

Active shooter response planning for camps

Active shooter incidents are becoming more frequent within the United States. According to the FBI the number of active shooter incidents per year is approaching 17 incidents per year. An active shooter incident can be defined as an individual or individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people; these incidents are unpredictable, unfold rapidly, involve firearms and often have no pattern or method in the selection of victims. Recent active shooter incidents involve movie theaters, schools, shopping malls and events with mass gatherings of people.

As part of a thorough safety plan, your camp emergency plan should also include a segment dedicated to active shooter response that may reduce or eliminate casualties resulting from a shooting incident.

Your plan should consider two major phases of the event:

- The Recognition and Notification Phase
- The Reaction and Response Phase

In the Recognition and Notification Phase, staff or campers recognize that an emergency in the form of an individual or individuals actively engaged in shooting with the intent to injure or kill is taking place within the facility. This will undoubtedly be a stress-filled time as the shooter may be shouting as well as firing a weapon or weapons multiple times. With today's high ammunition capacity rifles and pistols available, this can continue for a substantial length of time before a lull occurs to allow reloading or to change weapons. The shooter will also most likely be moving to obtain more targets or search for a specific individual. During this chaotic time of first recognition an attempt must be made to identify the individual in terms of what clothing is worn so this crucial information can be relayed to first responders during the 911 call. Additionally, providing a location and direction of travel of the shooter will be important for first responders to formulate a response plan.

Once it is recognized that an active shooter is on the property and engaged in causing harm the camp must be alerted. Alerting the camp should include all practical means ranging from radios, public address systems and sirens, group texts and possibly runners. Any broadcast alerts, whether PA based or over the radio, should be different from other emergency alerts so the message can be clearly understood. At the same time the camp is being alerted a 911 call must be made in order to get first responders on their way to the camp as quickly as possible. Having a description including gender and clothing worn by the shooter to relay to your first responders will certainly be extremely helpful but no person should put their lives at risk to obtain a detailed description to aid the response process. Confirmation that a 911 call has been placed will be an important plan component and a backup plan using a hardline phone as well as mobile phone should be considered in your planning phase. As conditions allow, notify any staff or activity groups participating in activities away from the camp to not return until notified to do so to avoid the possibility they would return to an emergency environment.

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In the Reaction Phase, response to an active shooter must be initiated with the safety of campers and staff in mind. The current accepted practice of “Run, Hide, Fight” should be applied. Once the camp notification has gone out, all people within the camp should be in the “Run” mode; this is not to be perceived as an act of cowardice or abandonment but a prudent action to save as many lives as possible. This movement of people can be prepared for in the same way as moving people out of a burning building and your facility fire evacuation points might lend themselves to this purpose. The intent remains to protect as many people as possible in a way that does not increase their exposure to danger during the event. Attackers looking to “even the score” may be seeking a specific targeted individual but the attacker will most likely engage with everyone he meets along the way creating additional casualties. If the attacker is looking to make a statement and instill fear within the region or country the intent will most likely be to injure and kill as many people as possible to draw attention to the act or cause. Both types of attacks develop rapidly so quick action during the reaction phase of your plan will have the best chance of succeeding.

Once groups have assembled, additional movement of the group may be required, and this must be recognized. Time of day and weather conditions could play a role in this aspect of your plan, moving groups of people can both be aided and hindered by cover of darkness and any severe weather could mask the movement of the shooter creating additional challenges. Roads and pathways can be considered but these may also be used by the shooter as a means of making his or her way around the camp and will certainly be used by first responders moving rapidly during their response. Consideration can be given to using your tornado/severe weather shelters; however, placing large numbers of people within a contained area could increase the casualty numbers should the shelter be unable to be properly secured and the presence of the group detected by the shooter. Staff should instruct campers to move quickly and quietly to their evacuation points. If a building or secure area is used, turn off lights, lock any doors, stay away from windows and turn off cell phone ringers. Staff members with radios should reduce the volume on the handset to the lowest level possible and monitor the radio for important updates. Keeping the radio on will allow staff to provide information regarding the shooters location and movements. Your goal is to take appropriate action and stay out of contact with the shooter.

When law enforcement arrives, they will be actively searching for the individual and looking to establish safe operating zones and control the camp. Expect them to be in a highly adrenalized state and using specialized equipment and weapons. Approach them with caution and do not make any sudden movements; instead, raise your arms and show your hands. Follow any commands given when approaching the officers, maintain control over any campers you may be sheltering or shepherding. Provide any information you might have on the shooter such as direction of travel, current location and what the shooter is wearing; if it is determined that more than one shooter is present, relay that information immediately

Your staff should be prepared to render first aid to campers when it is safe to do so. Various injuries can be expected when moving rapidly over uneven ground especially at night. Staff may be faced with traumatic injuries inflicted by the shooter; trauma dressings and tourniquet may be required to control life threatening bleeding.

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Preplanning activities

Contact your local law enforcement agencies for their input into your plan as they will be your ally during the active shooter event and be a resource for the most up to date information regarding active shooter planning.

Provide all first responder agencies with a detailed map of your facility that accurately shows the locations of buildings and the configuration of your internal camp roadways. Provide first responders with any keys or codes needed to enter the camp so their response time is not delayed by locked gates. Your internal roadways should be clearly marked with the road names that correspond to your camp diagram.

Find out what your first responders will look like, will they be in regular uniforms, camouflage gear, black SWAT type uniforms, helmets? Are first responders allowed to respond in regular clothing? You should be prepared to distinguish good guys with guns from the shooter. Do your local or state authorities have an armored vehicle they deploy in these situations and will this vehicle fit through the camp entrance and across any bridges?

Offer your facility as a training ground for law enforcement and fire rescue when it will not impact your camp sessions or activities; the more time first responders spend on your grounds the more familiar they will be during times of emergency.

Campers and staff must be instructed to leave belongs and camp activity equipment behind during the "Run" phase of the plan.

Determine mobile phone signal strength and coverage, identify any places within your facility where mobile phone coverage is spotty or unreliable.

Periodic checks of social media sources should be performed to detect any threats or negative comments about your camp and any item reported to law enforcement. Your staff must be instructed to report any texts or messages that may be threatening to their personal safety or to the camp.

Be aware of any negative comments or threats made by an individual who may have been recently terminated. This could be a red flag in terms of transmitting an intent to cause destruction or fatalities at the camp, this is especially true for long term employees who once had camp housing but are now faced with not only loss of income but loss of the family residence as well.

Create a hard target profile for your facility by hardening entry points or showing a law enforcement or security presence. Show that any use of force against your facility will be difficult to incept and be met with trained responders. Do not advertise the depth of your plan or any specific components but do speak about having prepared a response plan with the help of your local authorities.