

Active Shooter Incident Preparedness

Make sure your organization is ready



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Why prepare for an active shooter?

Since 2013, an active shooter incident has occurred every 2 to 3 weeks in the United States.ⁱ These incidents can, and do, occur everywhere people gather and the effects are devastating. More than 1,270 people have been killed or wounded in 200 active shooter incidents from 2000-2015.ⁱⁱ Shootings have taken place in offices, schools, shopping centers, government buildings, theaters, places of worship, and on city streets.ⁱⁱⁱ

Due to the frequency and high human cost of these events, leaders of organizations large and small have a responsibility to be prepared. Steps can and should be taken to help equip people mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter event.

The FBI defines an active shooter as an individual or individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area. Most often the attacker uses a firearm and indiscriminately targets victims. Active shooter incidents are unpredictable, evolve quickly, and are usually over in 5 minutes or less.^{iv} Since the event is often over before law enforcement arrives, individuals have the chance to save lives based on their response to the situation.

To help your organization be ready to respond to an active shooter event, the American Red Cross has put together a set of materials based on widely accepted best practices supported by the FBI, DHS, and FEMA.

The approach is organized in three phases of emergency preparedness: Plan, Train, and Exercise. All three phases assist you in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from an active shooter incident.

Plan

The main components of the PLAN phase are creating an active shooter response plan and implementing a violence prevention program.

Emergency Action Plan

Your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) provides the people in your organization actions to take in an emergency. An EAP is a fundamental step in emergency preparedness and should include an active shooter scenario. The



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Shootings occur every 2 to 3 weeks



Most shooting events are over in 5 minutes



Shootings happen everywhere



plan will need to set forth: type of incident, anticipated impacts, key stakeholders, actions to be taken, and communications to be sent. See the Active Shooter Addendum in [EAPAdvance Template Generator](#) for detailed guidance to include in your existing EAP or to create an EAP if your organization does not have an existing action plan. You should also consider including additional emergencies, such as any potential extreme weather threats that may affect your location.

Whether creating a new plan or modifying an existing one, you need to coordinate with members of your organization that handle relevant functions. For example, those who manage background checks, employee behavior issues, facility access, and security. You should also seek input from local law enforcement and emergency responders. They are key stakeholders in preparing for an active shooter event. Action plans should include your current evacuation policy and procedures, which depending on the size and function of your organization, may need to be shared with local police or fire departments.

Your EAP should identify the actions individuals should take if confronted with an active shooter event. The Red Cross EAP Addendum for Active Shooter details an approach based on best practices recognized by the FBI, DHS, and FEMA. Your action plan should also include security considerations and provide for individuals with disabilities and others with functional and/or access needs.

Key elements of a violence protection program:

- *Training on and awareness of the indicators of workplace violence*
- *A system for reporting signs of potentially violent behavior*
- *Plans for taking remedial action*

Violence Protection

In addition to the EAP, your organization should consider implementing a violence prevention program to foster a respectful work environment and hopefully prevent violent acts. Key elements of a violence prevention program include: training on and awareness of the indicators of workplace violence, a system for reporting signs of potentially violent behavior, and plans for taking remedial action.^v Make sure that counseling services or contacts are available to those who may need assistance.

There are numerous signs of potentially violent behavior, such as the increased use of alcohol or illegal drugs, an unexplained increase in absenteeism, and depression.^{vi} Members of your organization should understand the signs and what to do if they observe them. Though individuals exhibiting these signs may not become violent, you are doing a service to all employees by nurturing an environment where reporting can take place and aid offered or action taken. Ignoring these symptoms can have dangerous consequences.

Train

All members of your organization must be trained on both the warning signs of violent behavior and on the EAP. You want to educate people on how to prevent and, if necessary, react to an active shooter.

Training focused on the EAP should detail the steps individuals should take during and after an incident. The Red Cross has prepared a [Sample Active Shooter Training Presentation](#) to help you educate members of your organization on how to recognize signs of potential violent behavior, react during an active shooter situation, and render aid. The training emphasizes the actions described in the EAP Addendum for Active Shooter.

Choose the training delivery methods appropriate for your organization. However, whether you use online training, classroom training or hands on demonstrations, it is important to provide training that is consistent and accessible to all. Individuals with additional responsibilities, such as floor wardens, mobility assistants, or managers, may require additional training.

Support training efforts and build awareness by publicizing your violence prevention program and the actions to take if confronted by an active shooter. To assist you, the Red Cross has created an [Active Shooter Informational Poster](#) containing critical information on responding in an active shooter event. The poster can be hung in a breakroom, workspace, or other suitable area in your facility.

