

Active shooter



Prior to April 20, 1999, mass shootings were not given too much thought. But that all changed when Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold let loose with their mayhem at Columbine High School in Colorado. Prior to Columbine, there had been a number of shooting incidents, but few of them were of that magnitude. Since then, mass shootings have become a more common occurrence and many people are now concerned with being caught by an “Active Shooter.”

What’s an “Active Shooter”? Per the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), an “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 firearm(s) and there’s no pattern or method to their selection of victims.” In short, the Active Shooter wants to cause as much damage as possible. In most cases, they have completed the act within 10 to 15 minutes and usually before law enforcement even arrives on the scene.

After such an incident, stories in the news often state that the person “just snapped.” However, according to the Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) that’s one of the myths about an Active Shooter. Other myths include: “No one knew.” And “never saw it coming.” The realities in these cases are:

- Erratic or abnormal behavior can be a warning sign of possible future violence.
- Warnings can be through comments, feelings or thoughts.
- There are flags along the path to violence.

Within the workplace there are a number of warning signs that there could be problems in the near future.

These include:

- Conflict between employees.
- Changes in an employee’s appearance.
- Increased mood swings.

- Depression/withdrawal.
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse.
- Explosive outburst of anger or rage.
- Fascination/fixation with guns, violent games and movies.
- Suicidal comments.
- Behavior which is suspect of paranoia, (“everybody is against me”).
- Escalation of domestic problems – talk of severe financial problems.
- Talk of previous incidents of violence.
- Empathy with individuals committing violence.
- Increasingly talking of problems at home.
- Noticeably unstable, emotional responses.

This list of behaviors isn’t comprehensive, nor is it intended as a mechanism for diagnosing violent tendencies.

According to RILA, there are five phases of the Active Shooter. These include:

- **Fantasy phase** – Dreams of shooting. Fantasizes about the headlines and news. May discuss with friends.
- **Planning phase** – Works on the logistics, the who, what, when, where and how. May put his/her plans in writing and will often discuss the plans with others. This phase is where the time and location is decided.
- **Preparation phase** – Obtains the weapons. Practices or conducts walk-throughs.
- **Approach phase** – The shooter has made his/her plans and is committed to carrying out the act.
- **Implementing phase** – Shooter opens fire. He/she is going for the “top score” or the “highest number of kills.”

continued



Preventative plans

As with any work place exposure, having a plan in place to address it with appropriate controls is important. To start off, there needs to be a written workplace violence prevention program that list out the company's policies and procedures. The company needs to train their management in the recognition of warning signs and indicators along with how to handle such information. Provide training for all employees on workplace violence which includes a review of the policy and enforcement procedures. In addition, enforce the security policies. One ingredient to include within the program is to conduct training with local law enforcement. This enables local law enforcement to have an understanding of the facility layout and evaluate conditions within the facility that could be a benefit for them or a hindrance in the event of an emergency.

Preparedness

As noted in the preventative plans, taking the time to gain familiarity with local law enforcement and emergency departments is one of the first steps to moving forward in the preparedness phase. Floor plans need to be gathered and stored in a place where emergency crews could access. Other options include providing copies of the floor plans to the emergency departments that they could download on their computers. Identify all exits and mark with easily readable numbers or letters. Establish safe rooms where employees can gather and the doors lock from the inside. Supplies such as water, medical supplies and a communication system such as an external phone system should be provided. With the program in place there needs to be a code to alert all employees of an Active Shooter. As with all emergency plans there needs to be training on evacuation procedures and where the designated assembly point is located.

Responding to an active shooter

According to DHS, there are three basic steps to take. The first step is Evacuate: During your time at work, play the "what if" scenario. What's the best way out of your area to safety? Where are the closest exits or safe room? If the time comes to evacuate, leave your belongs behind.

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If possible, call 911 when safe. Help others escape if possible. Prevent individuals from entering an area where the Active Shooter may be located. Keep your hands visible at all times – follow the instructions of law enforcement (when able provide information to law enforcement on location of the Active Shooter, number of shooters, physical description of shooter, number and type of weapons and number of potential victims at the location). The second step is to Hide Out if evacuation isn't an option. Find a place where the Active Shooter isn't as likely to find you. You need to keep out of the Active Shooter's view. Have some form of protection if shots are fired in your direction (i.e. in an office or safe room, under a desk or heavy furniture). Don't trap yourself or restrict your options for movement. If in an office, lock the door or barricade the door with heavy furniture.

The last and third step is to Take Action against the Active Shooter. This is as noted the last and most dangerous resort to take. Only take this step if your life is in imminent danger. DHS notes to attempt and/or incapacitate the active shooter by:

- Acting as aggressively as possible against him/her.
- Yelling.
- Committing to your actions.

The RILA has narrowed these three steps down to a simple acronym: The 3 E's:

- Evacuate – get to a safe location.
- Evade – find a place to hide
- Engage – fight for your life.

Having an Active Shooter plan is a new component that needs to be included in all Emergency Action Plans. Their purpose is to provide guidance and direction for all types of emergencies, including this new one.

Resources

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Washington, D.C. www.dhs.gov

Retail Industry Leaders Association. www.rila.org