

# ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

## PREPARATION & RESPONSE



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	4
<b>Step 1:</b> Implement a Zero-Tolerance Workplace Violence Policy .....	5
By the Numbers .....	6
<b>Step 2:</b> Create an Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) .....	7
Shooter Data .....	9
<b>Step 3:</b> Train Employees and Volunteers .....	10
Run Hide Fight .....	11
<b>Step 4:</b> Conduct Active Shooter Drills .....	12
Resources .....	13

# INTRODUCTION

**It isn't something people want to think about, but the fact of the matter is that not a single business or organization is immune from violence.** Every organization should actively plan and prepare for all sorts of emergency scenarios, including active violent threats. Planning for emergencies and establishing the proper policies and procedures is essential to ensuring that all employees know how to react and what to do in violent threat situations, including active shooter incidents.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) defines an active shooter as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area, typically through the use of firearms.”

Among active shooters there is no common pattern or method in selecting victims. As such, these scenarios will be unpredictable, dynamic, and evolve quickly.

There are no recommendations or preparations that apply to every facility, organization, or business; however, the more personal and specific you can make your preparations, the better.

The following suggested steps should be taken to prepare an organization for an active shooter or other violent threat incidents.

***The “active” aspect of these incidents implies that both law enforcement and citizens have the potential to affect the outcome of the incident based upon their responses.***

# STEP 1: IMPLEMENT A ZERO-TOLERANCE WORKPLACE VIOLENCE POLICY

## **An employer can show their commitments and priorities to their employees through the adoption of workplace policies.**

An organization's culture is heavily influenced by its leadership and implementing policies can help foster a good working environment. Additionally, a zero-tolerance workplace violence policy can serve to advise employees on what to do in the event of potential or actual workplace violence incidents.

## **A good policy will include:**

- The organization's statement on their commitment to maintain a safe working environment, partially through having zero tolerance for workplace violence;
- A comprehensive definition of workplace violence, as well as examples of prohibited behavior, including bullying, domestic violence, and intimidation;
- A statement encouraging employees to report any behavior they deem suspicious and/or threatening, including suspicions of domestic violence and threats of suicide;

- The procedures and avenues available to employees for reporting, including employees who wish to make anonymous reports;
- A strong commitment to preventing retaliation against employees who make any reports in good faith;
- Ensure that all employees have multiple avenues for reporting, including several layers of upper management. You do not want to limit an employee to reporting only to their immediate manager or HR if that employee does not feel comfortable with them;
- Outline how investigations will be properly and promptly handled; and
- Any potential consequences of policy violations, up to and including discipline or termination.

The policy and/or procedures can be made more specific to each individual organization and its concerns.

# BY THE NUMBERS: 2000 – 2021

**434**

Active Shooter Incidents occurring in US between 2000-2021

**85%**

Incident increase 2019 - 2021

**3,258**

Total Casualties  
\*1,203 - Killed  
\*2,055 - Wounded

**44 out of 50**

Number of states where incidents have occurred

**20**

Average number of incidents occurring annually

**152**

Number of incidents meeting the Federal definition of a Mass Killing

**192**

Incidents occurred in a Commercial Environment

**64**

Incidents occurred in an Educational Environment

**12**

Incidents involving multiple shooters

**69% of incidents are over in 5 minutes or less**

## STEP 2: CREATE AN EMERGENCY OPERATION PLAN (EOP)

**The goal of an effective EOP is to better prepare employees to respond to different types of emergency situations**, including active shooter incidents, and to help minimize any loss of life. Best practices concerning the creation of an EOP include getting input from several important stakeholders in the organization, as well as the creation of a Management Response Team (MRT) or a Safety Committee. An effective MRT or Safety Committee can be tasked with developing the components of an EOP that outline the proper procedures for an employer to utilize to handle emergencies of all sorts in the workplace.

### **An EOP should include such things as:**

- A preferred method of reporting fires and other emergencies;
- An evacuation policy and procedures;
- Emergency escape procedures and route assignments;
- Contact information for the individuals designated by the EOP, as well as the responsibilities for those individuals, including, but not limited to:

- » Speaking to the media with prepared media statements;
- » Contacting families of employees involved in the incident;
- » Fielding calls;
- » Working with emergency responders;
- » Information concerning local area hospitals;
- An emergency notification system to alert various parties of an emergency, such as any individuals who might be at remote locations within the premises, local law enforcement, and local area hospitals;
- A plan on how to notify families both during and after an incident, and how to address any media communications; and
- An overall plan to manage the aftermath of an emergency incident, especially an active shooter incident.

