

# Active Shooter

April 2018

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The IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center creates four types of documents: Model Policy, Considerations, Concepts & Issues Paper, and Need to Know one-page summaries. Typically, for each topic, either a Model Policy or a Considerations document is created, supplemented with a Concepts & Issues Paper. This file contains the following documents:

- **Model Policy**: Provides police agencies with concrete guidance and directives by describing in sequential format the manner in which actions, tasks, and operations are to be performed.
- **Concepts & Issues Paper**: Designed to provide context and background information to support the Model Policy for a deeper understanding of the topic.
- **Need to Know...**: Synthesizes the key points of the topic into a brief, one-page overview.

# Model Policy

Updated: April 2018

## Active Shooter

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide protocols for assessing the threat and immediately responding during active shooter situations to limit serious injury or loss of life. While the term “active shooter” is used throughout, this policy applies to all situations where there is an active assailant or assailants posing an ongoing deadly threat, to include, but not limited to, those from firearms, vehicles, explosives, and knives.

### II. POLICY

It is the policy of this agency in active shooter situations where ongoing deadly force is reasonably likely to be employed by a suspect—and delay in taking law enforcement action could result in injury or death—that immediate action by officers at the scene is necessary when such actions are deemed reasonable to prevent further injuries or loss of life.

### III. DEFINITIONS

*Active Shooting:* An incident in which one or more armed persons have used, or are reasonably likely to use, deadly force in an ongoing manner, and where persons have been injured, killed, or are under imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm by such persons.<sup>1</sup>

*Casualty Collection Point (CCP):* A forward location where victims can be assembled for movement from areas of risk. Based upon incident dynamics, such as the number and location of victims, multiple CCPs may be required.

*Cold Zone:* A geographic area where first responders can operate with minimal threat to personal safety or health.

*Contact Officer or Team:* The first officer(s) at the scene of an active shooting tasked with locating the suspect(s) and stopping the threat.

*Hot Zone:* A geographic area, consisting of the immediate incident location, with a direct and immediate threat to personal safety or health. All violent incidents are considered hot until law enforcement determines otherwise. Only law enforcement should operate in the hot zone.

*Immediate Action:* Rapid response by one or more officers to an active shooting based on a reasonable belief that failure to swiftly seek out and address the threat would result in death or serious bodily injury.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional terms that may be used to describe these incidents include active killing, active threat, and mass casualty attack.

*Incident Commander (IC):* The individual responsible for all incident activities, including the development of strategies and tactics and the ordering and release of resources. The IC has overall authority and responsibility for conducting incident operations and is responsible for the management of all operations at the incident site. Responsibilities of the IC can be assumed by the officer handling the original call to the chief executive of the agency and any additional qualified officers, depending on the size, scope, and complexity of the incident or event.<sup>2</sup>

*Inner Perimeter:* An area established to keep the threat contained to a specified location.

*Outer Perimeter:* An area established to keep the inner perimeter secured and to prevent outside elements from entering the incident.

*Rescue Task Force (RTF):* A team consisting of fire/emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, paired with law enforcement officers. Fire/EMS personnel are tasked with initial treatment and triage of victims in the warm zone. Law enforcement officers are assigned as the protection for this team and should not separate from the fire/EMS personnel.

*Staging Area:* An area or location near the incident where outside resources respond and are quickly inventoried for utilization and assignment at the incident. There may be more than one staging area per incident.

*Unified Command (UC):* An incident command system used when there is more than one agency with incident jurisdiction, or when incidents cross political jurisdictions. Agencies work together through designated members of the UC, often the senior person(s) from agencies and/or disciplines participating in the UC, to establish a common set of objectives and strategies. The IC responsibility is shared within the UC, with the function most important at the time taking the lead role. The lead responsibility may shift as the incident progresses.

*Warm Zone:* A geographic area where law enforcement has either cleared or isolated the threat to a level of minimal or mitigated risk; can be considered clear, but not secure.

## IV. PROCEDURES

### A. Situational Assessment

1. Based on available information, dispatched responders or officers already at the incident scene may verify that an active shooter situation exists through information provided by communications personnel; from persons confined within or exiting the target location; from witnesses; by reports of, or sounds of, gunfire; or through related means.
2. When available and as time permits, witnesses, or others should be asked about the location and number of suspects, the suspects' weapons, persons injured, the number and location of persons in possible jeopardy, and the use or location of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).
3. Upon completion of the initial assessment, the first arriving officer(s) shall
  - a. advise communications and request resources as deemed necessary, and
  - b. determine whether to take immediate action alone or with another officer or wait until additional resources are available.

### B. Individual Officer Intervention

1. In some instances, an individual officer may be present within or near the active shooting location, such as a mall or school. Whether on or off duty, in uniform or civilian clothes, he or she may determine that immediate action is necessary and reasonable to stop the threat. That decision may take into consideration the officer's capability to effectively intervene, based on his or her training.

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<sup>2</sup> See the IACP Model Policy on Incident Command at [http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/model\\_policy/incident-command/](http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/model_policy/incident-command/).

