

Active Shooter's Incidents

By L Rivera



Active shooter's incidents at Virginia tech and Columbine High School (AP Picture)

“Within the span of 16 minutes, the gunman killed 13 people and wounded 21 others. A savage act of domestic terrorism, their crime is the deadliest school shooting in the history of the United States”

*Sheriff John P. Stone
Jefferson Co. Colorado*

On 16 April 2007, Seung-Hui Cho opened fire inside a Virginia Tech dormitory and two hours later in a classroom. By the time the incident was over a total of 31 people had been killed in what has been classified as the most lethal Active Shooter Incident in American history, however, this incident is not without precedent on;

May 20, 2007: A sniper sprayed dozens of bullets on a courthouse, killing a police officer and wounding a sheriff's deputy and a civilian, then apparently killed a caretaker and himself Sunday in a nearby church in MOSCOW, Idaho

Oct 2, 2006: an active shooter killed five students and then turned the gun on himself in a school in Lancaster, PA.

Mar 21, 2005: At an Indian reservation high school in Minnesota a 16 years old male killed five students, a teacher, a guard, and killed and himself.

April 20, 1999: Two students killed 12 other students, a teacher and committed suicide at the Columbine high school in Littleton, Colorado.

May 21, 1998: At a high school in Springfield, ORE a 17 year old male student opened fire and killed two students.

Mar 24, 1998: An 11 and 13 year old boys killed four girls and a teacher in a middle school at Jonesboro, ARK.

What is an Active Shooter?

Active shooter is a phrase coined by law-enforcement. As an example the El Paso County, Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA, Sheriff's Office policy and procedure manual defines it as "... an armed person who has used deadly physical force on other persons and continues to do so while having unrestricted access to additional victims."

Said incidents are considered and or represent the greatest terror to a campus.

The definition includes so-called "snipers", but not usually bombers. Active shooters have caused a paradigm shift in law enforcement training and tactics, especially as these persons do not necessarily expect to escape or even survive these situations.

The uniqueness of the active shooter's phenomenon has forced law-enforcement to develop new tactics, techniques and procedures to protect the public. However, the burden of protecting against this type of acts must also be shared by individual members of the community. The bottom line is, as active shooter's incidents are characterized by their unpredictability, the speed in which they occur, and the lethality of the act. Preventing such incidents would require the presence of specially trained and equipped law-enforcement personnel in every school, university and workplace. But in reality there are not enough of these uniquely qualified individuals to satisfy such unwieldy requirement. For that reason, knowing what to do under such circumstances will greatly increase the chances of surviving.

To better understand the threat an active shooter represent to vulnerable sectors of the community—such as educational institutions—one must understand what makes a person or persons do such a thing.

What's in the mind of an active shooter?

Simply put, an active shooter wants to kill or cause serious injuries with little or no regard for his or her life. Active shooter's incidents are seldom random attacks. The majority of these cases are premeditated acts in which the perpetrator identifies the victim or victims, and searches for them with the intent to kill them. However, he or she will also engage targets of opportunity in the process of searching for the intended victim or victims as well as afterwards. The active shooter will continue to move through buildings and surroundings as well as killing unless he or she is neutralized, commits suicide or some type of intervention takes place.

The intent of an active shooter is clear ... "to kill and or cause serious injuries prior to being neutralized."

Improving the security of soft targets, including schools and college campuses, is a shared responsibility. In addition to important steps that should be considered by the federal government, local and state governments, school authorities, faculty and staff all have major responsibilities, as do students themselves as well as their families. The responsibility matrix is indeed complex, but necessary to understand if progress is to be made. The approach recommended by my colleagues and I at the National Center for Disaster Preparedness is based on organizing our thinking in three distinct functional categories of strategic proposals: Prevention, Mitigation and response and Recovery

*Irwin Redlener, M.D.
Testimony before the Senate Homeland Security
& Governmental Affairs Committee 23 April, 2007*

In response to Columbine, Law-enforcement Agencies, Police Academies and Departments throughout the country has developed training—for law enforcement and the community—that include new strategies and methodologies to control the situation, mitigate risk to law officers as well as the general public.

The concept is simple; lose of life can be mitigated by way of training, preparation and response against Active Shooter's Incidents. However, every situation will be different and the operational environment will also influence the outcome.

In military terms; the operational environment is a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of forces and bear on the decisions of the commander. It is classified as permissive, uncertain or hostile. In the case of an active shooter incident the environment—regardless of location—can very quickly transmogrified from permissive to hostile. Therefore, preparation is the key to increase survivability. Bottom line; if you prepare for the worst, the best should happen. And the same applies to security.

Security preparation in Public Schools and Universities

Security in public schools is different than in universities. The main reason for this is; students in public schools are under age and require a more control and safer environment. Many public schools are equipped with intercoms in classrooms, immediate campus-wide emergency notification system to initiate campus lockdown procedures, a centralized administrative office, visitor access points, similar monitoring and control of students and other people on campus as well as dense campus facility make-up.

In universities we find a different demographic, therefore, their approach to security is also different. Universities have robust law enforcement presence and response capability, dedicated and concerned community base, multiple means for reporting emergencies and alerting the community to an emergency, solidly constructed facilities Places of refuge and multiple escape routes.



Pictures of CONCID drill at the University of Puerto Rico

As these events transpire in a nick of time, it is imperative for individual members of the community to know what actions to take in order to survive and assist others in the process.