Organizations must be aware of and consider the needs of individuals with disabilities (or access and functional needs) who may require assistance during an evacuation or shelter-in-place. These needs must also be addressed in the EOP.

## STEP 2: CREATE AN EMERGENCY OPERATION PLAN (EOP) (CONTINUED)

After an active shooter has been incapacitated or apprehended and is no longer a threat, organizations should have a plan in place to best assist law enforcement and emergency personnel, including:

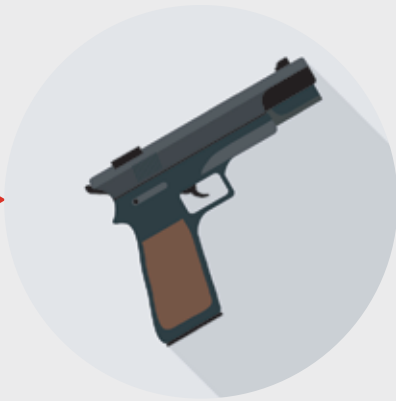
- Accounting for all employees, volunteers, and/or guests to determine who might be missing;
- Notifying the families of any individuals who were affected by the active shooter. If there are notifications of casualties, employers need to work with law enforcement on notifying the family;
- Having an operations plan in place to ensure that all essential functions will still be carried out as necessary;
- Determining a transition plan for the resumption of normal operations; and
- Developing a system to efficiently and effectively communicate with employees and their family members in the aftermath.

It is highly recommended that employers also have a plan in place to provide counseling or other types of psychological first aid for employees after an emergency incident. It is important for the health of an organization that the employees are also in good health, including recovering from the emotional side effects of violence and stress. Organizations can utilize their employee assistance program, if one is available, or reach out to local crisis centers, mental health services, and support groups.

***An employer should note that even if it chooses to not implement an EOP, it has a legal duty under the “General Duty Clause” of the federal Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards that are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) interprets this to include the responsibility to prevent harm to employees from workplace violence.***



# SHOOTER DATA



## SINGLE

Single shooter in 97% of incidents

## CONCERNING AND PREPARATION BEHAVIORS

In 93% of incidents shooter(s) exhibited concerning and preparation behaviors

## MALE SHOOTER

In 97% of incidents

## CURRENT EMPLOYEES OR STUDENTS

In 95% of incidents occurring in workplace and educational locations

## STEP 3: TRAIN EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS



**When under the stress of a traumatic incident, people without experience will never rise to the occasion, rather, they will sink to the level of their training.**

Schools and businesses in the United States have practiced fire drills for over 50 years – to the point that the reaction has become second nature. Sadly, the necessity for active shooter training drills across all venues is becoming more prevalent and necessary.

The most effective way to train employees to respond and react during any stressful incident is to conduct training and practical exercises while gradually introducing stressors to practice using critical thinking skills while under stress.

Most Active Shooter Response trainings currently taught focus on simple, options-based plans. One example is the popular **RUN – HIDE – FIGHT** procedures currently being taught around the country. Although not meant to be done in a linear progression, each option is a defined action to be used based on the dynamics of a current situation. Sometimes there may be only one option available, while in other situations you can utilize two or more together. Remembering to call 911 only when it is safe for you to do so.

To prepare for an active shooter incident or other violent threat, employees should be trained to:



***Remember, call 911 only when it is safe to do so.***

# RUN – HIDE – FIGHT



## RUN

**Getting away from the shooter or shooters is top priority.** Leave all your belongings behind and keep your hands visible. Remember, call 911 only when it is safe to do so. When you are safe enough to be able to call law enforcement during or after an active shooter event in the workplace, try to provide the following information:

- Location of active shooter(s);
- Location of caller;
- Number of shooters, if more than one;
- If there is law enforcement on-site (if known);
- Physical description of shooter(s);
- Type and number of weapons used by shooter(s);
- Use or threat of explosives/improvised explosive devices (IEDs);
- If shooting is still occurring; and
- Number of potential victims at the scene.