2. As soon as practical, officer(s) shall notify communications that an active shooter situation exists. The officer(s) should provide the following information and updates as available
  - a. the identity, location, manner of dress, and proposed actions of the officer(s) at the scene;
  - b. information about the suspect to include a physical description, weapons, equipment such as body armor, and current location and actions; and
  - c. available information on persons injured or under threat, their locations, emergency resources required, and recommended points of entry.
3. When displaying firearms while in plainclothes, officers shall verbally identify themselves as law enforcement officers, and conspicuously display their badges and/or other law enforcement identification to alert security personnel, arriving officers, or civilians who may be armed.
4. If officers are unarmed, they can still play a critical role in active shooter response through the following actions
  - a. facilitating evacuation by
    - a. locating points of egress and directing people to those evacuation points if reasonably safe for them to do so; and
    - b. locating and directing persons hiding in unsecure locations (e.g., under desks, inside unlocked rooms) to evacuation points.
  - b. if evacuation is not possible,
    - c. helping locate and direct persons to safer locations, preferably with thick walls and solid doors with locks; or, in the absence of such locations, rooms that can be barricaded with heavy furniture or objects;
    - d. directing individuals to silence all personal electronic devices, take cover, and remain silent; and
    - e. taking any actions possible to distract, disrupt, divert, or incapacitate the suspect using surprise attacks and any aggressive force possible.
  - c. when possible, assisting with the injured and directing incoming teams to injured persons.

### **C. Contact Officer or Team Response**

1. The mission of the contact officer or team is to locate and stop the threat. Even if the threat seemingly has been terminated, contact officers or teams are required to render the location safe, assist in screening and the orderly evacuation of persons to a designated area, and locating any other persons still in hiding.
2. Normally, only one contact officer or team shall be deployed at any given time. Additional officers or teams may be deployed at the direction of the IC to provide tactical advantage. The IC shall ensure that each team is aware of the other officers' or teams' locations and actions.
3. The contact officer or team shall be provided a clear communications channel to supply the following types of information:
  - a. The officer or team's progress and location.
  - b. The location and number of victims and their medical needs.
  - c. The estimated number of suspects involved.
  - d. The suspect's description and weapons if known.
  - e. The location of any booby traps or explosives. If discovered, the contact officer or team leader shall determine whether to post an officer near it, report it, or mark it for later removal.

4. The contact officer or team shall locate the suspect(s) in the most expeditious manner possible in order to stop the threat. In doing so, officers should not stop to render aid or assistance to victims, but may, where reasonably possible, inform them that RTFs are forthcoming and direct them to a safe point of egress or hiding if they are ambulatory and it is deemed safe for them to do so.
5. The contact officer or team should employ tactical advantages such as avoiding the use of the main entrance to provide an element of surprise and to bypass potential booby traps or ambush.
6. The contact officer or team should not attempt to conduct a thorough clearing of the location, but should follow sounds, such as gunfire, yelling, and screaming; observations of victims and bystanders; and related information to help locate the suspect(s) as soon as possible.
7. Once the location of the suspect(s) is known and any immediate threat is eliminated, the contact officer or team should proceed to clear all portions of the location in the event that more suspects are in hiding. If victims are encountered who require immediate trauma care, the contact officer or team shall provide such care prior to continuing to clear the location. Arriving tactical or other officers should be called upon to help clear the location of potential suspects, locate and evacuate persons in hiding, and render safe any dangerous munitions or armament.
8. The contact officer or team shall switch its focus to providing trauma care as necessary when the primary mission is completed.

#### **D. Rescue Task Force (RTFs)**

1. Once the contact officer or team is deployed, and as officers and resources arrive at the incident scene, the IC should ensure that RTFs are formed to provide trauma care and help evacuate victims.
2. RTFs shall be organized under a team leader, deploy in tactical formations consistent with agency training, and be prepared to respond to hostile action as rapidly changing circumstances may place them in contact with suspects. In such instances, the RTF shall be prepared and equipped to serve as the contact team.
3. RTFs shall be deployed only after the contact officer or team has made entry, provided a status report, notified the command post of the location of victims, established warm zones, and determined that rescue efforts may begin.
4. Wounded and injured persons shall be quickly searched, if reasonable, for weapons, quickly treated for obvious life-threatening injuries and removed to the designated CCPs with cover and movement of such persons provided by RTF members. If emergency medical personnel are not yet in place, basic trauma care shall be the responsibility of RTF members until they are relieved by medical personnel.
5. Rescue and recovery operations shall continue until the IC has declared the scene clear and safe.

#### **E. Unified Command**

1. Unified incident command shall be established as soon as possible.
2. The IC shall ensure that the following actions are accomplished:
  - a. Organize and establish unified interagency communication(s).
  - b. Establish an inner perimeter to control access to and egress from the area of risk.
  - c. Establish an outer perimeter.
  - d. Establish staging areas in the cold zone for the following purposes and notify communications of their locations:



- i. for responding officers and other emergency personnel (An officer should be assigned to this staging area to brief arriving personnel, maintain communication with the contact officer or team, and assign duties as directed by the IC.);
    - ii. for treatment of the injured and evacuation by EMS or medevac (CCP);
    - iii. where individuals without injuries should be directed for identification and debriefing (evacuation area);
    - iv. to accommodate arriving family members of persons at the incident scene (notification center); and
    - v. for the media. (This area should be staffed with appropriate personnel, such as public information officers.)
  - e. Ensure that officers assigned to the notification center maintain custody and control of all persons and document their identities until they can be reunited with family or others. Victims and witnesses suffering from emotional and/or physical trauma or shock should be kept under the observation of medical personnel until such time as they may be safely transported to a hospital or home in the care of family or friends.
  - f. Request mutual aid if necessary.
  - g. Establish traffic control and management for the ingress and egress of public safety vehicles. Special consideration should be given to maintain open routes for rapid transport of the injured.
  - h. Contact appropriate aviation resources to control air space for possible medical evacuation resources and to establish restricted air space for law enforcement use only.
  - i. Request emergency medical assistance.
  - j. Initiate intelligence gathering on possible suspects.
  - k. Summon chaplains and peer support officers to provide information to relatives of victims.
  - l. Coordinate with owners or officials of the target location for floor plans; site layout; and a roster, including emergency contact information as available, of employees, students, residents, visitors, or others believed to be on-site.
  - m. Assign a recorder to document actions at the command post.
3. When available on the scene, a tactical team may be assigned as appropriate to
  - a. contain the location,
  - b. assist RTFs,
  - c. help locate the suspect(s) or relieve the contact officer or team,
  - d. help locate and safeguard explosives pending removal, and
  - e. provide special weapons and equipment as needed.
4. Additional officers shall be deployed to control access to the location and monitor the perimeter.

