

3 MINUTES TO LIVE

Responding to the ACTIVE SHOOTER

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The **ACTIVE SHOOTER** is a threat that has been around for decades. Recent shootings targeting vulnerable populations, such as small children, and widespread media attention have drawn a tremendous amount of attention to this violent crime. Most people, whether at work, play, or social outings, give little thought to the possibility of an active shooter incident erupting and changing their lives forever. However, the possibility of this rapidly evolving, life changing event is always present.

The location does not matter. The time of day does not matter. The active shooter incident can occur anywhere at any time. For the less rapidly evolving events, that do not involve an active shooter, people will think to contact law enforcement and await their arrival to handle the situation. But with the active shooter, the event generally unravels much too quickly to “wait” for help and people must take action to save themselves and others.

When we break down the timeline of the active shooter incident, in many cases it has already ended prior to the arrival of law enforcement:

1. ***The active shooter is recognized*** – This may come in many forms. An intruder enters an establishment and begins to shoot, or an employee recognizes a stranger carrying a weapon, or acting oddly either by the way they are dressed, or the way they are acting. If they react appropriately the call to law enforcement may come at this time. This could be anywhere from 1 minutes to 4 minutes into the event.
2. ***Call to police*** – When the police are notified of the active shooter, the dispatcher will need to collect information in order to send officers to the scene of the shooting. Initially, just basic information is collected so that help can be dispatched as quickly as possible. If the caller is in panic, it may be more difficult to get the basic information and take longer. Additionally, police dispatch may be inundated with copious calls coming from the same location.
3. ***Police are dispatched to the scene*** – Once the dispatcher has the basic information needed, they will notify police officers to respond to the scene. The dispatcher will stay on the phone with the caller(s) to obtain valuable additional information, such as the number of shooters and their current location, so the officers can respond in the safest manner possible. As all of this is taking place the shooters are generally very mobile, taking lives as they move.
4. ***Police arrive on the scene*** – Once police arrive on the scene, they must determine the best location for entry into the building. This is determined by the information the dispatcher has gathered and supplied to them, and their observation of the scene. Generally, they will make their entry when



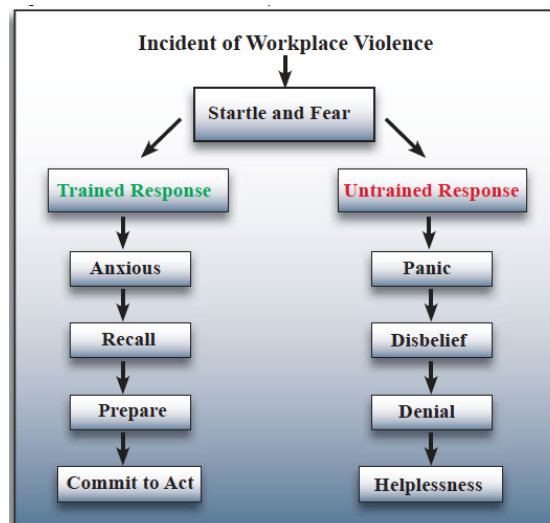
two or more officers arrive. Depending on the location of the shootings, this could take several minutes.

5. **Police gain entry into the building** – As the officers are planning their entry, they have to remain vigilant so they do not enter in a location that would immediately place them in jeopardy. If the officers are shot, it will take that much longer for help to arrive and disable the shooter(s).
6. **Shooter is apprehended or killed** – Once the officers enter the scene, they will have one goal in mind; to end the shooting. They will have to carefully search for the shooter(s), locate them, and either apprehend or disable them, sometimes taking the lives of the shooters.

As you look at each of these steps, you can see that valuable time is passing with each step. 15-20 minutes may pass between the time the shooter(s) enters the building and law enforcement is able to take action. In some rural areas, the time may be even longer.

Unfortunately, people do not have time to stop and think about what is happening when a shooter enters a building (or in cases where an active shooter incident erupts outdoors) and people do not usually go through their day thinking about the active shooter. In a workplace, employees may be thinking about work-related topics such as doing a good job, working towards a promotion, or their upcoming vacation. They do not think about how they will react to an active shooter so they are not as well prepared.

According to the FBI, when any type of workplace violence occurs, people are initially startled and fearful. The untrained individual will then respond with panic, disbelief, denial and a feeling of helplessness. The trained individual will react with anxiousness, recalling what they learned from their training, preparing to take action and finally committing to act. (See figure below)



The healthcare setting has seen numerous incidents of active shooters over the past several years, and as each incident is reviewed, we learn from it. The results of the active shooter incident include fatalities, injuries and long-lasting recovery from the traumatic incident. Additionally, facilities may be found liable in civil court for failure to provide a safe environment.

While some of the most well recognized and well-publicized active shooter incidents are those with which the most lives are taken, there are many less publicized incidents where fewer lives are taken. The active shooter does not necessarily need to go to a location and kill multiple people. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and Active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearms and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly and typically the immediate deployment of law enforcement is required to stop the shooting and mitigate the harm to victims.

Because active shooter situations are often over within 10-15 minutes, before the arrival of law enforcement, individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter incident

An active shooter may be armed with one or multiple weapons. The weapons may be of varying types, sizes and strengths. A basic knowledge may help provide potential victims with enough information to save their lives.