## HIDE-LOCKDOWN

**If you can't get away safely, find a place to hide.** Get out of view and stay quiet. Silence your electronic devices. Try to lock doors or barricade any entries to your location.

Your hiding place should:

- Have minimal interior glass (windows, doors)
- Provide protection if shots are fired in your direction (e.g., an office with a closed and locked door)
- Have furniture to aid with fortification
- Not trap you or restrict your options for movement

Quickly determine the most reasonable option to protect your life, and possibly, the lives of others. These incidents are dynamic and unpredictable. Your response will not be in a linear progression. The most important action is to move and warn others. Remember that customers and clients are likely to follow the lead of employees and managers during an active shooter situation.



## FIGHT-DEFEND

**An option, when in immediate danger, is to defend yourself.** Ambush the shooter with makeshift weapons such as chairs, fire extinguishers, scissors, and books which can be thrown to distract or disarm the shooter. Unlike other types of workplace violence, there are rarely any warning signs of an active shooter incident. However, it is critical that an organization train its employees to recognize indicators of potentially violent behavior, which can include one or more of the following:

- Depression and/or withdrawal;
- Resistance and overreaction to changes in policies and procedures;
- Increased severe mood swings;
- Noticeably unstable, emotional responses;
- Explosive outbursts of anger or rage without provocation;
- Suicidal indications;
- Comments about “putting things in order;”
- Empathy with individuals who commit violence;
- Increase in unsolicited comments about firearms, other dangerous weapons, and violent crimes.

An employer should ensure that its employees are aware of these behavioral indicators and urged to alert HR or a supervisor if he or she believes an individual exhibits potentially violent behavior.

## STEP 4: CONDUCT ACTIVE SHOOTER DRILLS

### **Drills allow employees to practice the escape routes and can show employers areas of potential weakness in their EOPs.**

Active shooter drills can take several different forms, depending on the size of the facility and staff, as well as the organization's resources. All drills must be announced prior to being conducted; the last thing an employer wants to do is to traumatize their employees. Employers should always be sensitive to any employee's needs and allow them to opt out of the training should they choose to. Because active shooter incidents are so unpredictable, practicing for several potential scenarios is recommended.

### **Drills can assist employees with:**

- Recognizing the sound of gunshots;
- Reacting quickly when an alarm is sounded, gunfire is heard, and/or when a shooting is witnessed, e.g. run, hide, fight;
- Knowing when and where to call 911; and
- Reacting appropriately when law enforcement arrives.

It is vitally important to train and drill employees on how to respond to the arrival of law enforcement. Be sure to:

- Remain calm and follow all instructions;
- Put any items in your hands down (like a purse, cell phone, or jacket);
- Raise your hands and spread your fingers, keeping your hands visible at all times;
- Avoid pointing, screaming, or yelling;
- Avoid making quick movements towards officer such as holding onto them for safety, and;
- Do not attempt to stop to ask officers for help or directions when you are evacuating.

At the end of every drill, the employer and/or trainer should provide the participating employees with feedback on how they performed in the drill, and what could be improved upon. Like with every drill, active shooter drills need to be done on a regular basis to ensure employees retain the information.

There is a lot of information available for free online from organizations looking to address the issue of active shooter preparedness in the workplace; the key is to find good quality sources.

[The Department of Homeland Security has a webpage](#) devoted to Active Shooter Preparedness including a webinar, a workshop series, and additional resources. [The FBI also has a webpage](#) of Active Shooter Resources, including a video on **Run, Hide, Fight** and **Active Shooter Studies**.

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A Poms & Associates Risk Services specialist can provide you with a personalized, on-site security assessment of your facility as well as custom, on-site training in threat assessment and active shooter response. We can also help you to develop an Emergency Action Plan and a comprehensive workplace violence policy. Please contact us at 800-578-8802 or email [info@pomsassoc.com](mailto:info@pomsassoc.com) for more information.



*DISCLAIMER. An individual must use his/her own discretion during an active shooter incident as to whether he/she chooses to run to safety or remain in place. Poms & Associates Insurance Brokers, LLC disclaims any and all liability resulting from an active shooter incident, and provides the within training and procedures to raise awareness and assist with the same. However, due to the unpredictable nature of an active shooter incident, it is impossible to provide guidance or recommendations as to all scenarios that could evolve during an active shooter incident.*