## F. Community Notification

The PIO or other designated individual(s) shall be responsible for ensuring appropriate information is distributed in a timely manner to the community. This may include

1. shelter in place warnings for nearby locations during active shooter situations;
2. alerts to avoid the area due to heavy law enforcement activity and potential road closures; and
3. specific directions for individuals who elect to visit the scene.

**G. Debriefing**

As soon as reasonably possible after the incident, the agency shall conduct a debriefing of essential personnel involved in the incident. The debriefing shall identify areas of potential improvement and determine whether changes in operational protocols, policy, or training may be warranted.

**H. Training**

This agency shall provide active shooter training to all sworn and civilian personnel, including simulation exercises conducted in schools and other facilities and partnering first response agencies, where appropriate.



Every effort has been made by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this model policy incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no model policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives, and demands; often divergent law enforcement strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities, among other factors. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes. Law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions, and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered and should therefore consult their legal advisor before implementing any policy. This document is not intended to be a national standard.

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# Concepts and Issues Paper

Updated: April 2018

## Active Shooter

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Purpose of Document

This discussion paper is designed to accompany the Model Policy on Active Shooter, established by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center. While the term “active shooter” is used throughout, this document applies to all situations where there is an active, ongoing deadly threat, to include, but not limited to, those from firearms, explosives, knives, vehicles, and fire.

#### B. Key Definitions

For the purposes of this document, an active shooting is an incident in which one or more armed persons have used, or are reasonably likely to use, deadly force in an ongoing manner, and where persons have been injured, killed, or are under imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm by such persons.<sup>1</sup>

*A contact officer* or team is the first officer(s) at the scene of an active deadly threat tasked with locating the suspect and stopping the threat.

*Immediate action* is defined as rapid response by one or more officers to an active shooting based on a reasonable belief that failure to swiftly seek out and address the threat would result in death or serious bodily injury.

*The incident commander* (IC) is the individual responsible for all incident activities, including the development of strategies and tactics and the ordering and release of resources. The IC has overall authority and responsibility for conducting incident operations and is responsible for the management of all operations at the incident site. Responsibilities of the IC can be assumed by the officer handling the original call to the chief of the agency and any additional qualified officers, depending on the size, scope, and complexity of the incident or event.<sup>2</sup>

*Rescue task forces* (RTFs) are teams consisting of fire/emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, paired with law enforcement officers. Fire/EMS personnel are tasked with initial treatment and triage of patients in the warm zone. Law enforcement officers are assigned as the protection for this team and should not separate from the fire/EMS personnel.

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*Unified command* (UC) is an incident command system used when there is more than one agency with incident jurisdiction, or when incidents cross political jurisdictions. Agencies work together through designated members of the UC, often the senior person(s) from agencies and/or disciplines participating in the UC, to establish a common set of objectives and strategies. The IC responsibility is shared within the UC, with the function most important at the time taking the lead role. The lead responsibility may shift as the incident progresses.

### C. Concept of Immediate Action

Active shootings can result in a number of casualties in a short period of time, generally before officers or other emergency responders can even be summoned. In spite of this logistical disadvantage, it has been recognized that even one or two armed officers can make a difference in the outcome of active shootings by taking swift, but calculated, individual or coordinated action. For example, during the 2009 Fort Hood, Texas, shooting, two officers in close proximity to the incident took immediate action that successfully stopped the threat. Given this and similar incidents, current thinking reemphasizes that, given proper justification as defined by law and agency policy, taking immediate action during active shooter incidents, rather than waiting for specially equipped and trained officers, can save lives and prevent serious injuries. Time lost by delayed action is likely to result in additional casualties. Quick integration and deployment of life-saving measures and personnel into the initial response effort must be accomplished to minimize the impact of these types of incidents. Early medical intervention and rapid transportation to an appropriate treatment facility<sup>3</sup> are the most important factors to limit loss of life. Agency policies should include adaptable options for evolving threats that make the best use of available personnel to immediately suppress the threat and to treat and transport the injured.

### D. Development of the Active Shooter Response Concept

Since the establishment of organized law enforcement, the primary role of peace officers has been to respond to calls for assistance. Technological advances dramatically improved the way calls were received and processed and the way patrol officers traveled to the scene, but the basic call-respond-resolve paradigm remained fundamentally unchanged until August 1, 1966. On this date, a former Marine Corps rifleman climbed the tower at the University of Texas and within an hour and a half shot 46 people, killing 15. This was not the first mass murder in history, but it was unique. Rather than responding to this call after the fact to initiate a homicide investigation, patrol officers drove into a prolonged gun battle in which they were ill prepared to deal with a well-trained, well-equipped, and determined adversary.

