

WITH THE PRESS OF A BUTTON

Securing doors easily and quickly
during emergency situations

VIEWPOINT



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INTRODUCTION: Hi, and welcome to *Schools In Focus*, an 1105 Media podcast. I'm your host, Matt Jones, senior editor of *Spaces4Learning* and *Campus Security & Life Safety*. Our guest today is Mark Berger, president and chief product officer for Securitech Group, Inc. He's here to discuss a school security solution that gives every student, teacher and staff member the agency to secure themselves with the press of a button in the event of an emergency. He'll discuss its theory of operation and the installation process, as well as his own experiences working with Sandy Hook Elementary School following the December 2012 shooting incident. This episode is sponsored by Securitech Group.

SPACES4LEARNING: I'm your host, Matt Jones. I'm here with Mark Berger, the president of Securitech Group. Mark, thanks a lot for being here today. We met and we talked a little bit last week at the ISC West conference in Las Vegas. It was great to chat with you. I'm glad we get to keep that conversation going today.

MARK BERGER: Right, the only difference is you won't hear the sounds of my samples as we're standing next to each other.

S4L: That's too bad. Can you just tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got into your current role?

MARK: My title is president and chief product officer. I'd like to say that I invented that title, but I didn't. I stole it from the guy that used to wear the black turtlenecks at Apple. I realized that when a company is all about solutions and products, being president of the company means that you are ultimately responsible for the products and should highlight that in your title. As president and chief product officer of Securitech, I am responsible for

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everything that goes out the door and for our company's deep commitment to life safety and security. I'm one of the founders of Securitech back in 1983. And while I wasn't president at the time, I became president in the late '80s and have been fulfilling that role ever since.

S4L: Jumping in, it looks like you've created a series of locks for schools. Can you tell me about those?

MARK: Securitech as a company is based upon solutions. It's all about solving problems, but in a way different than anybody else in the industry, and hopefully leading the industry to where they catch up to us.

Prior to our introduction of Red Button locking, the basic lockdown method for school was one person with the key gets to the door, and whether it's on the inside or the outside of the door, turns the key to lock the door. Sadly, at Sandy Hook, that concept of having one person with a key get to the door proved to be tragic for way too many lives. I actually was in Germany watching television [when the shooting happened]. I was watching all of the news coverage on that horrible day. And literally on that day, before I knew anything about what happened, I was thinking about classroom doors, thinking about what was on the market to lock them down, and it really just



was reverberating through my head. The concept came to me that, really, it should be anyone in the room at any time should be able to enact a lockdown.

Securitech as a company tries to ensure that every solution we produce advances the art and goes one step further than anything else that's in the marketplace. But most importantly, we married code compliance with security. So everything we do is going to be 100 percent safe, 100 percent compliant with NFPA and IBC and all the other local codes that are out there. And in creating our product

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line of Red Button locks, the idea was anybody approaches the door, presses a button, locks down the classroom from inside without opening the door, maintaining life safety from the inside so you can always get out with one motion, and maintaining the ability of first responders, school staff, police, whomever, to enter the room by a key.

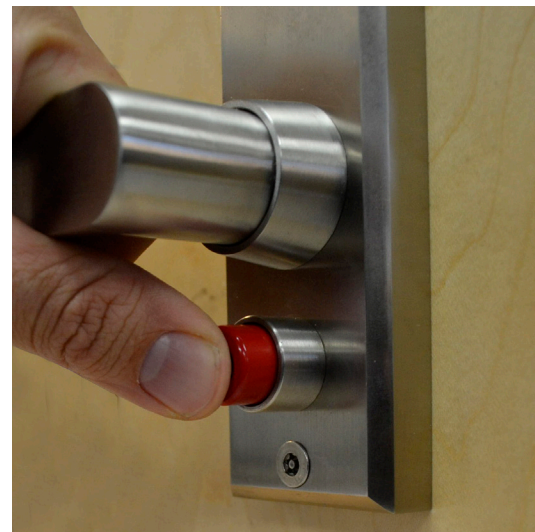
S4L: How did you go about developing this idea? And who did you consult with?

MARK: Before we had even gotten this product to the market – because we were really redeveloping something – I was already involved in the ASIS International School Safety and Security Council. I was already involved with them for many years on the physical security council, so I speak to a lot of people in the space. But at that point, when we were developing this product, we were approached by the security consultants for the new Sandy Hook school. They wanted to use another one of our products, an automatic deadbolt lock set, and put that on each and every classroom door. The advantage of automatic deadbolt locking is that each time the door closes, it shoots out the deadbolt. So you actually hear the deadbolt physically lock the door every time it closes. Now, they wanted to do that at Sandy Hook because of the sensitivity and because they wanted to go one step beyond anything else that was out there.

