

Active Shooter/ Active Threat:

Are You Prepared?



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Active Shooter/Active Threat: Are You Prepared?

While it's scary to use the word "epidemic" when describing active shootings, these incidents are becoming more frequent. In 2017, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) identified 30 incidents — the highest number ever recorded in a one-year period. In addition, the number of people injured or killed during each incident is rising.

Employers have a legal obligation to provide their employees with a work environment free from harm, including physical violence. Given the increase in workplace shootings in recent years, some employers are going a step further and teaching their employees how to react if such dangers occur in their places of business.

Knowing how to respond if confronted with an active threat is just as important as knowing what to do in the event of a fire or tornado. Even though the likelihood of a violent situation may be low, you should still be prepared, especially when the results can be so devastating.

What exactly is an "active shooter?"

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, an active shooter is "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area." An FBI study identified 250 active shooter incidents in the U.S. from 2000 – 2017 that killed or wounded a total of 2,217 people.

The majority of incidents ended before law enforcement arrived. To help prevent loss of human life in an active shooting incident, companies and individual employees must take steps to plan and prepare for these types of events.

Defining workplace violence

Violent acts committed by past or current employees fall under the category of workplace violence (violence, or the threat of violence, against employees, supervisors, customers, or vendors). Although there is no specific federal OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) standard which addresses active shootings in the workplace, the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act, in Section 5(a)(1), states "each employer shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees."

In many cases, employees who become violent in the workplace first exhibited warning signs in the form of observable behavior or simply told others what they were planning to do, making themselves a "recognized hazard." As such, any employer who fails to take feasible steps to minimize these threats could face an OSH Act violation as well as negligence or liability lawsuits from surviving employees or victims' families. Worse, an employer could lose a trusted employee and valued friend during the incident.

Active shooter profile

The unfortunate truth is there are few similarities among active shooters, the locations they target, or their choice of victims.

The FBI study revealed the majority of shooters were males acting alone, but other demographic factors varied widely. Aside from gender (94% male) and race (63% white), there are no similarities in age, education, employment, or criminal background of the shooters studied. Creating an active shooter profile simply isn't possible.

These incidents have taken place in rural areas, suburban communities, and large cities. Most incidents take place in areas of commerce, but shooters also target schools, open areas, government buildings, residences, churches, and healthcare facilities.

Active shooting incidents start abruptly and typically last just minutes, with the majority ending before police arrive on the scene. Because these events unfold so quickly, employees should learn how to take their safety into their own hands.

 The majority of active shooter incidents end before police arrive on the scene.

Take the proactive approach

The key to stopping workplace violence is to identify and address potential problems before they escalate into violent outbursts.

Train employees to recognize warning signs in coworkers and encourage them to report their findings to a supervisor, talk to a member of Human Resources (HR), or use an anonymous reporting avenue.

Common warning signs of a potential active shooter incident include:

- A notable increase in frustration or picking fights,
- An obsession with weapons,
- An increase in alcohol or drug use, and
- Symptoms of depression or thoughts of suicide.

It's important to reassure employees they will be protected from any form of retaliation if they do make a report and ensure them that their reports will be handled as confidentially as possible.

Train employees to be proactive

Properly training employees to survive an active shooting incident can save lives. Expert research and agency guidance recommends taking the three following approaches:

- **Avoid** — at the first sounds of gunfire, employees need to realize it is not fireworks or some other prank. If they can, they should move toward a safe exit immediately and get out of the facility as quickly as possible.
- **Deny** — if the shooter is blocking their exit or they are physically unable to escape, employees should deny the shooter access to them. Find a safe room, preferably with a locking door, shut

off the lights, silence cell phones, and make no noise. Barricade the door with heavy objects if it can't be locked.

- **Defend** — if avoiding and denying aren't possible, employees should take every effort to defend themselves as a last resort. Use whatever objects are within reach and attack the shooter without hesitating. Don't fight fair, and don't stop until the shooter is incapacitated and disarmed.

Conduct a threat assessment

Since threats can also come from outside your place of employment, it's important to conduct a risk assessment that examines your building and the access to it. The goal of this detailed evaluation is to identify areas of vulnerability.

When conducting a risk assessment, seek the assistance of local law enforcement. These experts are aware of any local threats and have the knowledge and understanding from previous experience.

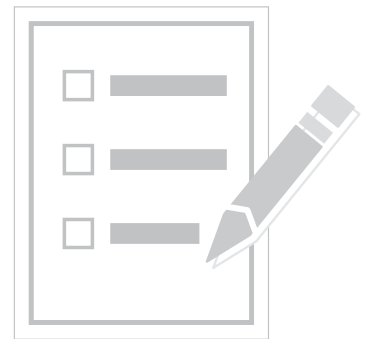
Create an emergency action plan

Unfortunately, even the best prevention measures cannot stop all acts of violence; however, creating an emergency action plan specifically for an active shooting will ensure all employees know how to respond.

Some items you'll want to include in the plan are how to:

- Report an active shooter,
- Alert other employees,
- Respond after the active shooter incident, and
- Account for all employees afterward.

