

SPECIAL ANALYSIS: The Active Shooter Threat

Monday, August 20, 2012

Introduction

Over the past few weeks, there have been a number of high-profile, active shooter events which have occurred around the country. Two horrific incidents, one in Aurora, Colorado and the other in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, have caused many in the security industry to review their policies and training associated with the active shooter phenomenon. The MSA Research & Intelligence Analysis Group has compiled this informational bulletin to assist security personnel to be better prepared to address the active shooter threat.

The Threat

Recent Active Shooter Incidents

2012

August 5 – Oak Creek, WI
7 killed, 3 injured

July 20 – Aurora, CO
12 killed, 58 injured

April 2 – Oakland, CA
7 killed

2011

October 12 – Seal Beach, CA
8 killed

July 22 – Oslo, Norway
69 killed, 110 injured

January 8 – Tucson, AZ
6 killed, 13 injured

2010

August 3 – Manchester, CT
9 killed

2009

November 5 – Fort Hood, TX
13 killed, 42 injured

April 3 – Binghamton, NY
13 killed

March 29 – Carthage, NC
8 killed

March 10 – Geneva & Samson, AL
11 killed

2008

December 24 – Covina, CA
10 killed

2007

December 5 – Omaha, NE
9 killed

April 16 – Blacksburg, VA
33 killed, 17 injured

Active shooters remain a viable threat for the simplicity of attack and high impact, achieved in a relatively short amount of time. For example, in just under 15 minutes, James Holmes killed 12 people and left 58 others injured during his shooting spree at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado last month. By comparison, Sueng-Hui Cho killed 33 people, including himself, and wounded 17 more in less than 11 minutes during the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre. More than half of active shooter incidents are terminated in 12 minutes, which corresponds to the average initial police response time.

Within the last five years, there have been at least 14 prominent, high-casualty producing active shooter incidents (listed on left). Most of these cases have occurred in locations where the shooter has been undeterred and unobstructed from carrying out their attack. The incident locations have often been described as “soft targets” with limited active security measures or armed personnel to provide protection for members of the public. In most instances, shooters have either taken their own lives, been shot by police, or surrendered when forced with a confrontation by law enforcement. According to New York City Police Department (NYPD) statistics, 46% of active shooter incidents are ended by the application of force by police or security, 40% end in the shooter’s suicide, 14% of the time the shooter surrenders or, in less than 1% of cases, the violence ends with the attacker fleeing.

Due to the rapid and dynamic nature of active shooter attacks and their propensity to occur against soft targets and unarmed persons, security personnel must be trained and prepared to address these deadly attacks by recognizing characteristics associated with past attackers, maintaining a situational awareness, and developing countermeasures.

Common Characteristics

Although the following factors alone do not indicate that an individual will commit a violent act, these characteristics have been commonly associated with past perpetrators of active shooter incidents:

- Male < 45
- Loner, usually quiet, with defiant outbursts, emotionally unstable
- History of violence
- Elevated frustration level
- Erratic behavior
- Pathological blamer or complainer
- Strained work relationships
- Reduced productivity
- Extremist views
- Threatening behavior



- Changes in health or hygiene
- Feels victimized, makes threats
- Fascination with weapons
- Exhibits paranoia
- Seems depressed
- Dependence on alcohol or drugs
- Is involved in a troubled, work-related romantic situation
- Suffers dramatic personality swings / depression
- Evidence of psychosis

“Because active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes, before law enforcement arrives on the scene, individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation.”

Department of Homeland Security

Situational Awareness

It is not always possible to recognize the aforementioned characteristics when you are either unfamiliar with the normal behavior associated with the subject or the normal tempo of the location you are staffing. No matter where you are or who you deal with, you should always have the presence of mind to identify potentially hostile situations. Maintain your situational awareness by:

- Remaining alert
- Having a rudimentary mental plan in the event of an emergency situation
- Focusing your attention on your environment
- Looking out for odd or threatening behavior
- Knowing the location of other security personnel
- Identifying nearest exits
- Locating stairwells
- Taking note of unattended packages
- Noting the locations of alarm pull stations

Countermeasures/Mitigation

The necessity for countermeasures and mitigation are crucial to the prevention of this seemingly increasing act of extreme violence. A clear example can be observed by looking at the recent thwarted active shooter attack attempt on August 15 at the Family Research Council in Washington, DC. A lone gunman attempted to enter the facility with a handgun and approximately 50 rounds of ammunition. Due to the facility's effective policies for visitors and its well-trained, knowledgeable, and capable security staff which properly enforced such policies, a catastrophe was averted. The time is now to review your existing plans. It is not sufficient to say the plan is good enough and it probably won't happen here. You must be proactive in your approach:

- Adopt a written zero tolerance policy for threats and violence.
- Update and review emergency response plans to include an active shooter component.
 - A security force should be able to provide a tactical response capability to bridge the gap between the incident initiation and law enforcement response.
 - Have a plan, train your employees and exercise your plan to identify shortcomings.
- Train staff to include security (armed and unarmed), supervisors, management, and administrative personnel on the active shooter threat.
 - Conduct training at your facility on conflict resolution, recognizing threats, past incidents, and company policies.
 - Train employees on what to do if in active shooter incident occurs.
- Include an intelligence component to your security program.
 - Security teams should be briefed on real-time threat information, including evolving threats, tactics and trend analysis.
- Review and institute administrative controls with elements including:
 - Employee confidential information hotline
 - Employee assistance program-counseling referral
 - Pre-employment screening
 - Employee termination policy
 - Crisis management team
 - Internal and external communication plans
- Modernize existing engineering controls.
 - Have a professional facility security risk survey performed, including a review and update of facility screening procedures and visitor management systems.
 - Institute active security measures to supplement security personnel (i.e. access control systems, turnstiles).
 - Update surveillance capabilities with personnel and/or cameras.
- Coordinate with local authorities to allow them to familiarize themselves with your facility.
 - Allow authorities to train at your facility.
 - Provide a copy of your plan to the authorities for their review.

MSA Security offers training and consultation to assist your security team in the preparation for, prevention of, and response to an active shooter threat. If you would like to learn more about these services, please contact John Quinn, Director, Specialized Training at (212) 509-1336 ext. 257 or jqinn@msasecurity.net.

