



Community Involvement

When it comes to preventing school shootings and violence, there are things shooters do in public that serve as an advanced warning.

It used to be that, in small towns, every adult watched. Some people remember how, when they were kids, adults were so observant that it was like having 100 mothers. If you did anything wrong, your own mom would get at least one call, if not several.

In today's bigger communities, it's difficult to continue this awareness when people don't even know the children in their own neighborhoods. To the extent possible, adults can keep an eye out for dangerous patterns, especially if they work in certain types of stores.

Just as it has become second nature (and against the law in many states) for clerks not to sell spray paint cans to kids, it can also become routine for local merchants to watch for other problem purchases.

- Law enforcement can educate retail employees whose stores carry the ingredients for homemade bombs, about which items to watch for and in what quantities.
- Scrap dealers can watch for teenagers wanting to purchase engine components that can be reused to make mass destruction devices.
- Hardware stores have their work cut out for them, since nearly everything used to make pipe bombs is available on their shelves. Enlisting law enforcement to train employees on what to watch for would be very helpful in this area.
- Military surplus stores are another place where law-abiding people like to shop, but which also have items used by those planning military-style attacks. School-

aged children or others seeking information on bomb making might feel like they have a confidant in a military surplus employee.

Since the Oklahoma City bombing educated the public on the destructive capabilities of enough fertilizer, feed stores and nurseries are now on the list of community members who need to keep an eye out for strange purchases. A farmer who's been a customer for years buying a large quantity of fertilizer isn't suspicious. A school child, however, is another matter.

As the community gets smarter about watching for warning signs, however, those wanting to cause trouble will be getting better at covering their tracks. Merchants selling the same type of goods might want to set up a system through which they communicate concerns about customers, purchases or anything that doesn't feel right. It's not out of the realm of possibilities that a potential bomber might buy smaller quantities of fertilizer, for instance, to make detection more difficult. Communication between shop owners and clerks can help put together the pieces of the puzzle, if one exists.