The actions of an individual will definitely influence others, therefore, one should take charge and reassure others that the authorities are working to protect them—***Stay Calm and consequently others will do the same.*** Secure the immediate area; whether a classroom, bathroom, or office by locking the door—locking doors must be rehearsed during emergency response drills and the location of door keys must be known to all personnel. As most doors in university buildings are solid core, and many walls are made of blocks and bricks, classrooms can definitely provide protection, for that reason, barricading oneself in a classroom is advisable. Once in the room; block the door using whatever are available—desks, file cabinets, books, or other furniture. If the shooter should enter the room and leaves, lock/barricade the door behind him. If safe, allow others in the room. Once you have secured the room or area to the best of your ability, instruct everyone to seek further protection by hiding behind places like filing cabinets, inside rooms—closets and/or small storage rooms—and even furniture. This will provide additional protection from small arms fire and observation.

After securing the primary point of entry; secure all other points that may be used to access to the room—additional doors, windows, and/or openings. Avoid making unnecessary noises—turn-off all computers and radios. If you have a cell phone and you do not want or can't turn it off, set it to vibrate.

Continue to reassure everyone that help is on the way, but be cognizant of the fact that it may take some time to arrive. Recruit the assistance of other people in the area to help treat the injured. Remember basic first aid and use your imagination, be creative and look for things that can be used for caring for the injured and or wounded—clothing, paper towels, sanitary napkins, news papers, etc.

Stay alert ... Lowering your sense of alertness and or awareness will become easy once the effects of adrenaline begin to wear out. Remember, the shooter will not stop until

reaching his or her objectives, is detained or neutralized by the authorities. For that reason, when considering opening the door of a room that has already been secured in order to assist others, do not lose sight of the possible consequences, and do it only if it doesn't put others at risk—consider the safety of the many versus that of the few. Make sure the persons calling for help are in fact victims and not the shooters pretending. If there is any doubt to the safety of the individuals inside the room, keep the room secured.

Don't leave anything to chance and do all you can to assist the authorities in their rescue efforts ***“make it easier for rescuers to find you.”*** If the situation permits it; signal for help. Signals can be displayed on doors and windows; however, extreme caution must be exercised when doing so, as the shooter can also see these. Signals or marks should also be used to mark the location of wounded and or injured personnel.

The next step ***“Call for emergency personnel.”*** Calling 911 should not be the only way to contact authorities and or ask for assistance. During emergencies, 911 operators may be overwhelmed with calls. For that reason, it is important to know other emergency numbers. Make an entry in your cell phone, and once the call is made, remain calm, pay close attention to the questions and provide clear and concise answers. Be prepared to answer the following questions;

- *Your specific location*
- *Building name*
- *Office/classroom number*
- *Number of people at your specific location*
- *Injuries*
- *Number of people injured*
- *Types of injuries*
- *Dispatcher may provide instructions on how to care for injured until medical assistance can be provided*

Information concerning the assailant(s):

- *Specific location*
- *Number of assailant(s)*
- *Race and Gender*
- *Clothing color and style*
- *Physical features – height, weight, facial hair, glasses*
- *Type of weapons (rifle/shotgun, handgun)*
- *Backpack*
- *Do you recognize the shooter? What's his name?*
- *Have you heard explosions separate from gunshots?*

What to do if you're in open or unsecured areas?

If in an open/unsecured area, drop to the ground immediately; look for a location that can provide protection from observation and bullets being fired. Once you have identified the location, move to it as quickly as possible however, do not expose yourself unnecessarily; run, walk, or crawl as the situation allows. Bottom line; you want to put some kind of structure between you and the shooter. Make an effort to identify the location of the shooter, evaluate the situation and if possible, escape from the area and alert the authorities. However, if escaping is not possible then stay put—behind cover and wait for help to arrive.



Pictures of Special Operations Response Teams (SORT) of the PR Police Department training on reaction drills for Active Shooter's Incidents

Police Response

Law enforcement personnel will do their best to respond to the area as soon as possible. It is important for you to convey to others that help is on the way, and to remain inside the secured area. It is also important to know the priority of law enforcement's personnel is to locate, contain, and stop the shooter. The shooter will not flee when law enforcement enters the crisis site—building, room, etc. Instead, he or she will have new targets to shoot at. Therefore, the safest place for you to be is inside a secured room. Remember the Active Shooter's mindset is not to escape but to kill and injure



Pictures of CONCID drill at the University of Puerto Rico

Injured persons

Again, law-enforcement initial responders will not treat the injured or begin evacuation until the threat has been neutralized. In view of that, you will have to explain this to others in an attempt to keep them calmed. Once the shooter is contained, law-enforcement officers and other emergency personnel will begin treatment and evacuation procedures.

Evacuation

In order to safely evacuate personnel from the crisis site, safety corridors will be established. This may be time consuming, for that reason, it is important to remain calmed and in the secured area until instructed otherwise. For every one's safety, all involved will be instructed to do things like keeping their hands on their head, as well as be subjected to numerous searches—at the site a quick or cursory search will be performed. Personnel will then be escorted out of the building by law enforcement personnel and taken to a holding area where a more thorough search will be performed, medical care, interviewing, and counseling will be provided.

The investigation of the incident will follow the evacuation of personnel from the site. All releasable information will be provided to the community and media as quickly as possible. The crisis area, site and point will be designated as crime scenes; therefore, in the interest of not contaminating the crime scene, no one will be permitted to retrieve items or access to said locations once they have been evacuated.

Important Note: *The information in this article is the result of formal training, personal experience in security operations and in-depth research. Although the tactics, techniques and procedures discussed in it have proven effective. It is not the intent of CONCID or the contributor to create a false sense of security for the reader. The bottom line is; "It is impossible for anyone to guarantee this information could stop determined individuals or criminals—such as an Active Shooter—from killing or cause serious injury to innocent people."*

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