International Center for Enterprise Preparedness (InterCEP)

Active Shooter Preparedness

Web Forum

On March 14, 2017, **Mohamed Telab**, Protective Security Adviser for DHS's Office of Infrastructure Protection Region II, led a discussion about how to plan for, respond to, and recover from an active shooter event. The overall goal of preparedness in this area is to ensure a high likelihood of survival for those impacted, and this means minimizing casualties and shortening the length of the incident. This is a challenging threat since it is changing over time as vehicles and other tools are increasingly being used as weapons.

Active Shooter Preparedness: Introduction

Three key aspects of preparedness for active shooter events include:

1. For any active shooter event preparedness depends on whether individuals are prepared since law enforcement may not be there for a few minutes.
2. Two things individuals in an organization can do during an active shooter event is be prepared to get people out of the way and to work with law enforcement.
3. It's important to have a plan ready to go so organizations should begin the planning process as soon as possible.

A preparedness plan typically addresses five areas: prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery.

Active shooter events show significant variation in terms of targeted sites and tactics used. The most common venues include commercial, education and government facilities. Between 2000 and 2013 there were 160 active shooter incidents. These events resulted in 1,043 casualties, and of these, 486 people died. Over this period, the average frequency of incidents was 11-12 per year.

In order to begin the planning process to address active shooter events, organizations should include members of their human resources and security departments to provide a framework for how to implement a plan.

Preventing an Active Shooter Incident

One important aspect that organizations should focus on is how to recognize pathways to violence. This should also include a focus on providing assistance and reintegration for employees. These pathways to violence typically begin with behavioral changes and organizations should be sensitive to those changes

and should be able to identify appropriate responses. Individuals that are on a pathway to becoming an active shooter may show speech or writing signs well before they carry out an attack.

A pathway to violence may start with some grievance for an active shooter. These grievances can be logical or illogical. An organization has an opportunity for intervention when individuals begin to show signs of pathway to violence at work or school. Some signs may appear subtle at first, such as soliciting information from security or taking pictures of a facility.

What signs should organizations look for? Some reactions can be normal. For example, angry or withdrawn behavior do not necessarily mean that a person will become an active shooter. But a combination of factors and other behavioral problems can provide red flags and suggest a need for intervention. Some initiators of behavioral changes include: health wellness, finances, religion or ideology, and family situations.

Some examples of behavioral indicators that organizations should be aware of are:

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Violations of company policies
- Increased absenteeism
- Exploiting or blaming others

Some important tools that organization should have in their toolkit include:

- Pre-employment background checks and drug tests
- Train staff on behavioral signs and impact of workplace violence
- Policy for violence and weapons in the workplace
- Train staff on HIPAA and FERPA reporting exemptions
- Support a culture of caring for all employees

As part of preparedness efforts, organizations should form a core team and provide a framework for preparedness. This effort should always include reaching out to local police and fire departments in order to form a relationship with them.

Risk Analysis as a Planning Tool

Risk analysis helps identify, assess and manage threats and risks to an organization's facilities. Risk is a function of threat, vulnerability and consequences.

Assessing risk will help organizations:

- Understand their situation
- Prioritize actions
- Identify and compare options, and
- Allocate resources

Threat is a function of an individual's intent and capability. Capability varies greatly and can be difficult to estimate.

Is a facility vulnerable? What can an organization put in place to detect and delay an incident of this type? This kind of analysis can help organizations get people out of harm's way during an incident. Delaying an active shooter provides more time for law enforcement response.

The consequence of these events is human cost. Organizations should focus on where they can have the biggest impact to minimize costs.

Protective Measures

Protective measures can delay an active shooter and they buy time for law enforcement. Some organizations may assume greater risk because security measures may be too costly or they may not be consistent with their business model (i.e., open-access venues).

Organizations that can increase protective measures should assess how their facilities look from a shooter's perspective. Are they easy to access?

An active shooter can also be an insider. Hence, organizations should also think about how their physical security looks from the inside. How often do personnel have access to areas where they shouldn't be? Organizations need to think of their facilities from the outside in and from the inside out.

From the inside organizations are concerned about safeguarding people. Can people barricade themselves? Can they escape during such an event?

Mitigation, Notification and Response

From the perspective of mitigation, organizations should focus on two things: saving lives and working to reduce law enforcement response time. Training programs and relationships with law enforcement are key to successful mitigation.

Notification can also play a key role in this area. Does an organization have a notification system that is adequate? Organizations should have the ability to respond immediately. Some important issues to consider include:

- How will people receive the information?
- Does the notification system take into account people that may have impairments and disabilities?
- Will people understand the message?

Notification procedures can inform people inside and also responders. Can a fire alarm be used? Do people respond differently if they know the cause is a fire or a shooter? The answer is yes. So the message needs to be clear. And this is true for visitors as well.

During an incident, mass notification systems may use a PA system, and these come in many varieties. For example, an organization may use a system of codes to alert employees that there is an active shooter event unfolding. This type of system may help employees who understand the message, but not visitors. Other organizations may choose different language in their PA messaging, using "security situation" instead of "active shooter."

Some organizations have mass email or electronic notification systems, using text messages, for example, and these are particularly useful if they can be geo-fenced so that the people that need to receive the message do so. A limitation of this kind of system is for those who may not have their phone with them, those who may silence their phones during an incident, or those away from a computer terminal.

These notification systems can also prevent employees or people from walking into an active shooter event. Some schools and other organizations are implementing visual technologies to convey the message that individuals should not enter the facility.

Maintaining course of action, in terms of contacting affected individuals and their families, should be part of the business continuity elements associated with this kind of event.

Other actions to take during an active shooter Incident include:

- Silence phones and devices, take off vibrate mode.
- If you can't run or hide, you have the option to fight.
- When you call 911, address the number of attackers, weapons, and victims.
- If an active shooter alarm is triggered, it is vitally important to follow the instructions of law enforcement when they come in to avoid accidental shooting.
- The message should be run, hide if you can't, fight if you must.

- Organizations can minimizing casualties until law enforcement arrives. Law enforcement will go straight for the shooter.

Recovery

Short-term recovery measures address immediate needs and include:

- Providing health and safety beyond immediate rescue
- Establishing a hotline
- Immediate crisis support
- Re-unification with families, communities

Long-term recovery measures continue for months or years. They address restoration and include:

- Providing grief counseling
- Resuming operations
- Establishing memorials
- Avoiding scam and fraud awareness
- Civil or criminal trials

Additional Resources:

- Active Shooter Preparedness, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Available at: https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness
- Mass Fatality Incident Family Assistance Operations, U.S Department of Justice. Available at: https://www.ntsb.gov/tda/TDADocuments/Mass%20Fatality%20Incident%20Family%20Assistance%20Operations.pdf
- Responding to Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence Crimes, U.S. Department of Justice. Available at: https://ojp.gov/ovc/publications/infores/redcross/ncj209681.pdf
- Responding to Crisis at a School, Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. Available at: ⍰ http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/crisis/crisis.pdf
- Standard Reunification Method, "I Love U Guys" Foundation. Available at: http://iloveuguys.org/srm/Standard%20Reunification%20Method.pdf
- National Disaster Recovery Framework, FEMA. Available at: https://www.fema.gov/national-disaster-recovery-framework