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Wisconsin School Talk

Active Shooter Incident



“Plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” In other words, the planning process cannot move beyond theory until the plans are tested. Without rigorous testing, it is impossible to be assured that the process has resulted in a plan that will be functionally operational. In general, testing should consist of periodic exercises that go beyond the tabletop discussion to include the execution of your plan, mobilization of your staff and communication throughout the event.

— President Dwight D. Eisenhower

Active shooter incidents have become a concern for all in recent years. These incidents occur without warning and quickly progress. Although they cannot always be prevented, entities and schools can take steps to help minimize the impact to their organization, employees and students. Having a plan in place to respond to an active shooter event is essential as these situations are usually over before law enforcement arrives on the scene.

An active shooter is defined as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.”¹ Active shooters use firearms and there is no pattern or methodology to their selection of victims.

Active shooter incidents in the United States continue to rise in frequency. A recent study by the FBI of active shooter incidents looked at two 7-year periods, spanning 2000 to 2013. “That study found that between 2000 and 2006, an average of 6.4 incidents occurred annually, but between 2007 and 2013 that average increased to 16.4 incidents annually. According to a 2013 FBI study of active shooter incidents, the active aspect of an active shooter situation inherently implies that both law enforcement personnel and citizens have the potential to affect the outcome of the event based upon how they respond.

These violent acts can be committed by strangers, students, workers and coworkers or someone who has a personal relationship with an employee or student. Consequently this means that you should be prepared at all times. Proper planning and training are the keys for a successful program.

Establish an Effective Emergency Plan

- Establish a crisis management team
 - » Assign roles and responsibilities
 - » Include colleagues from Risk Management, Human Resources and Safety/Security Departments
- Tailor your plan to each specific site
- Consult with local law enforcement to assess your needs and provide additional guidance
- Conduct a facility assessment to identify potential security gaps and recommendations for improvements
 - » Consider how employees and students will respond if situation arises in different locations
 - » Examine floor plan to develop at least 2 clear escape plans and meeting areas
- Provide clear guidance on what to do and not do during such an event for all employees and students
- Conduct regular drills along with law enforcement teams

Resources to Assist with Training & Coordinated Planning

- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) — Active Shooter Resources
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security — Active Shooter Preparedness
- Federal Emergency Management Agency — Training Courses
- State & Local Agencies
- Wisconsin Office of School Safety — <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/office-school-safety/office-school-safety>

Important Considerations

Communication

- Develop a confidential process to allow employees and students to report signs of unusual or potentially violent behavior.
- During an active shooter event, employees and students should have a clear understanding of their role.
- Any method of warning should be communicated frequently and clearly.
- Make plans on how to account for everyone following an active shooter event.

Escape Plans and Meeting Areas

- Your strategy may be to evacuate or assign an area for a secure lockdown.
 - » These steps will need to be determined in advance and clearly communicated to staff and students.
 - » Avoid interference with life safety issues, such as fire codes. The installation or use of a device to lock or barricade doors to hinder the actions of an active shooter may conflict with local fire code. Consult with your local fire marshal before planning to install barriers.
- As stated previously, there should at least two escape routes and an alternate meeting area. This is critical to develop a procedure for accounting of all employees and students following the event.
- Employees should be trained to encourage others to follow them to escape routes and meeting areas.

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Insurance

- Review your insurance policies for applicable coverage and explore what type of resources and coverages may exist for such an incident with your broker.
- Seek advice from a professional public relations firm that specializes in crisis management. It is important to ensure some form of coverage is in place.

We recommend reviewing the following coverages with your broker:

- Coverage for Terrorism Plus Public Sector Risks
- Violent Malicious Acts coverage
- Disaster Management Services coverage
- Terrorism Risk Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2015 (TRPRA 2015)

Post-Incident Management

The way you respond can have a lasting impact on your reputation, brand, community and confidence. This can become a significant moment for any school or public entity.

It is imperative to have a predesignated representative to manage communications. A backup is also recommended. This individual should also be trained to answer press inquiries.

Finally, work with your insurance carrier representatives or legal counsel to properly deal with victims of an incident, as well as the families of victims.

¹The agreed-upon definition of an “active shooter” by U.S. government agencies (Department of Justice, FBI, Department of Education, Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency)