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Active Shooter Incidents Have Become a Concern for All

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 can take steps to help minimize the impact to their operations and employees. 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.

Wisconsin requires that “at least twice annually, without previous warning, the person having direct charge of any public or private school shall drill all pupils in the proper method of evacuation or other appropriate action in case of a school safety incident.”² These drills are typically focused on fire safety.

However, 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. Schools need to be prepared (<https://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/#3669>). The statistics are troubling. Most readers will remember Columbine High School but there have been other incidents:

- Antigo High School, Wisconsin - April 2016
- Muskegon High School, Michigan – February 2016
- Sandy Hook Elementary School, Connecticut 2012
- Northwest Passage High School, Minnesota – March 2015
- Arapahoe High School, Colorado – December 2013
- Weston High School, Wisconsin – September 2006

Violent acts such as these can be committed by strangers, students and coworkers or someone who has a personal relationship with someone. Consequently, this means that everyone should be prepared at all times. Wisconsin requires that “Each school board and the governing body of each private school shall have in effect a school safety plan for each public or private school in the school district within 3 years of May 27, 2010.”³



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An effective emergency plan must include clear guidance to your employees on what to do and not do in the event such an incident occurs. It is important to establish a crisis management team and assign roles and responsibilities. The crisis management team should include colleagues from the Administrative, Human Resources and Business Offices.

Your plan should be tailored to each specific location. A consultation with local law enforcement agency is recommended to assess your needs and to provide additional guidance about how to prepare for an active shooter situation. Law enforcement can work with your crisis management team to conduct a facility assessment to identify potential security gaps and make recommendations for improvements.

Additionally, the United States Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the FBI have developed active shooter preparedness resources to assist with training and coordinated planning with law enforcement agencies.

Links to this information can be found at:

- WI School Safety Coordinators Association <http://www.wssca.org/Links>
- FBI – <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/> active-shooter-resources
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security – <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency – <https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-907>

Also, you can check with your state and local agencies for additional resources.

When developing an emergency plan be sure to consider how your employees will respond if the situation arises in different locations. The floor plan of your building(s) should be closely examined to develop at least two clear escape plans and meeting areas. It is also important that regular drills are conducted so that your employees will understand immediately upon warning what their role is and what they need to do. Local law enforcement may assist in conducting these drills. Proper planning and training are the keys for a successful program.

Important Considerations

Communication

- During an active shooter event, employees 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.



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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. However, it is important to 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 be 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 and students should be trained to encourage others to follow them to escape routes and meeting areas.

¹ The 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)

² Wisconsin Statutes 118.07

³ Wisconsin Statutes 118.07

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