When developing your company's emergency action plan, seek input from members of HR, your training team, the owner or property manager of your facility, local law enforcement, and emergency responders in the area.



It's important to create an emergency action plan to ensure all employees know how to respond to an active shooter.

Conduct a tabletop exercise

After your emergency action plan has been written, members of management, HR, and your company's emergency response team should gather and conduct a tabletop exercise.

This exercise will take attendees step by step through the entire emergency process, generating discussion that could lead to the plan's improvement.

An active shooting tabletop exercise poses questions to consider during each phase: prevention, response, and recovery. Essentially, during a tabletop exercise, you are role playing the steps you would take during an actual incident.

Consult with local law enforcement

Just as with a risk assessment, you can also ask members of your local law enforcement for input on your emergency action plan. And, you can take a cue from real-life events you see on the news. Such incidents serve as reminders to review your plan and look for areas of improvement. Meet regularly with your leadership team and discuss recent incidents.

When you meet with your leadership team, ask questions such as:

- How would we have handled that?
- What do we think the company did well?
- What could they have done differently?
- What are the lessons learned?



The level of police involvement in your company's preparation is up to you.

Because active shootings last just minutes, some companies go a step further and provide local police with advance access to:

- Keys or key cards into the building;
- Floor plans; and
- Surveillance cameras.

The level of police involvement in preparation is up to your company. Talk to law enforcement about your options and provide only what you are comfortable with.

Incorporate practice drills

The decision of whether or not to incorporate practice drills within your active shooter/active threat training is not to be taken lightly. Active shooter drills can be traumatizing, even when conducted carefully.

The goal with any drill is not to frighten, but to teach an individual's body how to react in an emergency by creating muscle memory, or the ability to act without conscious thought. Rather than just hearing what to do, going through the physical motions will help employees respond, rather than freeze, during an actual incident.

If you choose to conduct practice drills at your company, you may want to consider making them voluntary rather than mandatory. The realistic nature of such practices may be too intense for some to handle. And, you'll want to seek assistance from local law enforcement officers. They are the experts when it comes to designing and conducting practice drills.

Recovering from an incident

Recovery begins the moment the active shooter is incapacitated, and law enforcement renders the building safe. Beginning to account for individuals inside the building and reconnecting employees with family members should all be a part of your company's emergency action plan and discussed during your tabletop exercise.

Employees may have fled, leaving personal items like jackets, purses, cell phones, and car or house keys behind. After things settle down a bit, there will be attempts to retrieve personal belongings. Because the building is a crime scene, someone from law enforcement will need to gather the items, not a member of HR or management.

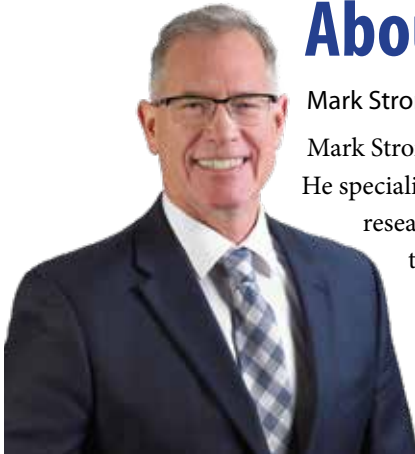
Depending on the size of your company, this may be quite an undertaking. In addition to recovering items left behind, police may not allow employees to drive personal vehicles home until after they have been searched and deemed safe. Consider discussing each of these prospects as you work with law enforcement during your active shooter preparations.

Are you prepared?

An active shooter is something no one wants to think about, much less plan for. But, as someone responsible for helping to maintain a safe workplace, you have an obligation to do just that.

Knowing how to respond to an active threat isn't enough. To plan for (and recover from) such an unthinkable event, businesses must thoroughly prepare long before a threat even exists. Are you prepared?

About the Author



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Mark Stromme is one of the lead workplace safety editors at J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. He specializes in workplace security and OSHA general industry safety. At J. J. Keller Mark researches and develops content for a variety of proprietary products, including training videos, newsletters, handbooks, manuals, and online solutions. Mark has authored whitepapers and presented in front of industry groups. His work has also appeared in *ISHN*, *Occupational Health & Safety*, *BIC*, *EHS Today*, *Modern Contractor Solutions*, and *IDC Industrial Review*. Mark speaks frequently to industry groups about safety and regulatory issues.

How We Can Help

Active Shooter/Active Threat

Developed alongside law enforcement and safety professionals, this training program will help employees at all levels protect themselves against workplace threats.

The training is comprised of two programs:

- **How To Survive** helps employees anticipate and recognize active shooter situations and respond appropriately and immediately if they are faced with one. It covers the warning signs of workplace violence, preparing for an active threat, and the best course of action to take (avoid, deny, defend).
- **Organizational Preparedness & Recovery** helps HR, safety management, and Emergency Response Team members prepare their company for an active shooter incident as well as recover from the tragedy. It covers risk assessments, an emergency action plan, practice drills, working with law enforcement, counseling and communication.

Active Shooter/Active Threat is available in DVD and Video Training Book formats.

Visit SHRMStore.org for more information



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