During this same period, a number of urban areas in the United States were being set ablaze by rioters, and the emergency personnel who responded were sometimes fired upon by snipers. Law enforcement agencies nationwide recognized that these unusual situations were beyond the training and technical capabilities of their first responding officers. As a result, agencies created specially trained and equipped units designed to handle these crisis situations using time; talk; and, if necessary, tactics. This was the beginning of special weapons and tactics (SWAT) and other tactical teams, which served as the catalyst for redefining the role of the first responder when confronted with certain high-risk calls for service.

With the introduction of the tactical model, patrol officers in highly volatile and tactically challenging situations were trained to secure the scene and await the arrival of these specialized personnel. The operational protocol in most agencies now involves a patrol response to a high-risk call for service, an on-scene assessment, and a determination of

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<sup>3</sup> An appropriate treatment facility refers to a hospital's ability to treat traumatic injuries. Not all hospitals have the same capabilities. Regional and community-based hospital systems might not be prepared to handle a large number of injured people or catastrophic injuries like a designated trauma center may. Even those hospitals accredited as trauma centers can have varying degrees of capability and readiness. It is imperative that agencies consider this factor when developing their individualized response plans.

whether a tactical team is required. If the predetermined criteria are met, the tactical team is called and the first responders transition from problem solving to securing the scene as they await the arrival of specialists.

This concept has been a proven lifesaver for both officers and civilians, as highly trained and equipped personnel have responded to and successfully resolved countless situations involving barricaded gunmen, hostages, and snipers. Nevertheless, experience has shown that reliance on specialized tactical units to resolve such high-risk situations sometimes results in delayed action at a crisis site. That is, certain circumstances are so dynamic and dangerous that securing the scene and waiting for a tactical team can be counterproductive to the first responders' primary lifesaving mission. Amid public criticism of the law enforcement response to the Columbine, Colorado, school shootings in 1999, many law enforcement executives began reconsidering the wisdom of limiting the role of first responders at critical incidents to containment and related basic functions.

## E. Immediate Action

With the evolution and increasing frequency of active shooter events, law enforcement response to these situations has evolved beyond establishing a perimeter and waiting for specialized units to respond.

As previously defined, immediate action can result from a dispatched call for assistance, or a self-initiated response to an active shooter. An active shooting exists—and immediate action is justified—not only when shots have been fired or death or serious harm has occurred, but also when an appropriately trained law enforcement officer believes it is reasonably likely that some form of deadly force will be used if immediate action is not taken.

Take the following scenario as an example: A heavily armed male suspect who has reportedly been disconsolate for some time after having lost his job has entered an office building after informing his wife that he is going to “kill my boss and anyone else I can find.” Immediate action may be justified based on the fact that

- the individual is armed with a deadly weapon or other weapon suitable for carrying out the threat;
- the individual is in a location where persons are under his control or are readily accessible;
- the individual has, by speech or conduct, or both, provided the basis to reasonably believe that he will use deadly force; and
- immediate action is reasonably likely to result in a successful resolution

Under these or similar circumstances, an officer would be justified in determining that immediate action is necessary and warranted, barring any other reasonable alternative.

The concept of immediate action reflects a change in operational philosophy as it relates to stopping a deadly force threat. These strategies may save lives, but they should not be considered as a full replacement for the traditional time-talk-tactics protocols that have served law enforcement well for many years. In most critical incidents, patrol officers will determine that requesting tactical assistance is the appropriate decision. In other cases, they will find it reasonable and necessary to use their enhanced skills, training, and equipment to take immediate action to protect lives.

## F. Active Shooters

An active shooter incident exhibits some of the same basic characteristics as hostage and barricaded suspect incidents in that the suspects are armed and have generally contained themselves in a facility with potential victims. However, barricade situations vary from the typical active shooter incident in that they often provide first responders with time to contain the perimeter and call for a tactical team and negotiator.

Active shooting scenarios are generally quite different in that they develop quickly into a deadly situation and are often concluded in a relatively short period of time. These situations are often highly fluid, as the shooters move through the location, searching for victims, and possibly planting explosive devices. A substantial ongoing risk of

danger continues to persons accessible to the shooters. However, officers must be prepared to transition from an active shooter response to a barricade incident, such as what occurred at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016.

**Characteristics of Active Shooter Situations.** While many associate active shootings with schools, they also occur at other locations, generally where numerous potential victims are in a confined area. A study conducted by the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center at Texas State University catalogued a variety of commonalities among the 200 active shooting events in the United States that occurred between 2000 and 2015.<sup>4</sup>

The study revealed that businesses were the most frequently attacked locations (49 percent) compared to 22 percent for schools. Sixteen percent of attacks occurred in public venues, such as indoor shopping malls or outdoor locations, and about 13 percent occurred in places other than these, to include military bases and churches.

The most powerful weapon used in 56 percent of incidents was a handgun, followed by 27 percent of suspects who used rifles, and 14 percent who primarily used shotguns. In nearly 53 percent of cases, the incident was resolved (e.g., the shooting/attack stopped) before law enforcement arrived at the scene. Of these 106 events, the attacker committed suicide in 54 instances and left the scene in 17 cases. In 35 cases, potential victims stopped the attacker, most often by physically subduing him, and in 8 cases they shot the attacker.

