

Situational Awareness Basics



Humans crave routine and predictability, particularly during the daily commute. We become accustomed to taking the same routes to our workplace, children's schools, grocery stores and gas stations. Some of us may not be aware of the directions in which we're traveling, nor the streets we take to get there! Involve your family and make a habit of identifying which direction (N/S/E/W) you're traveling while in the car together, along with what streets you're on. When they begin to grasp the concept, you could ask questions

such as, "Are we heading towards home on this road, or away?" or "What street is your school on?" Navigation is an invaluable skill for children to learn.

The first question you will be asked in the event you need to contact 911 is *"Where are you? /What is your address?"* If you're unsure of the exact location, get in the habit of looking at business signs and mailboxes for the street numbers. Landmarks are helpful as well. "I'm at the Starbucks on 28th street in front of Costco in Cascade" is more helpful than "I'm at Starbucks on 28th", because there are numerous Starbucks on 28th.

While out in public, assess the building you're entering, particularly where there may be additional exits. In a box store for example, there is typically an exit at the front and back of the stores, with additional emergency exits at the sides of the buildings. If you were to have an emergency within the store, could you articulate which area of the store you're within? If you aren't oriented to the navigational direction (*I'm in the northwest corner*) a helpful indicator for Dispatch would be, *"I'm in the produce section by the grocery entrance"* or *"I'm in the frozen food aisle at the back of the store."*

In the wise words of Benjamin Franklin, "By failing to plan, you are preparing to fail." It is better to have a rough draft in your mind of how you'd navigate an emergency, particularly when outside your home, where there are endless unknown variables to consider. The following scenarios are examples: A fire, emergency weather situation, or active shooter.

Example: *If there is a fire in the {grocery store} while I am shopping, I'm going to put my child into the shopping cart so that I may push them as I run towards the closest emergency exit. I would seek an emergency exit or alternate exit as to not get bottlenecked into the crowd at a main entry/exit point of the store. I will be mindful of any nearby windows and will break said window in order to safely exit if that becomes necessary.*

Visualizing your response and successful navigation of the above circumstances ahead of time enhances your performance if an emergency were to unfold.

If you or your business would like additional information regarding situational awareness or are interested in enhancing this skill set, the Kent County Sheriff's Office offers CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events) to the community. Contact Myself or Deputy Dieppa for further questions.

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