

Fact Sheet - Active Shooters

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: Crisis Management, Crisis Communications, Facility, Program and Transportation Safety

Key Considerations and Approaches

More than 160 active shootings were documented in the U.S. from 2000 to 2013 and the number of events escalates each year. The agreed-upon definition of an active shooter by U.S. government agencies—including the White House, U.S. Department of Justice/FBI, U.S. Department of Education, and U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency—is “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.” Implicit in this definition is that the subject’s criminal actions involve the use of firearms.

Active shooter incidents occur in areas where the general population is not anticipating danger: movie theaters, schools, hospitals, shopping malls, and businesses. These events are very hard to anticipate, and can last minutes or be protracted over many hours.

Preparing for an Active Shooter Situation

As with any aspect of a business continuity or emergency plan, nonprofit leadership teams should consider a number of key issues when formulating an active shooter response. Consistent with key considerations identified by the Healthcare and Public Health Sector Coordinating Council, the Center recommends that teams consider:

- Establishing a preferred method for reporting active shooter incidents
- Communicating emergency escape procedures (e.g., floor plans, safe areas, route assignments) to key stakeholders
- Instituting lockdown procedures for individual units, service site and facilities
- Integrating shooter response plans with the organization’s or facility’s Emergency Operations Plan, crisis plan and/or business continuity plan
- Documenting key information concerning local area emergency response agencies and hospitals (e.g., name, telephone number, and distance from your location)

Preparation is not complete until the plan is documented and shared with first responders (e.g., local police, Sheriffs, SWAT, FBI) in the community in which the nonprofit is based. Emergency responders will also need a diagram of the building identifying all possible entry points, the number of staff and clients within the building, access controls and locks. Communicating these security measures with first responders is key to enabling the first responders to assist the nonprofit in a crisis involving an active shooter.

Response Plan

There is no single best method to react to an active shooter. Prior planning and careful practice will empower you and your staff to make the best decisions in a heightened situation, with the goal of preserving lives.

Your primary goal in an active shooter scenario is to reduce or limit the shooter’s access to potential victims and

thereby mitigate the loss of lives. The Run-Hide-Fight active shooter video and public service announcement created by the City of Houston, Texas and the Department of Homeland Security is the most referenced YouTube video on the subject with over three million YouTube views. The suggested approach is clear, uses language common in other response situations, and was designed to give three distinct steps to take in a frightening event when thoughts are not clear, similar to “Stop-Drop-Roll” for during a fire. The critics to the popular Run- Hide-Fight approach suggest that each step has its flaws. Running could drive you straight into further danger, hiding could make you a sitting target, and fighting could exceed your self-defense skills. The overarching reminder is that each action of Run-Hide-Fight should be selected only when it is deemed safe for your specific situation.

RUN - IMMEDIATELY EVACUATE THE AREA.

This step is consistent with a human being’s natural response in a dangerous situation—to remove yourself from harm. Unfortunately, this is not always a viable option as escaping could draw more attention and put you in closer proximity to the shooter. There is compelling evidence that those closest to the active shooter are most likely to suffer serious and fatal injuries. With that in mind, if a safe path is available, take it.

HIDE - SEEK COVER AND DENY SHOOTER ACCESS.

If you aren’t able to safely leave the area of the active shooter, your next option should be to avoid detection, and wait for emergency response to arrive. Hiding can be dangerous because it can leave you trapped if the intruder detects your location. This step is advised when you are unable to exit safely and you are not sure of the intruder’s location. Find a place to take cover, barricade the door and silence your cellphone. If possible, call 911 or emergency from a landline or your cellphone.

FIGHT - ATTACK OR INCAPACITATE THE ASSAILANT.

This method should be used when it is not possible or practical to run or hide. Fight the attacker aggressively with all resources and weapons available, including ordinary items such as a pen, fire extinguisher or even hot coffee.

Snapshot

The following characteristics of the 160 active shooter incidents identified between 2000 and 2013 are rooted:

- An average of 11.4 incidents occurred annually.
- An average of 6.4 incidents occurred in the first 7 years studied, and an average of 16.4 occurred in the last 7 years.
- 70.0% of the incidents occurred in either a commerce/business or educational environment.¹⁰
- Shootings occurred in 40 of 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- 60.0% of the incidents ended before police arrived.

* A handful of those identified as “wounded” were not injured by gun fire but rather suffered injuries incidental to the event, such as being hit by flying objects/shattered glass or falling while running. This does not account for all those wounded in this fashion or any mental or emotional trauma that resulted in potential medical treatment.

¹⁰ All percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Resources

Discussion of Run, Hide, Fight Response – “Incorporating Active Shooter Incident Planning into Health Care Facility Emergency Operations Plans”

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation Federal Emergency Management Agency

www.phe.gov/preparedness/planning/Documents/active-shooter-planning-eop2014.pdf

Operations plans – “Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship”

FEMA

- Department of Education
- Department of Justice
- Department of Justice _ Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Department of Health & Human Services

www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/developing_eops_for_houses_of_worship_final.pdf

First Responders jurisdiction – Snapshot of active shooter incidents 2000 to 2013

- Department of Justice _ Federal Bureau of Investigation

<https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/fbi-releases-study-on-active-shooter-incidents>

What to do in a crisis situation – “Active Shooter Preparedness”

- Homeland Security – www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness

Lessons learned in crisis situations – “Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education”

- FEMA – www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/33597

The information contained in this Fact Sheet is intended to help nonprofit organizations begin formulating their procedures in the event of an active shooter. To learn more about how the Nonprofit Risk Management Center can help your nonprofit prepare for these risks and others, contact us at info@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504.