

# How to Prepare Your Business For an Active Shooter



**TILSON** E-Guide

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# Training Your Staff for an Active Shooter Situation

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. To best prepare your staff for an active shooter situation, create an emergency action plan (EAP) and conduct training exercises. Together, the EAP and training exercises will prepare your staff to effectively respond and help minimize loss of life.

## Components of an EAP

Create the EAP with input from several stakeholders, including HR, your training department (if one exists), facility owners or operators, your property manager, and local emergency responders. An effective EAP includes the following:

- A preferred method for reporting fires and other emergencies
- An evacuation policy and procedure
- Emergency escape procedures and route assignments (e.g., floor plans or safe areas)
- Contact information for, and responsibilities of, individuals to be contacted under the EAP
- Information concerning local area hospitals (e.g., the name, telephone number and distance from your location)
- An emergency notification system to alert various parties of an emergency including the following:
  - Individuals at remote locations within premises
  - Local law enforcement
  - Local area hospitals

## Components of Training Exercises

The most effective way to train your staff to respond to an active shooter situation is to conduct mock active shooter training exercises. Local law enforcement is an excellent resource in designing training exercises.

Training components may include the following:

- Recognizing the sound of gunshots
- Reacting quickly when gunshots are heard and/or when a shooting is witnessed:
  - Evacuating the area
  - Hiding out
  - Acting against the shooter as a last resort
- Calling 911
- Reacting when law enforcement arrives
- Adopting the survival mindset during times of crisis

## Additional Ways to Prepare For and Prevent an Active Shooter Situation

Below are steps you can take to improve preparedness:

- Ensure your facility has at least two evacuation routes.
- Post evacuation routes in conspicuous locations throughout your facility.
- Include local law enforcement and first responders during training exercises.
- Encourage law enforcement, emergency responders, SWAT teams, K-9 teams and bomb squads to train for an active shooter scenario at your location.

## Emergency Numbers

In addition, make sure to have the phone numbers on hand for the following:

- Emergency services
- Local emergency information line
- Local police department
- Local fire department
- Local hospital
- Local FBI field office
- Facility security

Make sure your facility's address, including floor, suite and/or room numbers, is also easily accessible, along with your office phone number and extension.

For more information on creating an EAP, contact the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Health and Safety Administration, [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

## Preparing for and Managing an Active Shooter Situation

Your HR department and facility managers should engage in planning for emergency situations, including an active shooter scenario. Planning for emergency situations will help to mitigate the likelihood of an incident by establishing the mechanisms described below.

## Human Resources' Responsibilities

The following are responsibilities of HR professionals:

- Conduct effective employee screening and background checks.
- Create a system for reporting signs of potentially violent behavior.
- Make counseling services available to employees.

- Develop an EAP which includes policies and procedures for dealing with an active shooter situation, as well as after action planning.

## Facility Manager Responsibilities

The following are responsibilities of facility managers:

- Institute access controls (e.g., keys and security system passcodes).
- Distribute critical items to appropriate managers and employees, including the following:
  - Floor plans
  - Keys
  - Facility personnel lists and telephone numbers
- Coordinate with the facility's security department to ensure the physical security of the location.
- Assemble crisis kits containing the following:
  - Radios
  - Floor plans
  - Staff roster and staff emergency contact numbers
  - First-aid kits
  - Flashlights
- Place removable floor plans near entrances and exits for emergency responders.
- Activate the emergency notification system when an emergency situation occurs.

## Reactions of Managers during an Active Shooter Situation

Employees and customers are likely to follow the lead of managers during an emergency situation. During an emergency, managers should be familiar with their EAPs and be prepared to do the following:

- Take immediate action.
- Remain calm.
- Lock and barricade doors.
- Evacuate staff and customers via a preplanned evacuation route to a safe area.

## **Assisting Individuals with Special Needs and/or Disabilities**

To assist those with special needs and disabilities, ensure that EAPs, evacuation instructions and any other relevant information addresses individuals with special needs and/or disabilities.

## **Recognizing Potential Workplace Violence**

An active shooter in your workplace may be a current or former employee, or an acquaintance of a current or former employee. Intuitive managers and co-workers may notice characteristics of potentially violent behavior in an employee. Alert your HR department if you believe an employee or co-worker exhibits potentially violent behavior.

## **Indicators of Potential Violence by an Employee**

Employees typically do not just “snap,” but display indicators of potentially violent behavior over time. If these behaviors are recognized, they can often be managed and treated. Potentially violent behaviors by an employee may include one or more of the following:

- Increased use of alcohol and/or illegal drugs
- Unexplained increase in absenteeism; vague physical complaints
- Noticeable decrease in attention to appearance and hygiene
- Depression and/or withdrawal
- Resistance and overreaction to changes in policy and procedures
- Repeated violations of company policies
- Increased severe mood swings
- Noticeably unstable, emotional responses
- Explosive outbursts of anger or rage without provocation
- Suicidal; comments about “putting things in order”
- Behavior which suggests paranoia (“everybody is against me”)
- Increasingly talks of problems at home
- Escalation of domestic problems into the workplace; talk of severe financial problems
- Talk of previous incidents of violence

- Empathy with individuals committing violence
- Increase in unsolicited comments about firearms, other dangerous weapons and violent crimes

Remember that this list of behaviors is not comprehensive, nor is it intended as a mechanism for diagnosing violent tendencies.

