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Pretend lockdown leads to real thing

Miscommunication

Presented by



Melissa Leong, National Post; With Files From Katherine Laidlaw



A lockdown drill at a Bloor Street ESL school turned erroneously into the real thing yesterday when someone, unaware of the exercise, reported that a gunman was in the school.

Toronto police, including tactical officers and canine units, surrounded the Bickford Centre at 777 Bloor St. W. shortly before 11 a. m., after a call from a citizen who had been in contact with a friend inside the building.

Police sealed off the street between Ossington Avenue and Christie Street and warned people to stay away from the area. Early reports surfaced that the principal had been taken hostage.

Richard Doerr, an instructor at the adult learning centre, said the school was practising a lockdown situation when an actual lockdown was initiated. "I didn't see anyone with a gun," he said. "My instincts started to kick in--no, this is not a drill."

The Bob Abate Community Centre, which runs daycare programs, is next door to Bickford, and yesterday, parents waited anxiously by the police tape.

After officers searched the school, it became obvious there had been a miscommunication, said Constable Wendy Drummond.

"It was an emergency drill that was not communicated to everyone in the school," she told reporters about 90 minutes after police arrived. "There has been no gunman, there have been no injuries and the situation is now resolved."

Paramedics wheeled one woman out on a stretcher. She was moaning, a blanket covering half of her face. Const. Drummond said the woman was pregnant and was taken away as a precaution.

"This affects a lot of people -- children, parents, people driving to work. I was pretty scared," said Sylvia, who declined to give her last name. She paced the concrete for more than an hour, holding a melted blue Freezie for her three-year-old son who was inside the community centre.

"I was sick to my stomach," said Ursula Andersen, a supply teacher who arrived at Bickford to find it blocked off by officers.

About 400 students attend the school, many of them newcomers.