

# ***Wisconsin Crime Prevention Practitioners Association***

## **Active Threat Mitigation**

April 20, 1999, is a day that changed many lives in the United States. It was that day when two students entered Columbine High School in Colorado and began assassinating students at will. It was this event that brought school safety and police tactics back to the training table and dramatically changed the way schools and law enforcement operated. It also brought the term *Active Shooter* into our homes and vernacular. Since that day we have been witness to over 170 active shooter events in the United States, some at places one would never think of like schools, churches, movie theaters, and parks, and some in communities where “that stuff does not happen,” like Wakefield (MA), Grundy (VA), Red Lion (PA), and Menasha (WI).

These events are very traumatic for all involved – obviously those directly at the time but also for the first responders and the community as a whole. National experts have been discussing these events in forums, trying to come up with an answer as to why they are occurring. Ideas have been tossed around with regards to gun laws, mental health issues, drug issues, propensity to violence, and so on.



So far we have not come up with an answer or solution to prevent these from occurring. One way that that we can have an impact is in reducing the opportunity for these events.

In the world of crime prevention, we rely on the *Crime Prevention Triangle*. Similar to the fire triangle where it takes three things to create a fire (heat, fuel, oxygen), the same applies to crimes. If one is missing, a fire cannot happen. A criminal needs to have the following in place to be successful in committing that crime.

**Ability** – A criminal is often savvy and has the tools or know-how to commit a crime. There’s not much we can impact here.

**Desire** – Criminals are going to have that desire. In these active shooter events, it is often some sort of hatred or vengeful act that precipitates this.

**Opportunity** – This is where we come into play and by doing certain things, we can remove that opportunity or certainly delay it!



Security measures are often classified along the five steps of the security continuum: **Deter, Detect, Delay, Respond, and Recover**. In an active shooter situation if we wait until the response step (typically when law enforcement responds to a 911 call), there will likely already be a loss of life. Remember – prevention is our ultimate goal!

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The first three steps: **Deter, Detect and Delay** concentrate on that. There are many ways that we can work to achieve that prevention such as employing security practices in our facilities through restricting access control and increasing surveillance. This type of prevention may require a physical change to the property and/or the addition of security equipment. In addition to these potential physical changes there may be a change to the policies and procedures. Does your company have the ability to detect a potential threat, be it a current or former employee or someone from outside? Is your staff trained to diffuse potential hostile situations? These are just a couple of ideas to look at when assessing your vulnerability.



Hopefully you never have to, but have you thought about how you or your employees will **Respond** to an active shooter event? The *Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training* Program or **ALERRT** provides active shooter training for officers all over the country and recommends three easy to remember responses – **Avoid, Deny, and Defend**. These responses are not necessarily in that order and really depend on the situation.

Ideally we would like you to avoid the situation and get out. That might mean breaking a window to escape. If you are not able to avoid safely, then you need to deny the intruder entry. This means locking yourself in a room, maybe barricading the door. Lastly, if you are faced with the intruder you will have to defend yourself. This could be with deadly force if you have a concealed carry license and are armed or it could through some unconventional weapons such as a large, heavy object.



Lastly we cannot forget about recovering from such an event. More than likely this will be the one of the most chaotic and traumatic events in your life! Emotions and stress levels will be at an all time high and hopefully you have already discussed this and have a plan in place. Areas to look at are: **Reunification and Family Assistance; Employee Psychological Trauma; Crisis Communications;** and **Continuity of Operations**.

Often times you may have these already in place, but in reality how often do we look at these? It may not be a bad idea to periodically review these - a good reminder to do so is when an event occurs elsewhere that we see/hear on the news to gather your leadership team and have a quick meeting and ask yourselves *What would we do?*

While there is no single, fool-proof method, there are several well-established security principles that can provide a strong foundation for mitigating and reducing these situations.

***Many of our Wisconsin Crime Prevention Practitioner's Association members offer Physical Threat Assessment surveys of your property and trainings on how to mitigate these active threat incidents. Contact your local law enforcement agency for further information on how you can protect yourself and your business.***