

I. PURPOSE

To define considerations for State Agencies and employees in planning for, preventing, responding to, and recovering from an active shooter incident in State office buildings or facilities.

II. PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS FOR AN ACTIVE SHOOTER POLICY

1. Planning for an active shooter incident includes three phases:
 - Prevention
 - Response
 - Recovery
2. Active shooters generally plan their actions in advance.
3. Active shooter situations often occur unexpectedly and often play out in less than 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Active shooters usually have some familiarity with the building/location where they intend to act and may have engaged in some pre-incident surveillance activity.
5. People on site are, in effect, the first responders and must be prepared to mentally and physically react until law enforcement arrives.
6. Law enforcement responders will actively focus on eliminating the threat, therefore victims and bystanders must be prepared to assume non-threatening postures during the incident (i.e. lay on the floor, hands visible).
7. The number of State facilities and their diversity requires tailoring active shooter planning to each location. Agencies are encouraged to take responsibility for the development and integration of this guidance into existing emergency operations plans.
8. Vulnerability mitigation strategies should be integrated in the renovation of existing state buildings and in the design for new state buildings.
9. Encourage employees to make the Delaware Capitol Police, on-site security, or agency leadership aware of concerns or behaviors that may indicate potential violence.
10. Planning for active shooter incidents cannot eliminate all risk. The goal is to minimize and mitigate risk where possible.

III. PREPARING FOR AND PREVENTING AN ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENT

There are two basic components in preparing for and preventing an active shooter incident:

1. Including Active Shooter response procedures in the organization's Emergency Action Plan and conducting associated training and exercises;
2. Being sensitive to and aware of behaviors generally associated with those individuals who may become an active shooter so that, if possible, preventive assistance may be provided to those persons.

Active Shooter Emergency Action Plans and Associated Training Exercises

Emergency Action Plans that address active shooter incidents should include:

- Preferred method for reporting emergencies
- Emergency escape procedures and route assignments
- Employee response and options in an active shooter situation
- Emergency plans should include provisions for individuals with special needs or disabilities
- Contact information for and responsibilities of persons to be contacted under the Emergency Action Plan
- Emergency notification system to alert law enforcement, hospitals and persons at remote work sites within the area of the shooting

An important aspect of active shooter preparedness is employee training. The most effective way to train employees to respond to an active shooter situation is to conduct mock active shooter training exercises. Law enforcement organizations are an excellent resource for these training exercises. Additionally, the United States Department of Homeland Security offers a variety of web-based resources designed to train employers and employees about active shooter prevention, response and recovery.

Behaviors Potentially Associated with Active Shooters

There have been a growing number of active shooter incidents in recent years committed by individuals. The active shooter(s) may be unknown to potential targets in the shooting location, a former or current employee, or an acquaintance of a former or current employee.

The motives for an active shooter attack can range from rage, an actual or perceived grievance, vengeance, ideology, or untreated mental illness. 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.

While not meant to be a comprehensive list, the following behaviors and events are commonly associated with active shooters.

- Increased use of alcohol and/or illegal drugs
- Unexplained increase in absenteeism
- Recent firing or job termination and the person has expressed violent intentions
- A Protection from Abuse (PFA) order for domestic violence
- Vague physical complaints
- Noticeable decrease in attention to appearance and hygiene
- Depression/withdrawal
- Resistance and overreaction to changes in policy and procedures
- Repeated violations of agency 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 that may suggest paranoia (e.g., “everybody is against me”)
- Increasingly frequent mentions of problems at home
- Escalation of domestic problems into the workplace
- Talk of severe financial problems
- Talk of previous incidents of violence
- Expressions of empathy with individuals committing violence
- Increase in unsolicited comments about firearms, other dangerous weapons, and violent crimes

Alert coworkers and managers may notice behaviors associated with potentially violent behavior by a person (non-employee) or employee in the work location. They should alert their supervisor or human resources department if they believe an employee or another person exhibits potentially violent behavior(s), so that preventative measures can be initiated. Actual threats or acts of violence should be reported immediately to law enforcement, security, and supervisors. The chances for prevention of violence in a workplace improve with increased awareness of potential warning signs and rapid response to a problem.

IV. RESPONDING TO AN ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENT

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area, typically through the use of firearms.

