



AlertFind

# **ACTIVE SHOOTER EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS GUIDE:**

**Everything Your Business Needs To Know**

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# Active shooter events in the United States are on the rise.

These events are financially, physically and psychologically devastating to the organizations that are targeted. The key to mitigating the damage caused to both human lives and financial loss is **preparation**. Proper preparation and planning could prevent your organization from being targeted at all or reduce the impact if an attack occurs.



The average response time of law enforcement to active shooter events is approximately 3 minutes (much faster than the average for standard 911 calls). This leaves the targeted organization, on average, 3 minutes to fend for itself.

**What an organization does during those 180 seconds matters.** More importantly, what it does in the preceding weeks, months and years matters even more. The plans, protocols, physical design, communication equipment/software and mindset used by the organization can have a significant impact on how its members survive the attack.

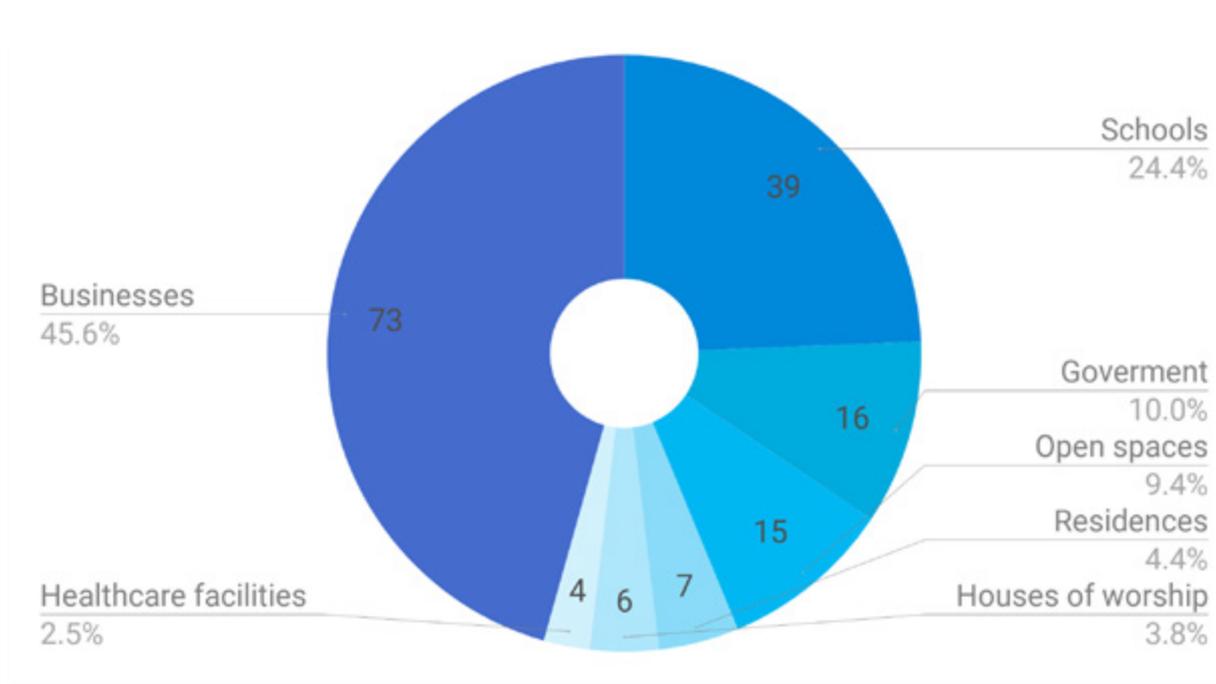
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## Who Is At Risk?

There is currently no way to predict where an active shooter event may happen. Statistically, the three most common places they occur are businesses (45%), schools (25%), and government facilities (10%). However, studies have shown that they tend to focus on soft targets. Soft targets are locations in which there is little to no security, open and easy access to the location, and dense groups of people.

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Source: FBI, a Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States between 2000 - 2013

According to a study done by the FBI, active shooter events are trending up in recent years with a yearly average of 16.4 events. This same study showed that in 61% of the cases there was some connection between the shooter and the target location.

One hundred percent of these events are preplanned and at least a third of them **are extensively planned**. There is no such thing as a spontaneous active shooter. Post-event investigations have been able to uncover the degree of planning involved by the shooters and some of them include up to a year of preplanning, surveillance, weapons preparation and internet research of other active shooters and police response.

**THE SHOOTER IS GOING TO BE PREPARED.**

**Will you be ready?**



## What Can I Do To Prepare My Organization?

The key to increasing your or your organization's chances of survival in one of these events is preparation. We know the shooter preplans every one of these events. One of the considerations that the shooter must take into account is the degree to which the location is protected.

With a 61% chance of the shooter having a connection to the targeted location, it would be a safe bet that he or she would likely be familiar with whatever safety protocols are in place. While this may seem like a disadvantage to the organization, it is in fact an advantage because it shows that the target will be much harder to attack and, therefore, not a good choice.