## **Managing the Consequences of an Active Shooter Situation**

After the active shooter has been incapacitated and is no longer a threat, HR and/or management should engage in post-event assessments and activities, including the following:

- An accounting of all individuals at a designated assembly point to determine who, if anyone, is missing and potentially injured
- Determining a method for notifying families of individuals affected by the active shooter, including notification of any casualties
- Assessing the psychological state of individuals at the scene, and referring them to health care specialists accordingly
- Identifying and filling any critical personnel or operational gaps left in the organization as a result of the active shooter

## **Lessons Learned**

To facilitate effective planning for future emergencies, it is important to analyze the recent active shooter situation and create an after action report. The analysis and reporting contained in this report is useful for the following:

- Serving as documentation for response activities
- Identifying successes and failures that occurred during the event
- Providing an analysis of the effectiveness of the existing EAP
- Describing and defining a plan for making improvements to the EAP

## How to Respond to an Active Shooter

In most cases, there is no pattern or method to active shooters' selection of victims, and the situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. Typically, the immediate deployment of law enforcement is required to stop the shooting and mitigate harm to victims.

Because active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes—before law enforcement arrives on the scene—individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation.

## Good Practices for Coping with an Active Shooter Situation

Below are some general practices for coping with an active shooter:

- Be aware of your environment and any possible dangers.
- Take note of the two nearest exits in any facility you visit.
- If you are in an office, stay there and secure the door.
- If you are in a hallway, get into a room and secure the door.
- As a last resort, attempt to take the active shooter down. When the shooter is at close range and you cannot flee, your chance of survival is much greater if you try to incapacitate him or her.
- Call 911 when it is safe to do so.

## How to Respond When an Active Shooter is in Your Vicinity

Quickly determine the most reasonable way to protect your own life. Remember that customers and clients are likely to follow the lead of employees and managers during an active shooter situation.

### 1. Evacuate

If there is an accessible escape path, attempt to evacuate the premises:

- Have an escape route and plan in mind.
- Evacuate regardless of whether others agree to follow.



- Leave your belongings behind.
- Help others escape, if possible.
- Prevent individuals from entering an area where the active shooter may be.
- Keep your hands visible so the shooter does not see you as an immediate threat.
- Follow the instructions of any police officers.
- Do not attempt to move wounded people.
- Call 911 when you are safe.

## 2. Hide Out

If evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide where the active shooter is less likely to find you. Your hiding place should have the following characteristics:

- Be out of the active shooter's view
- Provide protection if shots are fired in your direction (e.g., an office with a closed and locked door)
- Not trap you or restrict your options for movement

You should also take some basic steps to prevent a shooter from noticing your presence or entering your hiding place:

- Lock any doors, if possible.
- Blockade the door with heavy furniture.
- Silence your cell phone and/or pager.
- Turn off any source of noise (e.g., radios or televisions).
- Hide behind large items (e.g., cabinets or desks).
- Remain as quiet as possible.

If evacuation and hiding are not possible:

- Remain calm.
- Dial 911 to alert police to the active shooter's location, if possible.
- If you cannot speak, leave the line open and allow the dispatcher to listen.

### **3. Take action against the active shooter**

As a last resort, and only when your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter by doing the following:

- Acting as aggressively as possible against him or her
- Throwing items and improvising weapons
- Yelling
- Committing to your actions

## **How to Respond When Law Enforcement Arrives**

Law enforcement's purpose is to stop the active shooter as soon as possible. Officers will proceed directly to the area in which the last shots were heard:

- Officers usually arrive in teams of four.
- Officers may wear regular patrol uniforms or external bulletproof vests, Kevlar helmets and other tactical equipment.
- Officers may be armed with rifles, shotguns or handguns.
- Officers may use pepper spray or tear gas to control the situation.
- Officers may shout commands, and may push individuals to the ground for their safety.

When law enforcement arrives, do the following:

- Remain calm, and follow officers' instructions.
- Put down any items in your hands (e.g., bags or jackets).
- Immediately raise your hands and spread your fingers.
- Keep your hands visible at all times.
- Avoid making quick movements toward officers, such as holding on to them for safety.
- Avoid pointing, screaming or yelling.
- Do not stop to ask officers for help or direction when evacuating, just proceed in the direction from which officers are entering the premises.

Provide the following information to law enforcement or the 911 operator:

- Location of the active shooter
- Number of shooters, if there is more than one
- Physical description of the shooter(s)
- Number and type of weapons held by the shooter(s)
- Number of potential victims at the location

The first officers to arrive to the scene will not stop to help injured persons. Instead, expect rescue teams comprised of additional officers and emergency medical personnel to follow the initial officers. 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.

There are other steps you can take to prevent an active shooter situation. For comprehensive articles and posters to safeguard your business and your employees, contact your partners at Tilson HR.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security's, Active Shooter – How to Respond

For additional information on workplace safety and active shooter training please contact your local law enforcement. To discuss policy and workplace procedures please contact your HR Advisor.

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