S4L: I’m sorry, just for context, was this pre- or post- shooting?

MARK: Post-shooting. This is for the development of the new Sandy Hook School. So the state of Connecticut, in their reaction to the Sandy Hook shooting, said that classroom doors should be locked at all times. I happen to think that’s a bit of a hazard because teachers are going to block the doors open, whether it’s a chuck underneath the door – I’ve seen bungee cords tied around levers because of the convenience factor. So I don’t really understand that as a practical matter. But I certainly understand that as a response to the tragedy at Sandy Hook, instead of just latching the door closed, which most doors do, they want deadbolt action, and we were able to provide that for them. Now, at Sandy Hook, they also prop the doors open using magnetic hold-opens so that in the classroom, the teacher can press a button and lock their individual door. Or in the school office, they press one button that releases all the magnetic hold-opens and locks all the doors simultaneously. So they can truly lock down the school in an instant.

For most schools, however, their goal would be 99.99 percent of the time to have the door act as a regular classroom door. So the lock should function as it has for the last 50 years, letting people in and out. Securitech, what we brought to the game was the ability to have that functionality of



a free entry into the classroom, but enable and empower anyone within the classroom to lock it down just by pressing the Red Button. And while I said you wouldn’t have a sound effect... There’s a sound effect for you. That was pressing the Red Button and locking the door. Anyone at any time in the classroom can do it. Yet nobody is ever trapped in the classroom, like they would be if there was an illegal barricade device applied to the door.

S4L: Can you talk a little bit about the psychology behind this theory of operation, where it’s as easy as possible for anybody inside the classroom to lock themselves in?

MARK: Well, no, not to lock themselves in, but to secure the door lock themselves might mean that you wouldn’t be able to escape.

S4L: I should have said, be able to lock themselves in and get themselves out.

MARK: So, our whole thing is the safety and security side always working in tandem. You never know where the teacher is going to be in the classroom when there is an event in the school. Whether it’s active shooter and assailant, if some sort of an event message comes over the loudspeaker

or someone hears something and they decide they want to lock down the classroom... In a typical scenario, the teacher is typically a woman, they're not going to have a key in their pocket, they're not going to want to wear the key around their neck as jewelry. So they'd have to go from wherever they are in the classroom, go to hopefully the desk where they've got the key in a drawer, go from the desk to the door, close the door, insert the key while under stress. And let me just tell you something, getting a key and turning it while under stress, it's not so easy. But they'd have to do that. And that's how they would secure the door.

To me, that's impractical. Number one, what if the teacher is not inside the room? Number two, as happened at Sandy Hook, what if there's a substitute teacher who doesn't know the protocol, or doesn't have the key? Our belief was that a lockdown, which is the best way to secure people within a classroom, should be enacted by anyone, as you said, within the classroom that goes up to the door, and in our case just presses that button to be able to lock down the classroom.

One of the questions that comes up is, well, now you've allowed anybody to lock down the classroom. Well, that might be true except for one thing: people can always enter with a key. Principal, teacher, whomever, and anyone inside the room can always exit. Because you can always exit without special knowledge, the same way you would exit the classroom if the regular lock was being used is the way that you exit the classroom when one of our Red Button locks have been enacted or pressed and secured the room. So there's no special knowledge required.

It's 100 percent ADA compliant; things that you add to the door are not ADA compliant if you have to pinch and grasp to put them in place, or to remove them. We really understand what the needs are for the school



community, and try to make sure that we're meeting those needs in as safe and secure a manner as possible.

S4L: Can you talk a little more about the ADA compliance aspect of it? What is it that helps? What is it that helps you prize that so highly?

MARK: One of the things is, schools receive federal funds and state funds. To receive those funds, you have to ensure that what you're doing in construction in the school makes an open environment or welcoming environment for all members of the community. So ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, is basically saying that, number one, we've got to accommodate people with disabilities. In cities like New York, you'll see cut curbs so that people can wheel a wheelchair up a curb easily. When you go to enter a building, you'll see a button to press and an automatic door operator that will allow you to open the door. So there are lots of things that you can do in that space, to make sure that folks who are disabled can access an area the same way someone who is not disabled accesses them.