In instances where law enforcement arrived during the attack, the attack ended because the suspect committed suicide in 24 cases and surrendered in 8 cases. In 62 cases, the attack was terminated when law enforcement shot the suspect, or when the subject was subdued by other means (14 instances).<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, according to the study, active shooter attacks are on the rise. Specifically, in 2000 and 2001 there were 7 such incidents in the United States, compared to 38 in the two years of 2012 and 2013, 40 in 2014 and 2015, and 20 in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

**Who Is the Typical Active Shooter?** On January 10, 2013, the United States Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation issued a joint public intelligence bulletin outlining some of the most common characteristics of active shooters identified between 2002 and 2012. Their findings include the following:

*From investigations and analysis, many active shooters were described as social isolates, harbored feelings of hate and anger, and/or had some reported contact with mental health professionals. Mental illness is commonly referenced as a potential contributing factor, but its causal impact on the attack can only be speculated. Very few active shooters had previous arrests for violent crimes. Common catalysts or triggers observed include: loss of significant relationships, changes in financial status, loss of a job, changes in living arrangements, major adverse changes to life circumstances, and/or feelings of humiliation or rejection on the part of the shooter.<sup>7</sup>*

Other characteristics commonly associated with active shooter suspects from 2000-2013, as compiled by the FBI, include the following.

- Nearly all active shooters are males who act alone.

<sup>4</sup> Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Center at Texas State University, “ALERRT Active Shooter Data,” <http://www.activeshooterdata.org/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> ALERRT, “Active Shooting Resolution,” <http://www.activeshooterdata.org/the-resolution.html>.

<sup>6</sup> ALERRT, “ALERRT Active Shooter Data: Active Shootings, 2000-2012,” <http://www.activeshooterdata.org/2000-2012.html>; “ALERRT Active Shooter Data: Active Shootings, 2009-2011,” <http://www.activeshooterdata.org/2009-2011.html>; and “ALERRT Active Shooter Data: Active Shootings, 2012-2015,” <http://www.activeshooterdata.org/2012-2015.html>; and “Active Shooter Incidents in the United States from 2000-2016,” [https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/activeshooter\\_incidents\\_2001-2016.pdf/view](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/activeshooter_incidents_2001-2016.pdf/view).

<sup>7</sup> DHS-FBI Joint Intelligence Bulletin, “(U//FOUO) Recent Active Shooter Incidents Highlight Need for Continued Vigilance,” December 27, 2012.

- The age of an active shooter spans from young to old with no discernible pattern. Incident subgroup patterns were identified in some location categories. For example, active shooters in 12 of 14 high school shootings and 5 of 6 middle school shootings were students at the school, and 22 of 23 private business shootings were by employees or former employees.
- Less than 10 percent of active shootings targeted family members.<sup>8</sup>

## II. AGENCY PLANNING FOR ACTIVE SHOOTERS

Many law enforcement agencies have taken steps to address the active shooter risk in their communities through the development of policy and action plans addressing the agency-wide response to active shootings. These often have several factors in common, including

- using specific language that authorizes first responders to seek out and stop suspects who are engaged in active shootings;
- requiring adequate training for all personnel likely to respond to active shootings, to include
- practical, scenario-based exercises in operational environments such as schools, shopping malls, or office buildings;
- special emphasis on the primary mission objective of stopping the threat as opposed to rendering trauma care, extracting victims, and performing other actions; and
- joint training with local fire/EMS providers to ensure that all involved personnel understand their roles and responsibilities and those of other involved emergency responders;
- ensuring that resources between emergency responders are coordinated so appropriately trained personnel can gain access to victims as soon as possible;
- establishing unified command practices through policy and MOUs in advance of an incident;
- preventing “over-convergence” through the use of designated staging areas and personnel to direct individuals to the appropriate locations; and
- providing necessary equipment and related training for those tasked with immediate action, to include patrol rifles, helmets, enhanced ballistic and load-bearing vests, ballistic shields, window access and forced entry tools, and trauma kits.

The reality of response time challenges underscores the value of reaching out to the community. Law enforcement must explain what is known about active shooter cases, provide information on how law enforcement will respond and react, and what potential victims need to know in order to protect themselves and others prior to law enforcement’s arrival and intervention.

## III. RESPONDING TO ACTIVE SHOOTERS

### A. Justification for Immediate Action

A decision to initiate immediate action should take into account whether

- Reasonable belief exists that immediate action, to include use of deadly force, is necessary to prevent death or serious bodily injury.

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<sup>8</sup> J. Pete Blair and Katherine W. Schweit, A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013 (Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 2014), <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view>.



- Tactical officers will be available soon enough to take action in lieu of immediate action. As previously indicated, delays of even minutes can have negative consequences.
- Sufficient law enforcement personnel and equipment are available to effectively respond to the threat. A minimum of three officers is recommended to conduct a tactical deployment. However, this might not always be possible. Individual officers or pairs of officers may need to take steps to stop a threat, when a delay in acquiring backup is likely.

Other factors need to be considered in order to accomplish the mission. For example, can the target location be entered effectively to gain access to the suspect? This consideration includes, but is not limited to, such circumstances as known booby-trapped explosives that are beyond the capability of available officers to bypass or disarm. Additionally, many schools and other buildings are implementing enhanced physical security measures and lockdown protocols. Recognizing this, more law enforcement agencies are providing and training patrol officers in the use of breaching tools and munitions that heretofore have been available only to tactical units. At a minimum, relatively inexpensive breaching tools such as a sledge, ram, or Halligan bar should be available to all patrol units. Breaching rounds designed for use in standard issue 12 gauge patrol shotguns are another option, although more extensive training is required prior to field use.

Officers should also consider whether, given available information, intervention could potentially neutralize the opportunity for the suspect to gain access to hostages or other potential victims or for officers to locate and engage the suspect. This decision must be based in part on having a general idea of the location of the suspect and persons who are in jeopardy. Effective communication with persons reporting at or from within the shooting location can greatly assist this determination and the development of strategies.

