



Shooting on the Woodbridge Campus

December 8, 2009

After Incident Review

Presented to

Dr. Robert G. Templin, Jr.

President

Northern Virginia Community College

March 10, 2010

Page intentionally left blank

Foreword

There are many components to emergency response and at Northern Virginia Community College, like other institutions of higher learning; multiple departments and offices have responsibilities for that response. In 2007 after the Virginia Tech Incident the college administration created the Office of Emergency Planning to coordinate communications between internal and external groups before, during, and after an emergency incident. This office was also created to ensure that the highest level of response by administration could be achieved through the effective use of technology and best practices. The formalized system was severely tested on December 8, 2009, in response to the first “active shooting” incident at any Virginia Community College System campus. However, review shows that some aspects worked well while improvements can, and must be, made to ensure that the highest level of preparedness is realized.

The ability to control alert notification remotely and the police officer being trained to respond to an active shooter were major determinants of the outcome. Other conclusions illustrate areas that will be reviewed for follow-up action. The recommendations contained in the report are intended to help the college better prepare for this type of hazard and others that may affect the college. Some of these recommendations will require immediate action, further study, review, and cost analysis to determine the feasibility of implementation. Others are no cost items to implement, or require follow-up action with the appropriate department or group.

The purpose of this report is to provide an authoritative and comprehensive record of the event, provide preliminary analysis of how the college and external agencies responded and to make preliminary recommendations to college administration on how to improve overall emergency preparedness and response. The information presented in this report is comprised of reports, observations, and official documents via external public safety agencies. The Director of the Office of Emergency Planning is responsible for compiling this information and authoring this document.

Acknowledgements

- ❖ Officer Anthony Mellis, NVCC Campus Police
- ❖ Office of Mental Health and Student Behavior
- ❖ Deans of Students
- ❖ Northern Virginia Community College Campus Police Department
- ❖ Prince William County Police Department
- ❖ Prince William County Sherriff's Office
- ❖ Prince William County Fire & Rescue Department
- ❖ Virginia State Police
- ❖ Virginia Department of Emergency Management-Region 7 Coordinator
- ❖ CrisisLink of Arlington
- ❖ Prince William Community Services Board
- ❖ George Mason University
- ❖ The Loudoun County Community Services Board
- ❖ Prince William County Hotline
- ❖ United College Ministries
- ❖ The Virginia Psychological Association
- ❖ Police Ministry

Page intentionally left blank

Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	4
Incident Summary	7
Incident Timeline	11
Lessons Learned	14
Recommendations.....	17
Glossary of Key Terms	19

Incident Summary

On Tuesday December 8, 2009, Jason Hamilton, a student at the Woodbridge Campus of Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) brought to his math class a high powered rifle that was concealed in a duffle bag. He waited in the hall for the class instructor, to arrive. Once she began teaching, he entered the classroom and proceeded to remove, aim, and successfully fire two shots from his rifle in her general direction at a distance of no more than six feet. The two bullets missed the intended target and as the student attempted to reload the weapon, it malfunctioned and the suspect left the classroom and sat down in the hall where the Police soon arrived and took him into custody.

The instructor had only a few seconds to react when she looked at the classroom entrance to see the barrel of the rifle being directed toward her. She immediately told her students to evacuate and she took cover under her desk, actions that contributed to there being no injuries or loss of life.

The Northern Virginia Community College police officer who was on duty performing a traffic stop in the parking area heard the shots, saw the evacuating students, and immediately did what he had been trained to do, which was to contact the Prince William County Police Department (PWCPD) and request back up. The first Prince William County Officer (PWC) arrived within fifty-five seconds and once additional reinforcements arrived on scene, the officers proceeded to enter the building to make contact and neutralize the shooter. They moved to the area where the shots were reported and encountered the "Shooter" where he was arrested, without any resistance, by the NVCC and Prince William County Police Officers.

By the time the arrest was complete every available police officer from, PWCPD, Northern Virginia Community College Police Department, and the Virginia State Police were either enroute or on-scene to begin the process of searching the campus room by room to ensure that there were no additional shooters or incendiary devices.