Similarly, when it comes to doors, one of the things that's important is that we've moved from door knobs to levers, with the reason that all levers are ADA compliant. You don't have to pinch and grasp them to operate. You can just hit a lever, but you don't have to grasp it and pinch it tightly to operate it. So that's one part of the ADA compliance. The second is that many of the barricade devices that are on the market are what I call secondary devices. You've got to take them off the wall and put them on the door and then slide it into the floor. That act involves pinching and grasping and is not something that a disabled person could do.

S4L: So it's almost the same theory as the big Red Button that you just have to punch, just the levers on the doors make it really easy to just get in and out with as little need for manipulation as possible?

MARK: Exactly. And in fact, one of the reasons that we went for the Red Button was that we didn't want to make it look like a turn piece that you'd see on a regular door, because

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we didn’t want to make that inviting for kids to do. One other thing that we did – because frankly, I was the type of kid in school that would try to get away with things – is that the Red Button is actually below the surface of the housing that surrounds it, almost like a volcano. So that if I brushed by, I can’t project it. There’s no accidental way to say “Oh, I bumped into the door and it went through.”

I tell the story that principals who initially had a concern that “Oh, the kids are going to press the Red Buttons all the time and I’m going to spend all my day going around with keys and having to let teachers back in their rooms.” They haven’t seen it. And the reason that they haven’t seen it is (and speaking as a former troublemaker), if I press the Red Button and lock the teacher out of the room, where am I? I’m inside the room. So when they come and finally open the door, there’s no way I can talk myself out of it, because I’m caught red-handed in this space. So it has not been an issue of people locking teachers out of the door, which was something that came up in the early days of the product that we had to overcome.

S4L: You’re like the bank robber who locked himself inside the bank vault.

MARK: Right. Not a good thing to do. Although I did see that in the movie once and it was pretty clever. I should say one

thing about the product...our Red Button solutions are deployed in elementary, middle and high schools. And generally a middle school is where you put a product if you want to get it tested, because those kids are the roughest. We are in the eighth-largest school district in the United States, Prince George County, and we’re doing middle schools, elementary schools and higher ed and the high schools. No issues with people being locked out of rooms.

S4L: Just to give our audience a little bit clearer picture: it’s the Red Button that’s kind of mounted inside the recessed volcano that you were talking about, right? Is that placed on the wall right next to the door, is it on the door as part of that push bar mechanism?

MARK: So yeah, it’s kind of hard to visualize locks without seeing them. The easiest thing that your listeners can do while listening to this podcast is go to redbuttonlocks.com, and they can actually see the products. And even though we’ve got our own Securitech website, Red Button Locks is dedicated to these solutions so people can see them. But they are on the door, either right above the lever or below the lever, depending on the type of door hardware that’s applied. So people don’t have to go around and look at anything, you go toward the lock and you’re going to see the way to lock down quickly.



S4L: Can you tell me a little bit about the installation process?

MARK: There are two versions. We’ve got a product called Safebolt, which mounts above a cylindrical lever lock. You can Google what a cylindrical lever lock it is, but that’s when you see a little round circle and a lever coming out of it. The Safebolt fits on top of that. We provide a steel marking template so that you can mark everything for the Safebolt and get it right without having to do any measuring. That’s the Safebolt, which, again, mounts over the cylindrical lever lock.

If you happen to have a mortise lock – you know it’s a mortise lock because if you look at the edge of the door, the faceplate for the locks would be eight inches long. For mortise locks we have our QID series – Quick Intruder Deadbolt – that replaces the existing lock with the Red Button lock. In that case, the Red Button is below the lever so you can actually press it with your thumb while grasping the lever.

S4L: Has there been any kind of feedback from schools? I guess, supposedly, if it works....

MARK: ...You hear nothing. That’s the rule. But the reality is, schools are supposed to be places where students



feel safe and comfortable learning. There's no better way to feel safe or comfortable in the space than being empowered to secure yourself within that space. I've written a couple of pieces for educational periodicals and it talks about not having students feel as if they're in prison, but maintaining that school ambiance, that free thought process ambiance that you should feel comfortable in your school and not be concerned about your personal safety continuously.

We try to hope that our products, they're there, people know that they're there, but they don't make the classroom look like a prison or make you feel as if you've got to turn it into a prison to be safe.

S4L: I really liked that idea of giving students that little bit of agency, just the idea that anybody can kind of push that Red Button in an emergency, just

the idea that you're not waiting for a teacher to either notice or to fumble for a key or to come sprinting back down the hallway from the bathroom. Just that idea that any human being in that room can instantly enable a lockdown if need be. But also it doesn't cause any unnecessary complications either if it's a false alarm or a prank, or if it's something that emergency crews need to get into the room right away. It just seems a great way to give everybody kind of that power without giving them too much power.

