

ACTIVE SHOOTERS ARE METICULOUS PLANNERS – ARE YOU?

Sadly, another week goes by and yet another story of active shooters on a campus – this time the [American University in Kabul](#). While distant from home, it's a jarring reminder of the threats we face in schools, universities, public spaces and work places across the country from rogue active shooters seeking to take lives and disrupt our sense of safety.

A common theme among active shooters is often the meticulous effort they go through to plan their actions in the hope of achieving the greatest extent of destruction and mayhem. The gunman in Munich, who killed nine people on July 22, is said to have [planned his attack for nearly a year](#), obsessively studying the [Norway attack](#) in 2011 that killed 77 people. Similarly, the Columbine High School shooters were said to have been planning the bombing and attack at their school for over a year as well, bent on taking as many lives as they could.

As each tragedy unfolds we find ourselves recommitting to “doing something this time” to be prepared. Businesses have a responsibility to their customers, schools to their students and employers to their employees. **Given the randomness of when and where an active shooter may strike, employers, businesses, schools and other entities need at a minimum, an emergency plan, as well as robust training and awareness efforts and ideally, regular training exercises.**

When thinking about developing your plan, it's important to take into account some key considerations.

- Have we assessed our facility?
- Do we know where we have vulnerable infrastructure designs as well as identified “safe spaces” for individuals to take shelter?
- Are evacuation routes clear and direct – and appropriate for individuals with disabilities to navigate?
- Have we considered what a good “hide” location looks like, and infrastructure design that maximizes the ability to safely separate oneself from danger?

Physical site design and understanding evacuation routes and shelter locations can be as important as human judgment when it comes to survivability.

Other questions to consider include:

- What relationship have you built with your local first responders?

First responders should be familiar with your facility, have easy access to floor plans and be familiar with evacuation routes in your plan as well as designated “shelter in place” safe zones.

- Do you have roles and responsibilities identified among your leadership team and down through your chain of command?
- Who is responsible for engaging first responders on behalf of your organization, who can talk with the media to ensure accurate information is disseminated, where will organizational leaders gather to ensure continuity of operations, if critical?

In a crisis moment, clarity of roles and responsibilities can become murky quickly as individuals either assert themselves or recede in panic – it’s important that roles are defined so key decisions can be made quickly.

Once you’ve developed your plan it’s critically important that your employees, students or other associated individuals are familiar with your plan. **A plan is no good if only those involved in drafting or at the highest levels actually know what it says.** Engage individuals in a discussion about the plan, how it is designed to protect individuals and what actions can be taken to improve survivability should the unfortunate ever occur. Talk about “Run, Hide, Fight” and other survival techniques. This is the time to let individuals ask questions – for those who learn by listening, often much of what is discussed can be reflected upon in an emergency and provide a clarity of action. For those who may visit your location, consider developing posters, print outs and pamphlets and making them available in visible locations.

Not only is it important to discuss your plan, but testing it and engaging individuals in simulated drills is equally important. For those who learn by doing, walking through a plan as well as physically examining escape routes and sheltering locations can be of immense value. Don’t run through drills just once, remember you may have staff turnover or populations in different locations at different times of the day, so institute regular drills that vary by day of the week and time of day. Once you’ve completed each exercise, regroup and talk about what did or didn’t work, and what concerns individuals still have. **Your emergency response plan must be a living document that is regularly updated and equally owned by your employees, students and others.**

Protecting your key assets includes protecting your employees, students and customers. There are multitudes of things to consider and certainly to explore in future discussions. But fundamental to all of this is that good leaders will protect their assets and ensure that their business develops a plan of action and takes steps to mitigate risks. Sadly, those who seek to do harm are often meticulous planners obsessed with the success of their terror. **You can improve the chances of saving more lives by committing to develop a plan of action and training your employees or students to be better prepared.**



JOHN TORRES

President, Security + Technology Consulting

John P. Torres is the president of the Security & Technology Consulting practice for Guidepost Solutions. John has extensive investigative and security experience. Previously, he served as the Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security Investigations in Washington, D.C. and Virginia. His background includes more than 27 years of experience providing investigative and security management for the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security and Justice, including serving as the Acting Director and the Deputy Director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.