The Provost made initial calls to the Woodbridge Police Sergeant, learned he was off-campus, and subsequently attempted unsuccessfully to reach the College Police Chief. He then called to inform the President's office that there were reports of gunfire inside the Seefeldt building, and to confirm this information. Learning that the president was out of town, he contacted the Vice President of Finance and Administration who oversees the College Public Safety functions. The Vice President immediately notified the Police Chief and Emergency Planning Director who responded by reporting to the administration building. The College Incident Response Team (IRT) for this incident consisted of the Acting President (Vice President for Instructional and Information Technology), The Vice President of Finance & Administration, the Director of Information Technology and Support Services, Chief of Campus Police and the Emergency Planning Director. The IRT team operated at first from the office of The Vice President for Finance and Administration. The team began managing the incident under a modified version of the National Incident Command System (NIMS) model. Minimal staff and the venue location made it possible to have only the Incident Commander, Public Information, Operations, and Logistics roles staffed. The Police Chief continued to obtain situational awareness through her on-scene command staff as well as through the Prince William County Emergency Communications Center. The Emergency Planning Director, Vice President for Instructional & Information Technology and staff from IT Support Services took control of all alert notification for the campus, as key campus staff that had notification responsibility were sheltered in place and had not been able to send alarms. With police confirmation that there was actual danger on the campus, notification of the Woodbridge Campus became first priority for the IRT. The IRT began notifying and updating the campus that there was an "emergency on campus" and to shelter-in-place. Multiple alert technologies were used in an effort to reach and keep the maximum number of people safe. Text messages, computer pop-up alerts, and the Digital Visual Messaging System (Flat panel screens in hallways) were used. Classrooms phones were activated when it was determined the campus had not done so. All were very vital in the layered notification process that NVCC has in place. The Office of Public Information, Web Services & Digital Media were notified and began to provide support. Once the accuracy of information had been verified by the College and PWCPD, and provided to the IRT about the incident was posted on the College website. Text messages were sent to the entire college indicating the Woodbridge Campus was closed (specific messaging text is contained in the timeline). The Office of Student Mental Health and Behavior was also contacted and made aware that their services would be

needed post incident in the area of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) for students, faculty and staff.

Members of the Public Information Office, and administrative staff from the President and Executive Vice President's Offices joined the IRT, as the team relocated to the Board Room at the Presidential suite.

The entire college community was also notified via text message that the Woodbridge Campus was closed, and information about the incident was posted on the college website. The IRT provided updated information to the people who were sheltering in place by using the pop up alerts and classroom telephones. The IRT remained in constant communication with the Provost and he, in addition to the police officers, provided the necessary information to communicate with the media, college leadership, and the college community.

The search of the campus took approximately three hours. The police searched every classroom, closet, and office to make sure the campus was safe. As they cleared each room, they escorted all the students, faculty, and staff that had been sheltering in place out of the building to a designated area. The provost's office was searched and cleared; the police escorted him and his staff out of the building and he proceeded to the command post where he was informed of multiple media requests. He contacted the IRT to make them aware and obtain guidance from the Public Information Officer (PIO) that was located in the college EOC. The College PIO had been in continual communication with the PWCPD PIO and together they prepared the provost to issue the first public on-camera statement about the incident. The NVCC PIO provided guidance to the team on specific messaging to be posted on the college website, crafted and issued press releases, and served as a liaison to the web & digital media services office, provost, and PWCPD.