In some instances, immediate action by a single officer may not be prudent or possible. For example, an off-duty officer in a mall may not be armed. However, an unarmed officer can take other measures. For example, the officer can contact the communications center, identify himself or herself as a law enforcement officer and, as a trained observer, provide as much information as possible on the situation and needs for assistance. The officer should also provide his or her location, description, whether he or she is armed, and request that this information be provided to responding officers so as to avoid misidentification. Whenever displaying firearms in a crowd in these or other conditions, officers in plainclothes or civilian attire should conspicuously display their shield and announce their presence as a law enforcement officer, again, to avoid being confused for the suspect by responding officers or civilians who may be armed.<sup>9</sup>

The officer should also determine whether he or she may be valuable in assisting in evacuation by locating the closest points of egress and directing persons to those points and away from likely points of danger or by directing persons in unsecured locations to safer areas or points of evacuation.

If safe evacuation is not reasonable (e.g., doors have been locked or barricaded), the officer may assist in the location of shelter, such as rooms or areas with thick walls that can be secured with solid locking doors or barricaded with heavy furniture or other objects. Persons in hiding should be directed to turn off all electronic devices and remain completely silent.

Another option for an unarmed officer is to take any actions designed to distract, disrupt, divert, or incapacitate the shooter using any force options available.

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<sup>9</sup> See the IACP Model Policy and Concepts & Issues Paper on Off-Duty Arrests at [http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/model\\_policy/off-duty-arrests/](http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/model_policy/off-duty-arrests/).



## B. Initial Response to the Incident

Intervention begins the moment the first call is made by witnesses or others to the emergency communications center. Communications personnel need to be provided with training that will allow them to identify potential active shooter situations and to ask important questions in priority order to obtain the most essential information in the least amount of time. Callers who are witnesses to, or in the midst of, an active shooting incident are the first and best source of information that will assist responding officers—providing information on whether deadly force has been used; how many shooters are involved; and where in the building or other location the shooting is taking place. It is the difficult job of communications personnel in these incidents to calm and focus callers so that they can provide essential information where possible.

Patrol response should be initiated as soon as possible. Callers can often be kept on the line so that additional information can be relayed to responding officers. It should be noted that most active shooter incidents include reports of multiple shooters, though the overwhelming majority have only one.

**Control Zones.** For the purposes of this discussion, the incident scene can be divided into several different zones that can be used to designate necessary resources. Cold zones are areas where there is little or no threat due to geographic distance from the threat or the area has been secured by law enforcement. Some items that should be located in the cold zone are patient loading areas, the unified command post, and staging areas. Warm zones are areas of indirect threat where law enforcement has either cleared or isolated the threat to a level of minimal or mitigated risk. These areas can be considered clear, but not secure. Finally, hot zones are areas where there is a known hazard or direct and immediate threat to life. These include any uncontrolled area where an active shooter could directly engage responders.

**Initial Situational Analysis.** Based on observation and all available information, initial responders should determine, as quickly and to the greatest degree possible, whether an active shooter situation exists. Initial assessment of the situation may be aided by comments received by communication from persons at or fleeing the scene, sounds of gunfire, or similar sources. Where available, witnesses should be asked for any information related to the number of subjects, their weapons, the place where they were last seen, and an estimate of the number of persons at risk, including their locations, injuries, or deaths. As soon as reasonably possible, the first responders should advise communications of the incident status and request that necessary resources respond to a designated staging area.

**Contact Officer or Team.** The mission of the contact officer or team is to stop the threat by locating the suspect in the most expeditious manner possible. In doing so, officers should not stop to render aid or assistance to victims but can, where reasonably possible, inform them that additional rescue task forces (RTFs) are coming to assist and notify emergency responders of the victims' locations and perceived conditions. The contact officer or team should wear appropriate ballistic protection and equipment and be specifically trained in tactics appropriate to respond to active shooters. However, when time is of the essence, entry should not be delayed in order to gather all items of equipment that should ideally be available.

The officer or team should utilize tactical advantages such as entering at a location other than the main entrance to provide an element of surprise and to avoid potential booby traps or ambush. Contact officers or team members should be given a clear radio channel to provide ongoing communications with the command post, if established; other tactical teams; and RTFs regarding the following:

- The officer or team's progress and location.
- The location and number of victims and their medical needs.
- The estimated number of suspects involved.
- The suspect's description and armament, if known.

- The location of any booby traps or explosives. If a booby trap or an explosive device is discovered, the contact officer or team leader should determine whether to post an officer, where available, near it; to report it; or to mark it for later removal.

The contact officer or team should not attempt to conduct a thorough clearing of the location, but should follow sounds, such as gunfire, yelling, or screaming; observations of victims and bystanders; and related information to find the suspect as soon as possible. Once the suspect has been located and the threat addressed, the contact officer or team should proceed to clear all portions of the location in the event that more suspects are in hiding. If victims are encountered who require immediate trauma care, the contact officer or team should provide such care prior to continuing to clear the location. Arriving tactical or other officers should be called upon to assist in this effort.

Normally, only one contact officer or team should be deployed at any given time. However, additional officers or teams may be deployed, but should ensure that all officers deployed are aware of location and movement of other officers or teams. This is particularly important when plainclothes officers are on site.