**The best active shooter plan an organization can have is the one that dissuades the shooter from ever attempting an attack because the target organization has taken the necessary steps to prepare for it.**

# What Should My Active Shooter Plan Look Like?

For businesses, the best plan is a unified and multifaceted one that accounts for **mental preparation, improved communications, site hardening** and **physical actions to take during an event.**

## Mental Preparation

01

**Leadership is the key to mental preparation.** The leader of the organization must acknowledge that this threat exists and be willing to take on the role of preparing the organization. This leadership role is vital because many employees may prefer to pretend that there is no threat and remain in a state of blissful ignorance.

Leaders must get their organizations comfortable with discussing potential threats because only then can real progress be made in implementing the rest of the plan. When faced with unexpected life-threatening situations, the unprepared person is very likely to fall into denial and freeze. You can see this when looking at videos of violent crimes.

All too often, witnesses and victims will stand and watch robberies, violent assaults and even shootouts between the police and suspects without taking any safety measures for themselves. This state of denial is natural for the untrained person as it takes a while for their brain to make sense of the violence that is suddenly occurring.

The problem with denial is that it can often cause a person to freeze. We all are familiar with the “flight or fight” response. With people, we find that it expands to include fight, flight or freeze. In an active shooter event, both **fight and flight would be appropriate responses**, but **freezing could be a fatal error**. Yet, freezing is often the natural response that stems from denial.

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## So how do you avoid denial?

**The first step is acknowledging that the threat exists.** The second is to familiarize yourself and your organization with what an active shooter event would look, sound and feel like. By familiarizing yourself with what an event looks, sounds and feels like, you will be able to recognize when an actual event is occurring and tailor your response appropriately.

The next step in being mentally prepared is to work through the deliberation period of what to do when threatened. During this deliberation period, **we must work through one of two processes: reflective response or reflexive response.**

### **A reflective response is the process of reflecting upon a problem in order to come up with a solution.**

Given time, you can usually come up with a very sound, well-thought-out and appropriate response to almost any threat. However, in a life-threatening event such as an active shooter, you do not have that luxury. Therefore, you must rely on a different response process, which is the reflexive response.

### **How can you train yourself and others to enact a reflexive response in the direst of moments?**

In a word: preparation. Much like a professional athlete studies film of his opponents in order to be prepared, we must think about what an active shooter event would look like so that when we see it in real life, we recognize the stimulus and are prepared to react.

When a professional boxer studies his opponent and realizes that he follows his jab with a right cross, he begins to train his reflexive mind to block the cross as soon as he sees the jab. Over time, it becomes a reflex and no longer requires reflection.

This is the same type of response that you want for your organization. When presented with an active shooter, the threat is instantly recognized, and then the response is reflexive. This is crucial because seconds matter and during a crisis is not the time to try and generate a plan. This is why it is crucial to discuss and practice the plan with regularity.

A fire drill is a good example of a precautionary measure you already use to protect your employees. It does not need to be done more frequently than once a year, but everyone knows how to exit the building in a safe orderly manner should a fire occur.

## Improved Communications

# 02

“*Rapid notification is a key factor in saving people’s lives.*”

The ideal communications setup for an organization would be to have the ability to reach all of your members instantaneously. This capability is demonstrated in schools that have a public address system that can reach the entire campus, including remote buildings, in an instant.

Improving on that model, organizations should have the ability to send and receive two-way communications about real-time experiences (e.g. “I hear shots in my hallway,” “We are sheltered in room 202,” “I saw the gunman, he looks like this”). Ideally, this information would be funneled through a central repository like your organization’s security department.

[This communications system is invaluable for the law enforcement agencies that respond and helps ensure employees receive real-time updates about the event as it unfolds so they can try to avoid additional threats.](#)

In lieu of such technology, a simpler “echoing” alert can be used. As members of an organization become aware that there is an active shooter, they can then yell “active shooter, active shooter, active shooter”.

As other members hear the alert, they then “echo” the warning as they start to enact their safety plan. While this method is rudimentary, it can be very effective in single building organizations.

## Site Hardening

# 03

Your building’s layout can make it either a prime target or a virtually unassailable fortress. Most organizations want their building to be warm and inviting and do not want the campus to feel like a TSA checkpoint. There are steps that can be taken to harden the site without making it feel that way.

### **The three primary steps organizations should take to “harden” their location are:**

- ✓ Controlling access,
- ✓ Setting up interior shelters
- ✓ Creating multiple exit options.

## Controlling access

Controlling access is a key way to ensure that everyone who is entering a building has a legitimate need to be there. While it won’t prevent a current member of an organization from attacking his or her own organization, it will slow or prevent an outside attacker.

The mere fact that it is a controlled access building will likely serve as a deterrent and make the attacker choose a different location. The access location can be controlled by key card, physical keys, a receptionist with a remote access solenoid or many other options. If a receptionist or security staff is stationed at the access point, they should be knowledgeable of active shooter protocol and empowered to set off the alarm.

**Note that an attacker is looking for a dense crowd of people to attack.**

If they are unable to access the building's interior, then that lessens the appeal of attacking that building. If they were to launch an attack at the entry to the building that serves as a delaying mechanism for the rest of the organization.