Another major component to this incident was mental health. The Special Assistant for Student Mental Health and Behavior and Associate Vice President for Student Services & Enrollment Management were informed by the Director of Emergency Planning that they would be the central point of contact for all Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) needs. This office immediately took action by searching

their database to learn if the accused shooter had been reported to the College's Care team whose mission is to provide a systematic response to students whose behavior is disruptive to themselves, to others or to the community. Finding no reports from any faculty members on Jason Hamilton, the Woodbridge Campus Dean of Students was contacted to discuss how they would provide mental health counseling to the students. They identified the hours that needed mental health coverage and decided on the following: December 9th 12:00-5:00 PM; December 10th 8:00 AM-8:00 PM; and on December 11th 10:00 AM-2:00PM on the Woodbridge Campus and from 10:00 AM-7:00 PM at the other campuses. The Human Resources Department was also contacted and provided support and identified previously established resources that were available to employees for mental health counseling services. The coordinated efforts between the Office of Mental Health and Behavior, Human Resources and the Woodbridge Campus Dean of Students, and Deans of Students at the other campuses resulted in counseling services being provided to the Woodbridge campus and the entire college community that week. This was accomplished through the volunteer efforts of multiple community mental health organizations like the Prince William Community Services Board, George Mason University, and CrisisLink, among others. Arrangements were made to meet with the students who were in the room where the shooting occurred on Thursday, at their regularly scheduled class time. The Woodbridge Campus Dean of Students made a personal phone call on Wednesday evening to each student, telling them where to meet on Thursday for this session. After the mental health debriefing session, the students were given appropriate handouts and counselors were available to meet with them individually. The Dean of Students at Woodbridge will manage any ongoing mental health needs for the students on this campus.

Some specific details of the incident, such as actions of the persons in the immediate vicinity at the time of the incident, have been withheld due to ongoing legal actions. Any information that was used in this report was utilized if it was verifiable through official capacities such as law enforcement or submitted to the Office of Emergency Planning in a report. The campus police are the official custodians of all redacted information as it pertains to the criminal elements and the Office of Emergency Planning is the custodian of all other information as it pertains to the incident.

Timeline of Incident¹

- 2:33 - First shot reported to Prince William County Police Department (PWCPD) by
NOVA Campus Police
- 2:34 - PWCPD arrive on scene
- 2:35 - Suspect encountered by PWCPD & NVCC Police Officers and placed into custody
- 2:36 - Provost notified President's Office and remained in constant contact while sheltering in place
- 2:36 - Vice President of Finance & Administration notified
- 2:37 - Emergency Planning Director notified by VP of Finance & Administration
- 2:38 - Police Chief notified by VP of Finance & Administration
- 2:39 - Emergency Planning Director established modified Emergency Operations Center
- 2:41 - Informed VP of Institutional Research via telephone that Public Information Office and Web & Digital Media Office would be used in response efforts.
- 2:41 - PWCPD notified College Police Chief that suspect was in custody and search for other suspects was to begin
- 2:42- Emergency Planning Director updated Acting President and requested that all necessary emergency notification technology be used to communicate possible threat(s).
- 2:48 - Pop-up alert sent to all Woodbridge computers
 - ✓ "Shelter in Place Until Further Notice. There is an emergency on campus"
- 2:54 - Text message sent and Visual Message System activated
 - ✓ WOODBRIDGE CAMPUS ONLY - Shelter in Place Until Further Notice. There is an emergency on campus
- 2:56 - Message put on campus digital display system
 - ✓ "SHELTER IN PLACE REMAIN IN A SECURE LOCATION UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE THERE IS AN EMERGENCY ON CAMPUS"

¹ Timeline is Approximate

3:13 - Message sent to all classroom phones

- ✓ Shelter in Place Until Further Notice. There is an emergency on campus.

3:26 - Updated pop-up alert sent to all Woodbridge computers

- ✓ "PW County Police are currently searching the Woodbridge Campus buildings. Please remain in your classrooms/offices to facilitate their search. More information coming."

3:31 - Sent another message to Campus Phone

- ✓ "PW County Police are currently searching the Woodbridge Campus buildings. Please remain in your classrooms/offices to facilitate their search. More information coming."

3:35 - Classes Cancelled text message sent to Woodbridge Users

- ✓ "Tue., Dec. 8 - Woodbridge Campus is closed and classes cancelled."(Woodbridge & Rapid Enroll users)

3:43 - Message on shooting and class cancellation posted to Web

3:52 - Message sent to all Woodbridge Campus Phones

- ✓ "As police clear each room during their search, they are releasing students/faculty/staff to leave the building and campus. Please do not move until directed by the police. We will continue to update regularly."

3:55 - Text Message sent to all college on Woodbridge closing

- ✓ "Tues-Dec 8, 2009--Woodbridge Campus is closed for all classes and activities."

3:58 - Slight Revision to Message on Website

4:23 - Woodbridge Campus Highway Radio 1630 am updated

- ✓ "Woodbridge Campus is closed until noon on Wednesday, December 9, 2009"

4:37 - Computer Pop ups sent to Woodbridge Computers

4:38 - Updated phone message sent to all classroom phones

5:43 - College Emergency Operation Center notified all occupants were out of the building and the Woodbridge Campus closed until noon Wednesday, December 9th.

6:30 – Emergency Planning Director established contact with the Special Assistant for Student Mental Health and Behavior and informed her that she would be the point of contact for Critical Incident Mental Health and all other mental health related issues related to this incident.

Office of Emergency Planning-For Official Use Only-Not for distribution

6:30 - Revised Web site and press release posted

7:09 - Text Message and email sent to all

- ✓ "Tues, Dec. 8 - Woodbridge NVCC Campus closed until noon on Wed 12/9 for police follow-up. See the web for details."

7:10 - Woodbridge Highway Radio System updated with current closing information

7:10 - NOVA Website Updated

7:30 - Emergency Operations Center Closed

10:43 - Text Message and email to College

- ✓ "Tues, Dec 8 - Woodbridge NVCC Campus is now closed all day and evening on Wednesday, 12/9/09. See Web for details."

10:50 - Email sent to All Faculty & Staff, All Adjunct Faculty, and All Students

- ✓ "Tuesday, December 8, 2009 – 10:50pm The Woodbridge Campus of Northern Virginia Community College is NOW closed all day and evening on Wednesday, December 9, 2009 due to the incident Tuesday afternoon. Students, Faculty and Staff can come to the campus after 12 noon on Wednesday to claim personal belongings."

Lessons Learned

Below are lessons learned as identified by the College Police, Woodbridge Campus, Office of Mental Health and Behavior, Human Resources, and the Office of Emergency Planning. These lessons highlight response procedures that worked well and some that need improvement. The Police Chief's decision for the department to participate with the City of Alexandria's Police Department on mandatory active shooter training as recently as two days (December 5) before this shooting incident proved to be a major determinant of the outcome.

- Campus Police Office did not have floor plans, extra master keys, and grand master keys to facilitate the room by room search
- Campus Police Office located in the main portion of the building which has a higher probability of being affected by an emergency incident which could hinder the retrieval of additional equipment and limit access to communications technology
- Regional law enforcement cooperation between College Police excellent i. e. Active Shooter training with Fairfax County and City of Alexandria police departments and access to public safety radio frequencies in all jurisdictions served by the college.
- Responding to the Woodbridge Campus was hazardous, both for the Police Lieutenant and the public, without use of a vehicle equipped with emergency lights and sirens.
- Leased Pool cars are not safe to use as emergency response vehicles by police leadership who are designated as "incident commanders" college wide
- No college public information support at incident site
- No senior College Police leadership in the EOC to manage other campuses' law enforcement personnel while the Chief was at the incident on scene.
- Minimal staff available to manage redistribution of personal property to the students, faculty, and staff, which caused police resources to be diverted to support this effort.
- Identified College Emergency Operations Center (CT355) not utilized, minimizing access to available technology, i. e. computers, phones, news channels.
- Limited redundancy of trained public safety staff with key response responsibilities
- Higher priority law enforcement duties prevented police officers from activating or initiating emergency alerts to the campus community

