

## **Surviving an Active Shooter: A Dozen Steps You Should Take Today for a Safer Tomorrow**

The 2019 holiday active shooter events in New York and Texas are only two of the latest mass shootings. There were 434 mass killing events<sup>1</sup> in 2019, with over 230 occurring in the last six months in 39 states<sup>2</sup>. These killings have not been limited to schools, houses or worship, and places of business. They have also occurred at malls, concerts, sporting events, restaurants and even a housewarming, to mention only a few locations.

There are many errors of judgment regarding active shooter incidents. First is that police and security forces can prevent these events. This is wrong; police and security are *responders*. They arrive *after* the initiation of the killing. This realization leads us to the second error. The response to a shooter is only one phase of the event that citizens and venue managers must address. Indeed, active situational awareness and reporting are key to preventing an active shooter in the first place<sup>3</sup>. The subsequent mitigation and recovery phases must also be addressed to minimize casualties, limit damages, limit liability and resume operations expeditiously. Third, people don't believe they are likely to be victims, but we have seen these events are ubiquitous and occur frequently.

So, what can you do to reduce the probability of a shooting event at your location and, if one does occur, limit its consequences? Here are several low-cost strategies, categorized in the four phases noted above.

### In the Prevention/Deterrence Phase

Ben Franklin's 1736 adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" aptly supports the importance of preventive steps in saving lives. You can do many things to maximize the chance of survival and minimize damages:

1. Review your policies and procedures. Are they up to date? Do they account for recent construction? Are they available to staff, students, visitors and guests?
2. Conduct a security assessment. Where are you vulnerable to unauthorized entry, the placement of explosive devices, secure killing locations, the creation of killing fields, etc.? What are the potential targets of interest at your site (e.g., concentrations of people, laboratories, art displays that may offend a segment of the population)? These locations bear greater scrutiny.
3. Teach your people how to recognize a threat. For instance, historically, who are shooters? What are their motivations? When do they kill, and how? What are the signs of concealed carry and potential terrorism? Teach people how to identify these "tells" and the fastest (and, if possible, anonymous) means of reporting them.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as 4 or more people killed in one spree. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_mass\\_shootings\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_in\\_2019](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mass_shootings_in_the_United_States_in_2019) and <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2018-041019.pdf/view>

<sup>2</sup> In the last six months of 2019, 29 of the 39 states had multiple shooting events and 8 states had 10 shootings or more: Illinois and Texas, 24 each; California, 22; Louisiana, 13; Florida, North Carolina and Missouri, 11 each; and Pennsylvania, 10.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.campusafety.com/university/how-to-improve-situational-awareness-on-campus/>

4. Teach your people what to do. People want information so provide it at new employee and student orientations, convocations, etc. List the Run-Hide-Fight (or similar strategy) link ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0&feature=player_embedded)) in student syllabi (and other employee materials) and discuss it. Post instructive materials and procedures around your location<sup>4</sup>, in employee newsletters, and your website. Also identify and mark locations that provide cover (stops a bullet) as opposed to concealment.
5. Conduct a tabletop exercise (TTX). First responders can't do it all. Everyone has a role to play throughout the four phases of an active event and often, the goals between phases and between actors vary and may even conflict. Get together with these actors and invite local responders to step through a scenario. For instance, who will be in charge in each phase? How will officials communicate with each other? You'll be surprised at what you learn about your state of preparedness!
6. Conduct campus walk-throughs with first responders (police and fire). Give local responders, upon whom you'll rely for assistance even if you have your own police or armed security, an opportunity to learn about how to enter buildings, where to park, the location of cover, the weapons and tactics of your own responders, etc. Also, provide training venues for locals at your location and, if possible, have your security forces train with them. This action will improve the response time and effectiveness of responders and, to the extent these preparations become known, may discourage potential shooters from attacking your location.

### In the Response Phase

Besides demonstrating resolve and capability, many of the recommendations above may discourage an active shooter. Active shooters want to kill as many people as quickly as possible so effective early warning and preventive measures may encourage them to go elsewhere. Additionally, teach people the following:

7. How to choose a personal survival strategy. No single survival strategy works for all locations, in all threat scenarios, and for all people. Go beyond the general Run-Hide-Fight, ALICE and ALERRT strategy prescriptions and teach people how to adopt a strategy suitable to their specific conditions.
8. Get off the X and do not cluster. It is very difficult to hit a moving target, especially if one's adrenaline is pumping, heart is thumping, and respiration is elevated as would be a shooter's. Even if hiding in a classroom or other location, move when the shooter enters. Whether one hides in a classroom or evacuates and then hides, do not cluster. Cluster targets are easy to hit without having to aim and therefore make attractive targets. Remaining stationary and clustering with others puts you at risk.

### In the Mitigation Phase

9. Once you escape, do not leave the scene. Get behind cover (but don't cluster) and await further instructions from responders. Over 300 responders arrived at the Orlando shooting scene. They included law enforcement officials and paramedics. Clearly, an effective active shooter response involves ending the threat and getting prompt medical attention for the victims. The last thing you want is to have evacuees clogging the roads and delaying the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2018-041019.pdf/view>

arrival of life-saving responders. Also, evacuees will have important crime scene information for the police.

10. Institute a Stop the Bleed Program. Most people who succumb to active shooters do so because they bleed out. Stop the Bleed training is free and easy. Bring it to your location and tell people where they can obtain tourniquets. Consider locating tourniquets throughout your locations (e.g., collocating them with fire extinguishers).

#### In the Recovery Phase

11. Identify the recovery goals and priorities for your staff. The TTX advocated above is a great way to identify and work through different and often competing goals of your staff. For instance, the Police and Facilities will want to delay reopening of the shooting location until the criminal investigation is completed and repairs are made. On the other hand, a college's financial leaders will want to reopen the school as soon as possible. Similarly, there will be pressure for the PIO to provide information while the institutions attorneys will recommend tighter information control. These are just two of many considerations you don't want to confront on the fly.
12. Evaluate Your Procedures. We tell evacuees to leave their bags and parcels behind to speed up their exit and to preclude their being misidentified as a shooter by responders. How will you protect the handbags, wallets, car keys, medicines and the like left behind? How will these items be collected and returned, and when and by whom? Who will inventory these items and document their return? Similarly, how will victims be united with their loved ones? Where? Where will loved ones park and how will they be kept safe and out of the way? Where will you locate the press? Etc.

#### A Final Thought

These recommendations are not expensive or beyond the ken of schools, business, churches and the like. Failure to implement them, however remote one considers the likelihood of a shooter, exposes one to significant liability. Worse, it threatens lives that might otherwise be saved,