**Rescue Task Forces (RTFs).** Once the contact officer or team is deployed, and as officers and resources arrive at the incident scene, a requisite number of RTFs should be formed to provide trauma care. Clearing a large building takes time, during which wounded persons may die due to hemorrhage. RTFs are intended to fill this gap in providing trauma care. They generally consist of three to four law enforcement officers providing protection to fire/EMS personnel moving in formation together to treat the injured. However, it is recognized that many jurisdictions might not be able to accommodate this preferred number. Therefore, it is left to the IC to determine the appropriate number of officers.

RTFs should be deployed after the contact officer or team has made entrance, provided a status report, notified the command post of the location of victims, and determined that rescue efforts may begin. This can be done in stages as locations are declared warm. The RTFs should be organized under a team leader, deployed in tactical formations consistent with agency training, and be prepared to respond to hostile action as rapidly changing circumstances may place them in contact with the suspects. Law enforcement officers with an RTF should be prepared and equipped to serve as a contact team. In case of stimulus or contact, officers should move fire/EMS personnel to a point of cover (e.g., within a room with limited entry points) and leave at least one officer to serve as a guard. At no time should fire and EMS personnel operating within a warm zone be left unprotected.

Injured persons should be searched, if reasonable, and then moved to an area with limited physical entry points, referred to as a casualty collection point (CCP), with cover provided by law enforcement officers. This location should also provide physical cover from a potential threat. If medical personnel are not yet in place at the CCP, trauma care should be the responsibility of law enforcement officers until relieved by EMS personnel. Unified command, in coordination with RTFs, should identify points of egress as soon as possible to begin extraction of only the most critically wounded from CCPs to exterior locations. RTF members, specifically law enforcement officers, should search uninjured persons in the hostile environment before moving them to the designated evacuation area. Rescue and recovery operations should continue until the UC has declared the scene cold. Officers assigned to the evacuation center should maintain custody and control of all victims and document their identities. As evacuees arrive at the evacuation center, the UC may direct that they be debriefed for information relating to the identity, location, and armament of the suspect and such other information as may be deemed important to ongoing contact and rescue operations.

It has been noted here that the contact officer or team should dedicate its attention to finding and neutralizing the threat and wait for RTFs to attend to and evacuate the wounded. In order to provide any useful assistance to the wounded, or to fellow officers who may be wounded or injured, an officer must have trauma care training<sup>10</sup> and the

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<sup>10</sup> This may include tactical emergency casualty care (TECC) and tactical combat casualty care (TCCC). All officers should receive emergency first aid training for traumatic injuries.

means with which to attend to the individual. Agencies should provide officers with basic emergency medical trauma kits to provide such assistance. Appropriately equipped trauma kits are relatively inexpensive and contain the basic equipment needed to save lives. In active shooter situations, these materials can potentially save lives that might be lost by delaying medical attention.

***Incident Command.*** Early coordination of incident activities is critical to mission success. Agency policy should establish provisions for the determination of who will assume the role of incident commander (IC). The IC serves as the primary point of contact between public safety communications centers; responding officers, including those who compose the contact team(s); fire and EMS personnel; and other entities that may arrive on the scene. The IC should establish communication with the contact officer(s) or team(s) and begin to coordinate their activity and should work with the ranking fire/EMS command officer(s) to form the unified command (UC).

***Unified Command (UC).*** A UC should be established as soon as possible. The UC should be housed in an area that is out of sight and out of the line of fire of the suspect. It should be located within the convergence of the inner and outer perimeters for easy access by authorized individuals.

The IC should ensure that the following actions are accomplished based on their urgency and importance to the operation:

- Organize unified interagency telecommunications.
- Establish the following areas in the cold zone, to include providing the necessary security for each.
  - A staging area for first responders.
  - An evacuation area to move victims and witnesses not requiring medical attention.
  - A CCP for treatment of the injured and evacuation by EMS or medevac.
  - In consultation with EMS, an area that affords safe egress from the CCP and uninhibited egress of transport units from the scene.
  - A notification center at a suitable, nearby location to provide information to the loved ones of victims (patients or otherwise). The UC should consider utilizing social media to announce the location to prevent civilians from overwhelming the scene. Some jurisdictions elect to establish two notification centers—one for individuals whose loved ones are deceased and another for those who are alive.
  - A media staging area separate from the notification center. This location should afford desired video capability to satisfy media needs. The UC should consider activating involved agencies' public information officers (PIOs) early to coordinate media communication and direction.
- Request mutual aid, if necessary.
- Establish traffic control and management to ensure egress of medical transport. Contact appropriate aviation resources to control air space for possible medical evacuation resources to establish restricted air space for law enforcement use only. In addition to, based on the number of casualties, request necessary medical evacuation resources and identify a field expedient heliport near the incident to allow for balanced distribution of patients to appropriate facilities.
- Initiate intelligence gathering on possible suspects. Establish communication with regional fusion or intelligence centers.
- Coordinate with owners or officials from the target location to obtain floor plans; site layout; and a roster, including emergency contact information as available, of employees, students, residents, visitors, or others believed to be on site. Consider coordinating with fire department units to obtain pre-plans. Many jurisdictions have the identified information readily available onboard responding units. Additionally, many fire departments have a building access system, commonly referred to as Knox keys or Supra keys.

Other than some federal installations, this system grants near full access to an entire building or facility minimizing the need for advanced breaching efforts.