- Campus unaware of correct college administrator to contact first to report incident
- Campus unaware of correct media response procedures
- Limited access and functionality of LenSec camera system made situational awareness difficult from the college and campus level
- Plans are lacking for how other campuses should respond when an incident occurs on another campus
- No pre-approved functional language for initial notification messages which could improve initial notification times
- Some Faculty and Staff unaware of how to respond (shelter-in-place vs. evacuate)
- Emergency Operations Roles insufficiently defined for college and campus staff
- Alert notification time and messaging to other campuses was vague and not timely
- Successful delivery of text messages from the text messaging system may decrease after the initial message is sent as more people begin texting and cell sites may filter messages or be overwhelmed with traffic
- Delays of text messages sent to cell phones due to spam filters, increased network traffic and other factors may cause disparate perception of how timely the initial message may have been sent.
- Character limits minimize the effectiveness of text messages
- Many classroom doors could not be locked without a key.
- Emergency Responder NOVACARD recognized by police allowing card holder access through secured checkpoints
- The IRT followed the National Incident Command System procedures, but was hampered by lack of adequate staffing who were assigned to respond to the EOC as well as from inadequate training and exercises
- The campus was not able to effectively utilize the National Incident Command System Procedures due to inadequate training and exercises
- Lack of adequate staffing of the EOC resulted in the senior management having to function as both the EOC incident command staff handling immediate duties, and as the executive policy group overseeing critical decisions

- The campus was not prepared to immediately issue emergency alerts, but the ability for central staff to activate those systems remotely as a back-up worked as planned.
- No functioning exterior notification and communication equipment to inform building evacuees and others of the condition
- The campus police having 800mhz portable radios that allowed instant communication with the PWC PD proved to be very effective.

Recommendations

- Provide campus police updated floor plans, extra master and grand master keys to increase the number of authorized personnel that can perform searches so that the building can be cleared and turned back over to the college faster.
- Determine best location for police offices that minimize the chances that the office is in an affected area.
- Provide funding for fully equipped police cruisers for College Police leadership (Lieutenants) to support safe, lawful, centralized police response to any campus.
- Identify and inform college as to who is the Public Information Officer for each campus or provide basic training to identified campus personnel who can serve as initial media liaison until PIO support arrives
- When the Police Chief is dispatched to an incident scene a member of the Police leadership with college wide authority over the police department should go to the College Emergency Operations center to maintain continuity of leadership.
- Review Emergency Operations Center policies and procedures
- Establish 24/7 Police Emergency Communications to do the following:
 - provide one number to each campus to call to begin notification process to students, faculty, and staff via alert notification technology
 - Make notification to appropriate college administrator
 - Decrease time to issue alerts
 - Obtain information to provide situational awareness to leadership
- Review Camera Access levels
- Provide campuses with alert notification policy that provides pre-approved alert notification messages and technology based upon incident
- Standardize emergency operations plans to comply with the National Incident Management System
 - Identify and define roles and responsibilities for college and campus staff with emergency response duties, i.e. Mental Health, Human Resources, Business Managers, Provosts, Deans, and College Leadership
- Determine appropriate staffing levels to support planning, implementation of recommendations, issue alerts, and perform additional incident priorities.
- Campuses should be responsible for initial alert notification to increase response time and ensure the maximum number of people are safe, instead of searching for specific college administrators to make decisions
- Determine the specific emergency response training that is needed for faculty, staff, and administration.
- Determine the best method of delivery for emergency response training.
- Provide funding to increase threat neutralization and incident management capability of public safety departments, specifically in the following areas:
 - Training
 - Weapons
 - Specialized Equipment
 - Personnel

- Develop plans for how a campus should respond when an incident occurs on another campus.
- Determine or establish classroom lock implementation and maintenance policy and procedure to ensure centralized response.
- Determine the best method to improve communications to building evacuees and others on incident status
- Identify types of drill that the campuses need to perform and develop training and drill calendar
- Obtain incident information within 48 hours from all involved parties to capture the most accurate data for improved reporting capability
- Rename the “Office of Emergency Planning” to “Office of Emergency Management” as emergency planning is function of Emergency Management which the discipline, this would also help with marketing and awareness.
- Develop a multilayer/redundant response/notification team process on campuses, which would allow team members to be trained and empowered to activate the appropriate alert notification technology in response to an emergency.