In preference and priority order, there are three general options or responses when one is confronted by an active shooter situation:

1. **Run** (First preference and priority)
 - Have an escape route and plan in mind
 - Leave your belongings behind
 - Keep your hands visible
2. **Hide** (Second preference and priority)
 - Hide in an area out of the shooter’s view
 - Block entry to your hiding place and lock the doors
 - Hide behind furniture if possible
 - Silence your cell phone
3. **Fight** (Third preference and priority)
 - If confronted directly and as a last resort when your life is in imminent danger
 - Attempt to incapacitate the shooter
 - Act with physical aggression, throw items at the shooter, yell loudly and commit to the effort
 - Moving people are harder to shoot

Call 911 when it is safe to do so.

Information you should provide to the 911 operator or law enforcement includes:

- Your location
- Location of the active shooter
- Number of shooters
- Physical description of shooters
- Number and type of weapons held by shooters
- Number of potential victims at the location

Attempt a quick accounting of workers.

- Given the nature of an active shooter incident, employees may or may not use designated assembly or muster locations
- Supervisors should attempt a quick accounting of worker and building visitors as soon as feasible and a more detailed accounting toward or at the end of the incident

When law enforcement arrives:

- Remain calm and follow instructions
- Put down any items in your hands (i.e., bags, jackets)
- Raise hands and spread fingers
- Keep hands visible at all times
- Avoid 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

The active shooter incident will be a dynamic situation that evolves rapidly and demands immediate response from law enforcement to terminate the life-threatening situation. The immediate response of the first patrolmen or officer on scene is to take aggressive action to find and stop the shooter(s). Rescue efforts will be delayed until the danger can be either mitigated or eliminated.

V. RECOVERING FROM AN ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENT

There are a number of actions and steps that organizations and management should take to help employees recover from the stress and trauma of an active shooter incident.

- **Ensure a Management Presence in the Work-Site**

After an active shooter incident, managers need to spend ample time with their employees, in the work-site or wherever they may be. Employees need to be reassured of their concern, and they need to be able to ask questions. Senior management should ensure that immediate supervisors are supported in this role, relieved of unnecessary duties, and not pulled away from their subordinates to write lengthy reports or prepare elaborate briefings. Union representatives can help in reassuring employees after an incident and in getting information to employees.

- **Share Information with Employees**

Employees will have many questions, and they need the answers -- often more than once -- if they are to resolve the experience for themselves. Information will develop over time, so information strategies need to be simple and fluid. A notice board at the elevator or a recorded message on a "hotline" number may suffice for the basics, and a user-friendly system for individual questions needs to be established.

- **Handle Critical Sites with Care, this is a Crime Scene**

Initially, the site of a violent incident will be secured as a crime scene. After the authorities are finished with it, management needs to be sensitive to a number of issues. It is helpful if employees don't have to come back to work and face painful reminders such as blood stains or broken furniture. But on the other hand, the area should not be so "sanitized" that it gives the appearance that management is pretending nothing happened. If someone has died, that person's work area will be a focus of grieving, and it needs to be respected as such.

- **Buffer those Affected from Post-Event Stresses**

Effective coordination with the media and timely dissemination of information can help reduce media pressure on those who are the most vulnerable. Assistance with employee benefits and other administrative issues can reduce the burden on victims and families.

- **Bring in Crisis Response Professionals**

Before an incident ever occurs, the planning group should identify trained mental health professionals in the agency's Employee Assistance Program or the community who would be available to respond in the event of an incident. When an incident occurs, involve these emergency mental health consultants as soon as possible. They will generally meet with management first, working down the chain, and then with line employees. Based on what the consultants learn, they will offer services such as debriefings and informal counseling.

- **Support Care-Giving within Work Groups**

Keep work groups together as much as possible, and try not to isolate employees from their normal support groups at work. Show respect and support for employees' efforts to care for one another.

- **Help Employees Face Feared Places or Activities**

Returning soon, if only briefly, to a feared site can help prevent lasting effects such as phobic responses. Having a friend or loved one along, or being supported by close work associates, may make the first step much easier.

- **Remember the Healing Value of Work**

Getting back to work can be reassuring, and a sense of having a mission to perform can help the group recover its morale. The return to work must be managed in a way that conveys appropriate respect for the deceased, the injured, and the traumatized.

References:

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