

ACTIVE SHOOTER

ACTIVE SHOOTER ON CAMPUS – Best Practices

Source: Keenan & Associates

Introduction:

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. More than 170 active shooter incidents have occurred since the fateful Columbine incident in 1999 and have taught us that campus shootings evolve quickly and they are unpredictable. The potential for an active shooter incident exists on every campus throughout the United States today. Good physical security, pre-planning and preparation are the keys to surviving an incident and keeping your campus as safe as possible.

Risk Control:

It is during the first few moments of an active shooter incident, when the perpetrator has the element of surprise that most casualties will occur. Even when a 911 notification is made immediately, the active shooter incident will most likely end before law enforcement officers can intervene. That's why it is vitally important to plan and prepare ahead of time. You will be the first responder.

Active shooter planning and preparation should include, but not be limited to:

- Conducting security and vulnerability assessments to identify existing shortfalls
- Implementing of physical security measures to control ingress/ egress
- Drilling various scenarios frequently with staff and students
- Working closely with local emergency responders to formulate response plans
- Providing education for staff, students and parents
- Providing mental health services for staff and students at your campus
- Implementing anonymous reporting systems for students and staff

Have you heard the adage, “Train as you do, do as you train”? Police, military and other emergency responders know that in high stress situations you will always fall back on your training. That is why they prepare extensively both mentally and physically before an incident ever occurs. Frequent realistic training and drilling will give your staff and students the confidence and skills they need to respond appropriately during a high stress situation and survive a critical incident such as an active shooter.

With that in mind, it is important to remember that what works for one incident may not necessarily work for another incident. Training and drills should be varied and you should consider things such as:

- What if the Administration Office is the first area affected during an incident?
- What if key elements of your infrastructure are lost (i.e. power, phones, PA, radios, etc.)?
- How will you respond if a diversionary fire is started during an incident?

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- Are your staff and students trained to respond in a dynamic manner?
 - Does your response plan work if you have multiple shooters on campus?

It is important to notify 911 as quickly as possible during an active shooter incident. The reporting party should be prepared to provide the emergency dispatcher with the following information:

- Location of the active shooter(s)
- Number of shooter(s)
- Physical description of shooter(s)
- Number and type of weapons
- Number of potential victims at location

A lot of lessons have been learned since the fatal Columbine High School shooting in April 20, 1999. Law enforcement agencies have changed the way they respond to campus shootings and schools have too. The current and most common best practice for active shooter incidents on campus is referred to as, “Run, Hide, Fight”. This refers to the three options staff and students have during an active shooter incident.

1. Run

- Have an escape route and plan in mind
- Leave your belongings behind
- Evacuate regardless if others follow
- Help others escape if possible
- Do not attempt to move the wounded
- Prevent others from entering the area
- Keep your hands visible
- Call 911 when safe

2. Hide

- Hide out of shooters view
- Lock doors to prevent entry to your hiding place
- Silence your cell phone (no ringer or vibrate)

3. Fight

- Fight as a last resort and only when your life is in imminent danger
- Attempt to incapacitate the shooter
- Act with as much physical aggression as possible
- Improvise weapons or throw items at the shooter
- Commit to your actions. Your life depends on it.

Initial responding officers at an active shooter scene will bypass the injured. Rescue teams will follow the initial officers to treat and remove any injured persons. Staff and students should remain as calm as possible and do the following when contacted by law enforcement:

- Follow all instructions and commands

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- Drop any items in your hands (i.e., bags, jackets)
 - Raise hands and spread fingers until instructed to do differently
 - Keep hands visible at all times and avoid quick movements toward officers
 - Do not grab on to officers for safety
 - Avoid pointing, screaming and yelling
 - Do not ask officer questions while evacuating

Staff and students will be held by law enforcement until the situation is under control and all witnesses have been identified and questioned. It is important that your District has a practiced re-unification plan in place to avoid additional chaos and ensure that parents and students do not suffer additional trauma after the incident.