Glossary of Key Terms

Coordination: The process of systematically analyzing a situation, developing relevant information, and informing appropriate command authority of viable alternatives for selection of the most effective combination of available resources to meet specific objectives. The coordination process (which can be either intra- or interagency) does not involve dispatch actions. However, personnel responsible for coordination may perform command or dispatch functions within the limits established by specific agency delegations, procedures, legal authority, etc.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM): A way of providing crisis counseling that includes debriefing people who have been exposed to a traumatic event.

Emergency Management Coordinator/Director: The individual within each political subdivision that has coordination responsibility for jurisdictional emergency management.

Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs): The physical location at which the coordination of information and resources to support domestic incident management activities normally takes place. An EOC may be a temporary facility or may be located in a more central or permanently established facility, perhaps at a higher level of organization within a jurisdiction. EOCs may be organized by major functional disciplines (e.g., fire, law enforcement, and medical services), by jurisdiction (e.g., Federal, State, regional, county, city, tribal), or some combination thereof.

Emergency Operations Plan (EOP): The plan that each jurisdiction has and maintains for responding to appropriate hazards.

Event: A planned, non-emergency activity. ICS can be used as the management system for a wide range of events, e.g., parades, concerts, or sporting events.

General Staff: A group of incident management personnel organized according to function and reporting to the Incident Commander. The General Staff normally consists of the Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, Logistics Section Chief, and Finance/Administration Section Chief.

Incident Response Team (IRT): The college personnel designated to manage incidents on any campus via the College EOC

Incident Commander (IC): The individual responsible for all incident activities, including the development of strategies and tactics and the ordering and the release of resources. The IC has overall authority and responsibility for conducting incident operations and is responsible for the management of all incident operations at the incident site.

Incident Command Post (ICP): The field location at which the primary tactical-level, on-scene incident command functions are performed. The ICP may be co-located with the incident base or other incident facilities and is normally identified by a green rotating or flashing light

Incident Command System (ICS): A standardized on-scene emergency management construct specifically designed to provide for the adoption of an integrated organizational structure that reflects the complexity and demands of single or multiple incidents, without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. ICS is the combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure, designed to aid in the management of resources during incidents. It is used for all kinds of emergencies and is applicable to small as well as large and complex incidents. ICS is used by various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private, to organize field-level incident management operations.

Initial Action: The actions taken by resources that are the first to arrive at an incident site.

Initial Response: Resources initially committed to an incident.

Joint Information Center (JIC): A facility established to coordinate all incident-related public information activities. It is the central point of contact for all news media at the scene of the incident. Public information officials from all participating agencies should collocate at the JIC.

Joint Information System (JIS): Integrates incident information and public affairs into a cohesive organization designed to provide consistent, coordinated, timely information during crisis or incident operations. The mission of the JIS is to provide a structure and system for developing and delivering coordinated interagency messages; developing, recommending, and executing public information plans and strategies on behalf of the Incident Commander; advising the Incident Commander concerning public affairs issues that could affect a response effort; and controlling rumors and inaccurate information that could undermine public confidence in the emergency response effort.

National Incident Management System (NIMS): A system mandated by HSPD-5 that provides a consistent nationwide approach for Federal, State, local, and tribal governments; the private sector; and nongovernmental organizations to work effectively and efficiently together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity. To provide for interoperability and compatibility among Federal, State, local, and tribal capabilities, the NIMS includes a core set of concepts, principles, and terminology. HSPD-5 identifies these as the ICS; multi-agency coordination systems; training; identification and management of resources (including systems for classifying types of resources); qualification and certification; and the collection, tracking, and reporting of incident information and incident resources.

Unified Command: An application of ICS used when there is more than one agency with incident jurisdiction or when incidents cross political jurisdictions. Agencies work together through the designated members of the Unified Command, often the senior person from agencies and/or disciplines participating in the Unified Command, to establish a common set of objectives and strategies and a single Incident Action Plan.

