being of Florida's residents and visitors from threats. BusinessSafe provides private sector partners with open source information, analysis and resources to help protect their businesses and communities.

Florida Fusion Center 19-264

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BusinessSafe Highlight: Houses of Worship

Criminal Activity

Houses of worship provide spaces for individuals to gather for fellowship and praise. As the holiday season approaches, houses of worship may host additional holiday related events and experience increases in attendance rates. These locations may be attractive targets for criminal activity due to the symbolic nature of religious locations and the large crowds present.

1. **Burglary and Theft** – Many houses of worship contain items of value, including technological equipment, instruments, and large sums of money, which may be attractive targets for theft. Sunday afternoons and evenings are when most houses of worship are targeted for these crimes because facilities are likely to have large sums of money after weekly services.
 - [Miami Church Burglarized, Vandalized for Second Time This Month](#)
 - [Two People Sought in Connection with Theft of Checks from Church](#)
2. **Arson** – Arson attacks continue to be conducted by malicious actors seeking to cause damage to houses of worship. Historically, many arson attacks in the U.S. were conducted in attempts to intimidate or harm particular groups.
 - [Suspect in Deadly San Diego Synagogue Shooting Linked to Mosque Arson Fire](#)
 - [Man Accused of Setting Fire to 3 Black Churches in Louisiana Charged with Hate Crimes](#)
3. **Vandalism** - Actors may vandalize houses of worship for either mischievous or malicious reasons. Common tactics include graffiti, breaking windows, and other forms of property damage.
 - [Swastika Found at Miami Beach Synagogue. FBI and Police are Investigating](#)
 - [Pasco Crime Report: Teen Arrested for Trashing Church](#)

Targeted Violence and Terrorist Activity

Although houses of worship are considered safe spaces, malicious actors have continued to target these locations for attack. Due to recent active shooter and bombing incidents, many houses of worship have instituted increased protective measures to protect congregants.



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1. **Small Arms Attacks** – In November 2019, a 16-year-old girl was charged with criminal intent to commit murder after planning an attack against a church in Gainesville, Georgia. Reporting indicates that the girl had assembled a collection of edged weapons and possessed a notebook with detailed plans for an attack. Authorities stated that the girl had visited the church one week prior but service was not being held at that time.
 - [Georgia Teenager Plotted a Knife Attack on a Black Church, Police Say](#)

On April 27, 2019, a man fired shots into the Chabad of Poway synagogue in Poway, California, killing one and injuring three. The attack occurred on the Jewish Passover holiday when approximately 100 people were at the synagogue. The gunman later claimed responsibility for a fire that occurred at a mosque in Escondido, California.

 - [19-Year-Old Pleads Not Guilty in Poway Synagogue Shooting](#)

2. **Explosive Device Attacks** – On November 22, 2019, a man was indicted for attempting to attack a synagogue in Pueblo, Colorado, using explosives. The man stated that he had also attempted to poison congregants at a separate synagogue in Colorado.
 - [Southern Colorado Man Indicted on Federal Hate Crime and Explosives Charges for Plotting to Blow Up Synagogue](#)

Resources

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement and Department of Homeland Security have developed the following resources to help protect houses of worship and increase awareness of suspicious activity at these locations.

[Religious Facilities Flyer](#) (PDF)

[Hometown Security Report Houses of Worship](#) (PDF)

[Safety for Faith Based Events and Houses of Worship](#) (PDF)

[FEMA Resources to Protect Your House of Worship](#)

[Why I See Say PSA - Churches](#)

The following flyer provide information on identifying suspicious activity and potential indicators of pre-attack mobilization related to houses of worship.

[BusinessSafe Fact Sheet: Houses of Worship](#) (PDF)

The following video, by the Department of Homeland Security, explains how houses of worship, law enforcement, and emergency management agencies can work together to protect religious facilities.

DHS: [Protecting Houses of Worship](#)

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