

M3 Risk Watch

Safety: It's No Accident



October 2014

ALICE – Should We or Shouldn't We Implement This Program in Our Schools?

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As you may know, ALICE is a crisis training program that stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate. Developed by two Texas law enforcement officers soon after the Columbine High School shootings, the ALICE program provides insight and response options when encountering an active shooter in a school. This training program has and is being instituted by many law enforcement agencies and schools throughout the country.

While recently reviewing a number of internet law enforcement and school safety blogs regarding the ALICE program, I was amazed by the two very different points of view regarding the use of ALICE in schools. Some of the more interesting posts from law enforcement and school safety officials included:

- “ALICE is an untested strategy as there is not one single case where a class of ALICE trained school students countered an armed intruder and demonstrated saving lives.”
- “There are a number of cases where a gunman was talked out of rooms by SWAT teams, or in some cases left on their own without firing a shot. Had one or two students starting throwing things at the gunman, the results may have been quite different.”
- “What right does any school district have to teach my child to attack an armed gunman?”
- “What is the liability of training kids to perform a counter attack on a gunman?”



With this being said, there were many comments from law enforcement and school officials that highly commended the use of the ALICE program in schools.

Most of the components of the ALICE training program have been ‘standard crisis procedures’ in our schools for many years. Talking with various school officials, it appears that much controversy centers around the ‘Counter’ aspect of the program; the belief that unarmed students are to attack an armed intruder with objects found within the classroom. For this reason, many law enforcement agencies and schools have turned away from the ALICE program, interpreting the ‘Counter’ controls as being an ‘all or nothing’ proposition.

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Let's face the facts, no one knows exactly how they, their fellow school staff members, or their students will act in a crisis situation that involves an armed intruder on school grounds or in one of your buildings. History shows that many school intruders (some carrying weapons) have entered a school full of students and left the premises without ever firing a shot or hurting someone. There is the real belief that having students throw objects at an intruder may actually encourage the intruder to carry out a violent act.

It is also well documented that the vast majority of violent school incidents involved current students, former students, or someone who was very familiar with the school. As I often mention to school officials, "your problem is already within your school," – thereby encouraging schools to diligently focus their efforts on facility security controls, strict visitor controls, securing of all doors all of the time, and most importantly, developing bullying and harassment guidelines and training programs that are mandatory for all students and staff.

In a crisis situation involving an armed intruder, there are no guarantees. No one can accurately predict how the intruder will act, or how your staff and students will react. The ALICE program can provide valuable options on how to act in this situation - it may not be a perfect fit for every crisis, but neither are your current protocols.

With this being said, your school should consider the following when determining if the ALICE program is appropriate for your school:

- **Any violence prevention plan (including ALICE) must be an agreed upon effort by your school and your law enforcement agencies.** There may be parts of the ALICE program that you will want to implement and parts of your school's current crisis procedures that will be used.
- **Develop your crisis response plans to address each school's unique characteristics** – the layout of your school and classrooms, the number of students and staff, the response time of law enforcement, the effectiveness of your lockdown and evacuation plans, etc.

It is interesting to note that over the past several months, there has been a significant number of Workers' Compensation claims related to school staff members practicing full speed emergency drills and training, including ALICE. When performing crisis exercises and drills, there are a number of safety precautions to consider so to minimize injury to your students and staff. These include:



If you would like additional information on this topic, please contact one of the education specialists listed below.

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About M3

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M3 is consistently ranked in the top 1% of insurance brokers nationwide and has been named to the list of Best Places to Work in Insurance by *Business Insurance* magazine.

- Do not perform crisis drills at full speed - especially no running
- Do not allow physical contact between participants
- Take great care if using simulated weapons. No real weapons should be used in the training exercises.
- Do not require anyone to exit through windows, move furniture or climb on furniture
- Participants should stay on their feet or be seated (they should not leave the floor in any way)

In conclusion, the implementation of parts or the entire ALICE program is a decision requiring a great deal of research by your school's administration. It's OK to decide to incorporate components of the program in to your crisis plan.

As it states on the ALICE Training Institute webpage:

"ALICE is NOT sequential nor is it meant to be a checklist of things to do. It is a list of options that can be used to stay safe in the highly unlikely event of a violent intruder. As the situation develops, it is possible that students and staff will need to use more than one option. During an active shooter event, staff will rarely have all the information they need to make a fully informed decision about which option is best. While they should follow the plan and any instructions given during the event, often they will have to rely on their own judgment to decide which option will best protect lives."

Work with your local law enforcement officials to determine the best crisis response plan; never simply assume that law enforcement has all of the answers or the entire ALICE program is the best fit for your school.



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