## Interior shelters

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Businesses also need to identify Interior shelters, places within the building that members of the organization could use to shelter in place from an attack. An analysis of active shooter events showed there is no evidence that a previous active shooter has ever breached an interior, locked, standard commercial door (metal frame with solid wood core). Employees who are able to shelter in a closet, office, class, copy room, break room, bathroom or any other room that has a commercial grade locked door and an absence of windows are in a very safe place.

Certainly, bullets can go through doors and also through walls. However, the shooter knows that the average police response will be in 3 minutes, which means they will be in a hurry to amass a body count prior to the arrival of police. While it is possible to shoot your way through a door, it is a difficult and time-consuming process.

## Multiple exit options

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Multiple and readily-accessible exit points are instrumental because, by far, the safest way to negotiate an active shooter event is to leave the area. Active shooters are methodical and have come to a location where they can access a lot of potential victims. They do not chase people down individually who are fleeing from multiple exits. Make sure all your employees know where the available exits are, which prevents them from being trapped.

**This is one of the reasons the Pulse Nightclub attack in Florida was so deadly.** Numerous patrons fled to the interior of the club where there was no exit and no qualified interior shelter. Both primary and secondary escape paths must be identified, established and practiced prior to an attack. This knowledge will save valuable seconds or minutes during an attack.

## Physical Plan During An Attack

# 04

**We advocate the Avoid, Deny, Defend plan.** The system should be viewed as a holistic plan and not a linear one. Each step is independent, and the most appropriate one should be applied. It is not necessary to employ the strategies in a sequential order.

- ✓ **Avoid** the confrontation at all cost
- ✓ **Deny** access to your location if you are unable to avoid the confrontation
- ✓ **Defend** yourself by any means necessary if you find that you are unable to avoid the confrontation or deny access to your location

## Avoid

Avoiding the confrontation means using all of your contextual clues to immediately identify that an active shooting is in progress. Things such as gunfire, screaming, mass panic and people fleeing an area are all clues that an attack is underway. This is best opportunity to avoid harm by leaving the area as rapidly as possible.

Some people will delay because they are afraid to look foolish or embarrass themselves. Help those people by showing them what to do. As you run away yelling “active shooter”, they will follow. Remember, the less prepared employees will follow a leader. This is where knowing escape routes and alternate escape routes is vital.

## Deny

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Deny means to deny access to your location if you can't leave the area. This is the portion of the plan that relies heavily on the pre-identified interior shelters. Every member of the organization should be able to identify a primary and secondary interior shelter in case they find themselves in a position where they cannot avoid the confrontation. This is also crucial for the more vulnerable employees who may be mobility impaired.

**Remember:** these interior shelters don't have to be fortresses, just a room with a commercial grade door and lock on it. Once in the shelter, the occupants should barricade the door with as many items as they can. They can use desks, copiers, chairs, tables, books, filing cabinets, break room appliances or any other heavy items. These would help slow down an attacker if the door were to be breached or if he or she has the keys or swipe card.

Also, anything that can slow an attacker down will save precious seconds for the first responders who will be coming to neutralize the attacker. Organizations often ask: What can stop a bullet, and does it help if I hide behind something?

Bullets cause damage in two ways, speed and mass. Makeshift barricades will slow the bullets and help break them apart. To be clear: **hiding behind a wooden desk is not considered good protection from a bullet.** However, if a person sheltering in place in a locked room could find a wooden desk to hide behind, that could potentially make them just a little bit safer.

## Defend

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Defend means to defend yourself by any means possible. Of the three steps, this is the one that is the most appropriate if you are right by the attacker. You need to realize that the attacker is trying to kill you, so you must fight with all of the strength, anger and ferocity that you can muster. You do not need to be a trained fighter to be effective.

Remember, the attacker has deliberately chosen a target location that he or she believes to be “soft”. They do not pick a location anticipating a counter attack. By launching an unexpected counter attack, you send the assailant into fight, flee, or freeze mode.

Research has shown that approximately 20% of would-be attackers are subdued by their intended victims. An excellent example of this is when several American servicemen were able to subdue a gunman in France while on a moving train, dramatized in the film, “The 15:17 to Paris.” In order to defend yourself, you have to be mentally prepared to take action. Using a pack mentality and attacking the active shooter in a group is also effective.



## Take Action Now To Prepare, Protect Your Organization

You have the ability to prepare your organization against the threat of an active shooter. It all starts with taking the actions to educate your employees. Remember that the most important step is making the decision to lead your organization through the mental and physical training it needs to prevail against an active shooter.

Creating a plan, implementing the recommendations outlined above and practicing it with your employees is the best way to ensure your employees are able to protect themselves from the debilitating stress and panic of an attack. Armed with knowledge and a well-crafted plan, they are in the best position to protect themselves and their fellow employees from harm.



AlertFind

Help protect your organization by learning more about emergency notification systems and the vital role they play in your emergency preparedness plan.

[Schedule A Demo](#)

**About the Author:**

Jason Bryant, a 20-year law enforcement veteran, specializes in active shooter response and teaches organizations how to respond to active shooter events.