It is recommended that active shooter instruction be part of training for new employees and volunteers, as well as an annual requirement for people within your organization.

Exercise

Training can educate but the best way to truly prepare is by conducting exercises. Exercises serve multiple purposes. They are an opportunity for members of your organization to learn experientially and they provide you a chance to test your EAP. For instance, whether your evacuation routes work or you have effective mechanisms to shelter in place.

Exercises for active shooter incidents should start with a scenario discussion, or table-top exercise. For most people, an active shooter scenario is frightening. A table-top is a great way to engage people in a non-threatening way. Talk about what would happen if an active shooter incident occurred in your location, the actions that you and your team will take, and with whom you would need to communicate.

The next step would be to drill, or test, specific portions of the EAP. This will give

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individuals the chance to consider and then perform what they would do in a specific situation, for instance one in which they can flee to evacuate. You can subsequently drill a situation when hiding is the only logical response. Utilize Red Cross's [Active Shooter Quick Drill](#) before conducting an exercise.

The most comprehensive way to exercise is with a simulated event. However, with an active shooter scenario, there are additional steps that must be taken to ensure the health and safety of people in your organization and the wider community. Realize that a live active shooter exercise may be very emotional for participants and could be triggering for people who have experienced violence in the past or have served in combat or law enforcement settings. This should be taken into consideration and discussed prior to conducting a simulation. Encourage those individuals to self-identify so that alternate arrangements can be made to fit their needs.

If you do conduct a simulated event, notify law enforcement that a drill is being conducted. Announcements also need to be made well in advance to employees, volunteers, neighbors, and the wider community. Highlight a notice to conceal carry permit holders in your announcement to draw their attention and to help ensure the simulation can be conducted safely. Live drill best practices indicate that real firearms should not be present. During the event, communications must be confined to drill participants and signage should be posted to ensure that no one unaware of the drill walks in on it. Review the additional safety considerations listed in the Red Cross's [Active Shooter Quick Drill](#) prior to conducting a live exercise.

Once you have completed an exercise, conduct a debrief to evaluate the effectiveness of your action plan. To assist you, a [Drill/Exercise History Form](#) and an [After Action Report](#) are available at readyrating.org. Then refine your action plan as necessary to reflect lessons learned.

Summary

The PLAN-TRAIN-EXERCISE approach is designed to help you, as a leader, prepare your organization for an active shooter situation. You can potentially save lives by building awareness and training individuals on how to prevent an incident and react if one does occur.

The following American Red Cross materials are available in the Ready Rating Resource Library and can get you started:

[EAPAdvance](#)

[EAP Addendum for Active Shooter](#) (found in the EAPAdvance)

[Sample Active Shooter Training Presentation](#)

[Active Shooter Informational Poster](#)

[Active Shooter Quick Drill](#)

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Sources

ⁱ Analysis by the FBI indicates 17 active shooter incidents in 2013. Blair, J. Pete, and Schweit, Katherine W. (2014). A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000-2013. Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation, US Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. 2014., supplemented by 2014-mid 16 statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1-1.pdf/view>. FBI analysis identified 20 incidents in 2014 and 20 incidents in 2015. Schweit, Katherine W. (2016). Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2014 and 2015. Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington D.C. 2016.

ⁱⁱ In 160 active shooter incidents from 2000-2013, 486 people were killed and 557 wounded. Blair, supra. 92 people were killed and 139 wounded in active shooter incidents from 2014-2015. Schweit, supra.

ⁱⁱⁱ Schweit, supra.

^{iv} Blair, supra.

^v Signs of potentially violent behavior include: increased use of alcohol or illegal drugs; unexplained increase in absenteeism; vague physical complaints; depression/withdrawal; resistance or over reaction to changes in policy or procedure; repeated violations of policy; unstable, emotional responses; explosive outbursts of anger or rage without provocation; paranoia; talks of problems at home; domestic problems escalating into the workplace; talks of severe financial problems; talk of previous incidents of violence; empathy with individuals committing violence; unsolicited comments about firearms, dangerous weapons and violent crimes. Active Shooter – How to Respond. (2008). U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Washington D.C. p11. Retrieved from https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf.

^{vi} Planning and Response to an Active Shooter: An Interagency Security Committee Policy and Best Practices Guide. (2015). United States Interagency Security Committee, Washington D.C. p11. Retrieved from <http://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=789035>.