

Myths and Misconceptions: What We Learned After Four Decades of Metal Detectors in Schools

Welcome.

You care about your children, but navigating the world of school security isn't easy, and there is a lot of contradictory information out there on the web. Garrett has decades of experience working with schools across the United States, and we want to help you by dispelling some of the most common misconceptions.

MYTH: Metal detectors will make students late to class

With a proper site assessment, the number of detectors can be optimized to mitigate or even eliminate lines. Staff training and operation guidelines, machine placement and configuration, and student education and preparation all come together in a successful implementation. For decades now, metal detectors have effectively and efficiently screened millions of guests at concerts, sporting events, airports, amusement parks, and government buildings around the world.

MYTH: Metal detectors are too expensive

A high-quality Garrett walkthrough with a companion hand-held metal detector will cost approximately \$3,000 to \$5,000 (depending upon model selection). As an example, a Pennsylvania school district was recently configured with 16 walk-through detectors located across multiple high school and middle school facilities for less than \$45,000.

MYTH: Metal detectors are only ideal for newer facilities

Old facilities can present a challenge for modern security programs, but even old buildings can be retrofitted with metal detectors, without modification to the facility in almost every case. Garrett metal detectors are very versatile. They are waterproof and thus can operate outside. They are mobile when installed with casters, and can be moved in and out of entrances. They can also operate on battery power for up to ten hours, allowing them to operate in areas where power is not readily available.

MYTH: Metal detectors frequently miss weapons

This claim, which often originates with misleading news reports, refers to X-ray machines, not metal detectors. X-ray machines rely on a human operator to visually identify weapons based on images. Metal detectors rely on physics, not human judgment, to detect metal objects, which mitigates human errors. Detector sensitivity can be adjusted to reliably identify metal objects as small as one-half of a razor blade.

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MYTH: Metal detectors require lots of additional personnel to operate them

An important goal of the site assessment is to minimize the number of entrances that are open and staffed. In the morning, students arrive at just a few secure entrances where they are screened promptly as they arrive. Once the morning rush is complete, only a single checkpoint entrance remains open, reducing the need for staffing for the rest of the day. Additionally, this is a frequent topic of competitor obfuscation – Garrett checkpoints can typically be staffed at fewer than 3 people per machine. Garrett does recommend that a campus police officer or some other trained security professional be stationed at each checkpoint.

MYTH: Metal detectors need frequent maintenance and recalibration

Our walkthrough metal detectors typically operate for ten years or more with minimal maintenance. They are solid-state with no moving parts to wear out, and are self-calibrating after initial setup.

MYTH: Metal detectors require significant manpower to check backpacks

Schools are uniquely positioned to eliminate bag checks for students, by educating and training parents and students to select low-metal backpacks, binders, and accessories. The few remaining metallic items can be placed in a bin for evaluation by a screener while the students continue through with their backpacks still on, significantly increasing ingress and minimizing required manpower for manual checks.

MYTH: Metal detectors will make my school feel like a prison

The perception of metal detectors continues to evolve as people gain greater exposure to them at airports, sporting events, concert venues, amusement parks, and other public sites. A child's first encounter with a security metal detector is more likely to be at an airport or sports arena than a prison. For many parents, the question has moved from, "Why should our schools feel like prisons?" to, "Why are our prisons, airports, and stadiums safer than our schools?"

MYTH: Metal detectors are a reactive security measure

Metal detectors are front-end security devices that serve as a strong visual deterrent and the final proactive line of defense for keeping weapons out of school. With a properly configured set of metal detector checkpoints, threats and contraband can be effectively deterred, identified, and removed before they make it into your facility.



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