- Assign a recorder to document actions at the command post.
- Assign security to ensure only authorized personnel can gain access to the command post.
- Activate involved agencies' PIOs early to initiate release of appropriate information and direction of individuals to appropriate locations. This information may include such items as shelter in place warnings for nearby locations during active shooter situations; alerts to avoid the area due to heavy law enforcement activity and potential road closures; and specific directions for individuals who elect to visit the scene. Social media should be considered as an avenue for quickly and effectively distributing appropriate information related to the active shooter situation.
- Request chaplains and officers trained in peer support.
- When available on scene, the UC may assign tactical officers as appropriate to do the following:
  - Contain the location
  - Assist RTFs
  - Help locate suspects or relieve the contact officer or team
  - Help locate and safeguard explosives pending removal
  - Provide special weapons and equipment as needed

**Perimeters.** The IC should designate an initial inner perimeter to contain the suspect and control access to and egress from the target location, when such containment is logical and appropriate. Escaping individuals should be directed out of the inner perimeter to the evacuation center for search, identification, and debriefing. Particular care must be taken to ensure that persons evacuating the facility do not include the suspects, who may be attempting to flee. Additional officers should be deployed to control access to the target location and monitor the inner perimeter. An outer perimeter should also be designated for the primary purposes of diverting traffic and securing the scene from spectators, media members, and others. This outer perimeter should take into account the areas at risk of danger not only from the active shooter, but also from the contact officers or teams that may be engaging the shooter from different locations.

**Staging Areas.** As previously outlined, the UC should ensure that suitable staging areas are selected for several purposes. This should not be accomplished until a sufficient number of officers arrive at the scene to provide support and is likely to take place after the initial responding officers have entered the facility. As a consequence, it is important that at least one officer remain outside the facility to maintain communications with the contact officer or team and to brief and direct arriving officers.

One area, for example, should be selected as a secure staging location for responding officers and other emergency responders so that they can be directed to assignments as necessary. In addition, locations should be designated for evacuees, family members, the media, and RTFs, if used. The exact location of all staging areas must be provided to communications for relay to responding units. The designated officer should remain at the staging area at all times to brief arriving personnel and maintain communication with the emergency communications center and the IC.

The staging area for family members, referred to as the notification center, is particularly important at incidents in schools, and similar locations as word spreads through the community and distraught parents or friends converge on the scene.

**Media.** Media attention will inevitably be drawn to active shooter incident scenes. To minimize confusion and ensure a consistent message, the IC should approve any information released to the PIO or directly to the media.

During the incident, news conferences for the media should be held and, if possible, specialists and other agency representatives should be asked to be present to answer questions specific to their areas of expertise.

Designation of a staging area for the media may help to ensure release of accurate information, as well as to contain the movement of media personnel. However, no special accommodations are required “[T]he First Amendment does not guarantee the press a constitutional right of special access to information not available to the public generally.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, “newsmen have no constitutional right of access to the scenes of crime or disaster when the general public is excluded.”<sup>12</sup>

### C. Debriefing

After the incident, the agency should conduct a debriefing that includes essential personnel involved in the incident. The debriefing should identify potential areas of improvement and determine whether changes in operational protocols, policy, or training are warranted.

### D. Training

All sworn personnel should be provided with training by their agency on immediate action for response to an active shooter incident. This training should include simulation exercises in schools and other facilities or tabletop training. Before an agency uses immediate action strategies, all of those involved should have successfully completed training on its use. As noted, training should include all agencies that would provide emergency response during active shooter situations, particularly cross training between fire, EMS, and law enforcement personnel. Training should include treatment for victims and fellow emergency responders as well as self-administered wound care and the use of basic life support equipment such as tourniquets, nasopharyngeal airway devices, and coagulant wound packing materials that have proven their value in numerous tactical encounters. Training should focus not solely on shared medical responsibility but also on the roles, expectations, organization, and management of responders.

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<sup>11</sup> *Branzburg v. Hayes*, 408 U.S. 665 (1972).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

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# Need to Know...

Updated: April 2018

## Active Shooter

*Active shootings can result in a number of casualties in a short period of time, generally before tactical officers or other emergency responders can even be summoned. However, swift, but calculated action by even one or two armed officers can alter the outcome of these situations.*

- An active shooting is defined as an incident in which one or more armed persons have used, or are reasonably likely to use, deadly force in an ongoing manner, and where persons have been injured, killed, or are under imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm by such persons. Additional terms that may be used to describe these incidents include active killing, active threat, and mass casualty attack.
- Law enforcement agencies should adopt policies that allow for immediate action by officers at the scene of an active shooting where ongoing deadly force is reasonably likely to be employed by a suspect and a delay in taking law enforcement action could result in further injury or death.
- Even if unarmed, officers can still play a role in an active shooter response. In these situations, officers should facilitate evacuation, where safe to do so. If evacuation is not possible, officers should shift their focus to directing individuals to safer locations and having them silence any electronic devices.
- A contact officer or team is comprised of the first officer(s) at the scene of an active shooting and is tasked with locating the suspect(s) and stopping the threat.
- Once sufficient resources are available, rescue task forces (RTFs) should be formed. These teams consist of fire/EMS personnel, paired with law enforcement officers. The goal of RTFs is to provide initial treatment and triage of victims and to assist with evacuation.
- Unified incident command should be established as soon as possible and should include representatives from all involved agencies.
- Separate staging areas should be designated in the cold zone for responding emergency personnel, treatment of victims and evacuation by EMS or medevac, identification and debriefing of individuals without injuries, arriving family members, and media.
- Law enforcement agencies should conduct joint training with local fire/EMS providers to ensure that all involved personnel understand their roles and responsibilities and those of other involved emergency responders when responding to active shooter situations.

**Law enforcement agencies can better prepare their communities for active shooter events by explaining what is known about these situations, providing information on how law enforcement will respond and react, and providing information on what potential victims need to know to protect themselves and others prior to law enforcement's arrival and intervention.**





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