

# GURDWARA SAFETY AND SECURITY



SUGGESTIONS AND GUIDELINES

Presented by Sikh Dharma International

## WHY WE NEED THIS GUIDE

With approximately 30 million Sikhs worldwide, Sikhism is the fifth largest religion of the world. With our turbans, chunis, and beards, Sikhs are distinctive and highly recognizable. These are articles of faith and are an integral part of our spiritual path.

Because of our high visibility, Sikh Gurdwaras have always faced challenges in the communities we live in. Sikhs have a long history of being targeted for hate crimes, both in India and in other countries around the world. However, Sikhs are amazingly resilient and uniquely prepared to respond to this threat. Drawing upon our natural aptitude to defend others and stand for righteousness, the security of our Gurdwaras can be significantly improved with planning and preparation. This guide is intended to help you prepare your Gurdwara to deal with potentially dangerous situations in order to protect the sangat.

*Now is the time to make this a priority in the sangat.*

## THE RIGHT TO REFUSE ACCESS

In many countries, the right to free exercise of religion is enjoyed by the population. This protects our Gurdwaras from arbitrary and hostile actions. In addition to this right to worship, Gurdwaras also have a responsibility to serve and protect the sangat. This includes *excluding* those individuals who behave in a manner that offends our principles. It is legal and right to bar entrance to certain people including:

- Disruptive persons,
- Individuals who harass people in the sangat,
- Individuals who are engaged in religious conversion, and
- Anyone who threatens the safety and security of the Gurdwara.

## ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Serving the communities in which we live is part of the basic tenets of Sikhism. Gurdwaras should extend their outreach and maintain a connection with local community government, religious leaders, and residents. This can be done in many ways, including:

- Make services welcoming to people of all faiths and help strangers to comply with our customs such as covering their heads, removing their shoes, and eating in the Langar.

ਜਬ ਲਗ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਰਹੇ ਨਿਆਰਾ ॥  
ਤਬ ਲਗ ਤੇਜ ਕੀਉ ਮੈਂ ਸਾਰਾ ॥  
ਜਬ ਇਹ ਗਹੈ ਬਿਪਰਨ ਕੀ ਰੀਤ ॥  
ਮੈਂ ਨ ਕਰੋਂ ਇਨ ਕੀ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤ ॥

Guru Gobind Singh ji

- Make contact with other churches and temples in the area to open a mutual dialogue. Engage in interfaith and inter-community events.
- Be respectful of noise, trash, traffic, and other impositions on the surrounding community.
- Maintain a tradition of seva in the local community.

## ENGAGING LOCAL AUTHORITIES

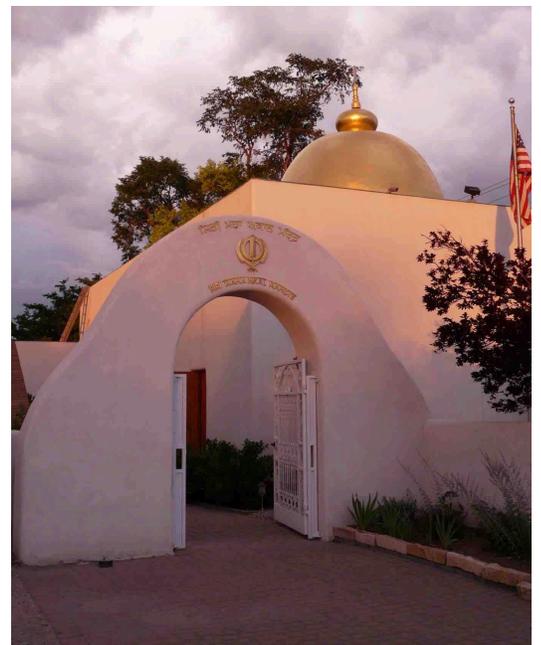
Maintaining a secure Gurdwara environment involves developing strong relationships with local police and governmental authorities. Local police, city mayor, and other influential officials should have a personal relationship with the Gurdwara and have a supportive understanding of the challenges we face. Some ways to develop a mutual relationship of respect and support are:

- Identify and get to know the police and local officials responsible for the area of the Gurdwara.
- Participate in local government and law enforcement events to show community involvement and support. Demonstrate your pride in the city you live in.
- Encourage the youth of your sangat to be good citizens and to participate in local events and programs on behalf of the Gurdwara.
- Invite local police and government officials to the Gurdwara for events and holidays.

## GENERAL SECURITY PRACTICES FOR GURDWARAS

The following are best practices<sup>1</sup> that will assist your Gurdwara in being safe and secure while maintaining an open and welcoming environment. Remember that local and global events may impact security. It is important to be proactive, increasing security during times of threat.

1. Make safety and security part of the culture of the Gurdwara, involving staff, sevadars, and sangat.
2. Designate a member of the staff to serve as Security Manager, responsible for the security protocol of the Gurdwara. Support the Security Manager in enlisting and training volunteers to act as Security Sevadars.



<sup>1</sup> Anti-Defamation League “Security Best Practices for Religious and Communal Institutions”

3. Have Security Sevadars present during events to monitor activities in the Devan Hall, Langar Hall, parking lots, and all sangat areas. The Security Sevadars are responsible to report security incidents, to call for help, and to make contact with emergency services when needed.
4. Create response plans for anticipated security problems and emergencies such as a bomb threat, active shooter scenario, and other hate crimes as well as fire, earthquake, and natural disasters. Regularly assess risks and revisit your response plans to update them.
5. Establish an emergency response plan for the sangat that includes evacuation, shelter-in-place, and lockdown. Ensure that there are multiple exits from the Devan Hall.
6. Establish a “safe room” where sangat and staff can lock the door and take shelter during a security emergency.
7. Develop relationships with law enforcement, fire department, and other emergency officials.
8. Provide security training to all staff and sevadars. Run regular safety and security drills to review how to respond to different emergencies.
9. Make sure the Gurdwara can be securely locked, both doors and windows. Interior rooms such as Sukhasan, office, and other important rooms should also have the capability to be locked. Install shatter-resistant glass in doors and ground-floor windows.
10. Encourage staff, sevadars, and sangat to be alert for suspicious activity and have a way they can report it to the Security Manager. Maintain records of suspicious activity to detect patterns. Report any suspicious persons or activity to local authorities immediately.
11. Install alarms and security cameras for optimal visibility and surveillance to deter theft and vandalism.
12. Ensure that all areas of the outside perimeter are lighted, or can be lighted, at night.

## SECURITY RESOURCES FOR GURDWARAS

The following resources provide additional information on dealing with and reporting hate crimes:

1. Anti-Defamation League – <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/hate-crimes-law/>
2. Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund – [www.saldef.org](http://www.saldef.org)
3. The Sikh Coalition – [www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org)
4. Sikh Dharma International – [www.sikhdharma.org](http://www.sikhdharma.org)

On August 5, 2012 white supremacist Wade Michael Page opened fire in a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin – USA, killing six people in the sangat and wounding four more as they were preparing Langar.