MARK: That's right on the money, Matt. I appreciate that. And if I can take two seconds to say. I sit on a couple of industry boards and advocacy boards and one of the big challenges we have is that people aren't really aware of how products can be misapplied. They'll take a simple solution and think it'll work.

Barricade devices, which are those

bars that you either put on the door or drop into the floor that block the door from opening, those can trap someone inside a classroom because they don't provide single-motion exiting. And they're not intuitive. The danger there is that .001 percent of our schools will have issues with an active shooter in any given year. Let's pray that it never goes higher than that statistic. From what I've discussed with school folks, 99 percent of our schools have issues with bullying. We never want to provide a solution that empowers a bully to trap someone inside a classroom. Barricade devices that are not part of the lock can be used to trap someone inside a room and are dangerous. So while they may seem like a good reaction to keeping a bad guy out of a classroom, they can be a horrible, horrible product. If a student, let's say, happens to bring a weapon in their backpack into the classroom, and has been trained on how to barricade the door and then barricades that door, every student in that classroom would be trapped with someone who is an active shooter in the room. And it's that stark, how dangerous it could be.

S4L: Wow, yeah, I hadn't really thought about that. Just the idea that you train all these kids how to deal with active shooters, but you also have to wonder if the knowledge that you're giving them is almost kind of giving away either the tricks of the trade or kind of telling them how to work around them. Does that make sense?

MARK: Exactly. Which is why the life safety component is so important, that we never violate life safety rules, which means get to the door, you can always get out.

S4L: The only other analogy that kind of keeps jumping to my mind is, I like how easy it is not just to use, but especially in a state of emergency. I'm not a morning person and because of

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that, I do absolutely everything the night before. I lay my clothes out, I make coffee, I make my lunch, I put my work bag together, because I just kind of plan on treating myself for that first 15, 30 minutes after I wake up, kind of like a toddler. It seems like you’re giving students – not just students, but students, teachers, everybody – the tools they need not just to succeed, but to succeed when they’re in a moment of crisis and maybe not thinking clearly.

MARK: It’s very true. There are lots of morning studies, but we won’t go there. But there are lots of studies about what happens to your motor skills when you’re under stress. And something as simple as putting a key in a lock when you’re hearing [popping sounds] or different sounds going on? You’re incapable of doing it. Do I turn to the right? Do I turn to the left? It’s just way too much stress.

S4L: Yeah, even just something like those fine motor skills to stick a key into a lock. If your hand is shaking, or if you’re getting jostled, that seems like kind of an unnecessary moving piece.

MARK: Yep.

S4L: Okay, then. I don’t want to put you on the spot, But maybe just in general, do you know roughly how



many K–12-type schools have these products installed?

MARK: I couldn’t answer that for you, because number one, we sell through dealers. But I would say we’re in hundreds of schools at this point with the Red Button solutions.

S4L: Okay. Perfect. I was just curious. It looks like that’s about everything that we had planned to discuss, at least at the broadest level. I was wondering if there was anything else that you wanted to talk about or get in before we sign off?

MARK: Just to let people know that these solutions are now being used in other places of concern. The concept of sheltering in place, or creating safe havens, is also being used in houses of worship, in retail locations, so that staff knows where to go to be safe in case there’s an incident. In commercial places, offices, factories. I think that concept of creating a safe room for everyone that’s within a space, or at least those who work there, that’s going to be growing over the years. And while we started with the schools, I think that’s something we will be seeing and

training ourselves for over the next couple of years.

S4L: I think that was about everything else that we’d had prepared, unless there was anything else that you’d like to slide in? I think we can maybe begin wrapping it up for today.

MARK: Okay. Matt, we appreciate the opportunity to speak about the Red Button solutions that we would suggest to people, very simple, www.redbuttonlocks.com. It’s just a great way to see some videos of the products in action, download material, and reach us with any questions if needed.

S4L: Unfortunately, that’s about all the time that we have for today. Once again, this has been Mark Berger, the president and chief product officer for Securitech Group. Mark, thanks so much for sharing your time and expertise with us today.

I’d also like to thank this episode’s sponsor, Securitech Group, Inc. And finally, thanks to all of our listeners for tuning in and spending some time with us today. I’m Matt Jones, and we will see you next time on *Schools In Focus*.