



Emergency Planning for Active Shooter Events



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Being prepared for life threatening emergencies requires practice. Developing and exercising comprehensive emergency preparedness plans will best serve your staff and visitors during emergency situations. While it's important to have plans for events such as fires, earthquakes, or power outages, they are especially critical for scenarios involving assailants, such as active-shooter events. Regular practice and review beforehand helps the appropriate responses to become second nature, and can identify weaknesses which can then be addressed and remedied.

Preparedness is defined by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as "a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action in an effort to ensure effective coordination during incident response." Particular emphasis should be drawn to the word "continuous" – once a plan is established, a system for review must be implemented so that it can be updated as staffing, environment, protocols, and other factors change or evolve. An outdated plan is akin to having none at all.

It is important to consider all factors that can contribute to or hinder the effectiveness of a plan. One of the biggest challenges planners face is that emergency situations can rapidly develop into scenarios that the plan did not anticipate. Ideally, plans will allow for flexibility, and drill schedules will train participants to carry them out calmly and thoughtfully.

The first step begins with program management: organizing and administering your program, and identifying the minimum requirements necessary to satisfy your organization's needs. Next is the actual planning stage: gathering information, assessing risk, and analyzing and examining ways to prevent or reduce those risks. Implemented plans should cover available resources, emergency response, communications, operations continuity, response training, and other applicable factors. Frequent testing and emergency exercises simultaneously trains participants in appropriate response behavior and also serves to identify any inherent weaknesses in the plan, which should then prompt further planning and testing sessions. In addition to self-review, other professional methods of plan evaluation can also be pursued.

Plans should address the entire "life-cycle" of a theoretical incident. The DHS document "[National Preparedness Goal](#)" outlines five stages, or "mission areas" that planners should consider:

1. **Prevention** – What can the organization do to prevent the incident from occurring in the first place? This can include observation and analysis of current systems – for example, what are your current procedures for gaining authorized access into your building? How might an assailant gain unauthorized access?
2. **Protection** – What can the organization do to protect against the incident? This can include either physical or virtual protection (from architectural elements to firewalls for computers, etc.). Risk management activities and protocol screenings could also be a part of this stage.
3. **Mitigation** – If the prevention or protection efforts are unable to curb or prevent an event from occurring, what systems are in place to reduce the impact of an event?

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- 4. Response** – This is the mission area that most think of when they envision an emergency plan, but it is only a part of the planning process. For instance, how will your organization respond to the incident? What modes of transportation are in place? What resources can be called upon for assistance, and what methods will be utilized to contact them so they can be dispatched in a timely manner?
- 5. Recovery** – This stage deals with the aftermath – once the incident has run its course, how will your organization recover? What is the projected timeframe for the recovery – for example, will systems be completely operational within days, weeks, or months following the incident? How will property be replaced, how will injuries be treated, how will financial losses be recouped?

Additionally, each plan should establish the priorities of the organization, identify the expected performance and operational capability of the organization, provide standards for the organization to assess its capabilities, and help participants learn their roles (DHS: Plan and Prepare for Disasters – link below). These elements are vital, and may differ according to the emergency scenario being addressed. For instance, priorities in a power outage will likely differ than the priorities in a fire, or an active assailant situation.

Unfortunately, incidents involving active assailants, and specifically active shooters, are on the rise. The DHS definition of an active shooter is “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearms(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims.” Due to the seriousness of this threat and the time-sensitive nature of responses, any employees and guests to your organization must be in no doubt as to what their appropriate actions should be, and it is highly recommended that organizations have a plan for this kind of emergency.

A commonly held best practice for responding to an active-shooter event is the “Run, Hide, Fight” mantra. Many are already familiar with this school of thought, which is to quickly assess your situation and then choose the most appropriate action and commit to it. To summarize: if possible, run; if impossible to run, hide; and if your hiding place is discovered, fight. A more detailed description can be found at the DHS website in a short video that can easily be integrated into a staff meeting, or assigned to employees as self-training (link below).

The DHS reports that 40% of businesses affected by some kind of disaster, natural or otherwise, never reopen. This is nearly half, and yet, two-thirds of interviewed respondents reported that their organizations have no emergency plans in place. Taking this crucial step is a vital countermeasure against catastrophic events, and the best way to protect employees and assets.

The information utilized for this article was drawn from the Department of Homeland Security (links below). Whether you are reviewing existing plans or developing new ones, we encourage all tribal entities to be proactive about preparation.

[DHS: Plan and Prepare for Disasters](#)

[DHS: Preparing Businesses for Emergencies](#)

[DHS: Active Shooter Preparedness Video](#)

[DHS: Active Shooter Educational Booklet](#)



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