For example, a revolver may take longer to reload than a semi-automatic weapon. Long guns, come in a variety of different types and styles. A shotgun may fire a single projectile (slug), but may also fire a spray of BB sized pellets that could spread out into a much larger pattern, depending on the distance. A rifle, on the other hand, will usually fire a projectile with a much higher velocity capable of piercing much more sturdy items.

While every situation is different, when confronted with the active shooter, you should remember to respond in three ways. First of all, if you have the opportunity to run, or evacuate the area, you should do so. You will have to make a quick assessment to determine the location of the shooter and the number of shooters so that you do not run into them. You will also want to leave your personal belongings behind. Property can be easily replaced. You may have moral decisions to make as well at this point. If other people are present, will you be able to help them escape as well and if they are patients, you will have to evaluate patient safety.

Your second option, if you cannot safely escape the area, would be to hide. If you are in an office or patient room, your best choice might be to stay in that room and secure it in the best possible way. This could mean closing the door



and locking it, barricading it with items in the room such as cabinets, chairs or a bed, or finding other methods of securing the doorway.

If you are in a hallway, you will want to find a room or location where you can hide. This might be a nearby office or patient room. It is important at this point to understand the difference between cover and concealment.

When you are trying to hide from the active shooter you may feel safe behind a curtain or thin barrier. While these items may conceal you, they offer no cover. If the shooter were to fire a shot into the curtain or thin barrier, the projectile would easily penetrate the item and place you in danger. You would be much more secure taking cover; hiding yourself behind an item that could not be as easily penetrated.

Your last option will be the most difficult. This is the option to defend yourself against the shooter. We do not recommend that any untrained individual take unnecessary actions that could place their life in danger, however, if this is your only option remaining, it may be the only way to save your life and the lives of others.

You will have to carefully evaluate how you will defend yourself and what, if any, weapons are available to you for this purpose. In some instances, you might chose to strike the shooter with a garbage can or fire extinguisher. You will also have to evaluate the distance between you and the shooter when considering taking this type of action as it will occur very quickly and subsequently, the shooter will respond quickly.

You should take the time to develop a plan for the active shooter incident as soon as possible. The absence of a “Code Silver” policy may create more confusion in the time of the critical incident. Having a good policy, educated employees, and a plan in place will help to minimize confusion if an active shooter event occurs at your location.

Another possibility during the active shooter event is the possibility of secondary devices. These may be in the form of explosives, smoke, or fire and may be inside or outside the building. The secondary devices have multiple purposes for the shooter. First of all, they may create a distraction, allowing the shooter to claim more victims. Secondly they may be placed in locations to cause more casualties. Lastly, they may be placed in a location to injure or kill emergency responders, such as police, fire and EMS personnel. If you observe anything that is out of place, you should alert law enforcement to this as soon as possible and clear the area.

If you are able to make a call for help to the police, use caution so you do not alert the shooter of your whereabouts. The dispatcher will need as much information as possible. Remaining calm when you are speaking to the



dispatcher will help him or her gain much needed, accurate information much easier than if you are yelling or disoriented.

You should be prepared to alert the dispatcher of the location of the shooter, if it is known, the number of shooters, a physical description of the shooter(s), the number and types of weapons the shooter has in his or her possession, and the number of potential victims at the location. Keep in mind that accurate information is essential. If you are unsure about the number of shooters or any other information, let the dispatcher know that you are uncertain.

Generally when 2 officers arrive at the scene, they will decide the best method of entry and gain entry with the intent of locating the shooter(s). They may be in police uniforms, kevlar vests, helmets or other tactical equipment and they will be armed. At times, they may deploy chemical spray or teargas, depending on the situation. Keep in mind that they do not know who the shooter is so they have to be cautious. They may shout commands and push people to the ground for their safety.

The first officers to arrive at the scene will not stop to help injured persons. Expect rescue teams comprised of additional officers and emergency medical personnel to follow the initial officers. In most cases, the rescue teams will not enter the building until the area is safe. These rescue teams will treat and remove any injured persons. They may also call upon able-bodied individuals to assist in removing the wounded from the premises.

Once you have reached a safe location or an assembly point, you will likely be held in that area by law enforcement until the situation is under control, and all witnesses have been identified and questioned. Do not leave until law enforcement authorities have instructed you to do so.

If you are confronted by the police, understand that they do not know if you are the shooter or a civilian victim. Remain calm and follow their instructions. If you are holding anything in your hands, put it down immediately, so it is not mistaken for a weapon. Raise your hands and spread your fingers to show law enforcement that you do not have anything hidden in your hands and try to keep your hands visible at all times. Any quick or erratic movements should be avoided, such as attempting to hold on to the officers. Avoid screaming or yelling as it only elevates the tension. You may be in fear and/or traumatized, however, the officers' primary goal is to stop the shooter as quickly as possible. Do not stop the officers to ask them for help.

Your actions will be crucial elements in determining the outcome of the event. Proper, trained actions will work towards a much better ending. Preparation for quickly evolving violent encounters, such as the active shooter, should be a priority with regular training and drills to aid in proper reactions to the event.

