

Chicagoland Synagogues Bolster Security Awareness Before Jewish Holidays

MAGEN Chicago held a seminar for synagogues pre-High Holidays, covering responding to threats, security measures and stressing coordination with police.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- With the Jewish High Holidays approaching, MAGEN Chicago held a security seminar before Rosh Hashana at the Bernard Horwich JCC for their group of Shul Safety Officers and Greeters (SSOs and SSGs) as well as security team leaders from synagogues across Chicagoland. MAGEN Chicago's SSO program trains synagogue safety volunteers in nearly 40 local synagogues. The seminar

brought together security experts from the Chicago Police Department, the Jewish United Fund's Security Department, the Skokie Police Department, and the Anti-Defamation League.



Daniel Godsel, Director of Security for the Jewish United Fund speaks on Jewish Community Security



Protecting Our Community
From Within"

MAGEN Chicago

The seminar covered best practices for securing synagogues, responding to security threats and incidents, and recent swatting incidents nationwide. Swatting involves making false emergency calls, often claiming a bomb threat or active shooter, to provoke a large law enforcement response during services. These calls force

the police and SWAT teams to enter and clear the synagogue quickly. These false reports are dangerous and disruptive.

"Recently, we've seen an alarming rise in 'swatting' incidents targeting synagogues nationwide. The rise of swatting comes after the ADL reported almost 3700 incidents of antisemitism in the nation, the largest number since reporting began in 1979." said Trent Spoolstra, Associate Regional Director for the ADL. "These false reports are incredibly dangerous and disruptive. We

are advising all synagogues to have protocols in place for handling such scenarios and working with police to respond appropriately."

Officers Michael Specht and Roger Heath from the Chicago Police Department's 24th District Place of Worship Safety Advisory Team (POWSAT) spoke about localized security measures they will be taking to boost community safety and security.

"The Chicago Police Department's 24th District POWSAT will increase our patrol during Rosh Hashanah. We will be visiting numerous synagogues and conducting surprise security sweeps of exteriors and interiors of undisclosed locations," said Officer Specht. "We strongly urge residents walking to and from Shul to be situationally aware of their surroundings, and if you see something that looks suspicious, say something and notify 911 immediately."

Commander Daniel O'Brian from the Skokie Police Department discussed the recent security phenomenon of swatting across the country and recent swatting incidents in Skokie, emphasizing coordination with law enforcement.

The Jewish United Fund reviewed community security resources available to local synagogues and schools.

"We want to make sure synagogues have robust security plans and trained volunteers or professionals who can put those plans into action," said Daniel Godsel, Director of Security for the Jewish United Fund. "By working together, we can help provide peace of mind so everyone can observe the holidays safely."



MAGEN Chicago "Protecting Our Community From Within"



Alderman Debra Silverstein of the 50th ward was also present to speak about her newly introduced legislation this month that received unanimous support from the Chicago City Council. This legislation would combat the escalating wave of hate crimes. "Hate is sharply rising in the City of Chicago," Alderman Silverstein said. "CHI vs. Hate is the city's first comprehensive effort in over three decades to reverse this worrying trend. For the first time, CHI vs. Hate will add a formal definition of hate incidents to the Municipal Code. These non-criminal acts often precede more dangerous hate crimes. This legal foundation will allow us to develop targeted policies aimed at preventing hate from escalating into violence.

The seminar aligned with MAGEN Chicago's theme of "Protecting Our Community From Within," emphasizing the importance of synagogues developing their own trained safety teams with their guidance.

At the seminar's conclusion, MAGEN Chicago's SSOs and SSGs participated in a Stop the Bleed review class led by Officer Brian Bardsley Jr, Medical Team Leader of the Chicago SWAT team. Officer Bardsley reviewed the basics of the Stop the Bleed protocol, an emergency response training program that teaches ordinary citizens techniques to prevent death from severe bleeding. MAGEN Chicago ensures its volunteers practice these potentially life-saving skills, preparing them to provide critical help during an injury or mass casualty incident.

"Ongoing training and preparedness are crucial for synagogue safety teams to protect their congregations effectively," said Chiam Naiditch, founding President of MAGEN Chicago. "We also emphasize building communication and strong relationships with local law enforcement. Good and effective communication is essential for increasing our Shul and community safety and security."

Several attendees said the seminar gave them new ideas and helpful connections to strengthen security at their synagogues. With the symposium concluded, MAGEN Chicago and its partners will continue working to share security best practices and training across Chicagoland's Jewish community.

MAGEN Chicago, founded in 2016, is a grassroots non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to protecting the Chicagoland Jewish community. MAGEN empowers individuals to take charge of their safety through education, safety training, and relationship building. MAGEN Chicago aims to continue their mission to "Protect the Community from Within." Community involvement is vital to enabling this organization to continue its efforts. For more information or to help them continue with their mission, please visit their website at magenchicago.org.

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