

Active Shooter Awareness ***Short*** **Student Guide**

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Center for Development of Security Excellence

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Introduction

On September 16, 2013 a federal employee entered the Washington Navy Yard with a disassembled weapon in his bag. Within 15 minutes, he killed 12 people and injured three others before he was killed by law enforcement.

On April 10, 2023, at the Old National Bank in Louisville, KY, an employee killed five people and injured eight more, including three law enforcement officers, before he was fatally shot.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, or FBI, defines an active shooter as one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area. These incidents are an ever-present danger for the American workforce.

Active shooters typically have no pattern or method to the selection of their victims.

In 2023—the year with the most recent available statistics—the FBI designated 48 shootings as active shooter incidents, killing 105 people and wounding 139. Nearly all the perpetrators were male.

Your preparedness for these events could save lives.

Prepare Your Plan

In this Short, you will think through several active shooter scenarios. Using an Active Shooter Awareness Plan, you will prepare for the decisions you would need to make during an active shooter incident. The Plan is designed for you to keep on hand at your workplace, and it's most useful when you review and update it periodically.

In this Short, you will begin developing plans for reaching emergency contacts, evacuating, sheltering in place, and taking action. The Active Shooter Awareness Plan Template is available in the Short Resources.

Emergency Information Activity

At the top of the Active Shooter Awareness Plan is a reminder to know your facility's emergency procedures, personnel, and equipment. All personnel have a responsibility to be familiar with this essential information.

Next, the plan contains spaces to enter your local emergency contact numbers. It is important to have these phone numbers nearby and available for many situations, including active shooter incidents.

Take a moment now to fill in the emergency contact information on your Active Shooter Awareness plan.

Reflection Activity 1: Evacuation

Take a moment to consider this situation. You are sitting in a cubicle on a Tuesday morning. The office is quiet. Suddenly you hear a noise that sounds like gunfire. How should you respond?

Select all that apply.

- Go immediately to the fire escape
- Secure your belongings
- Find your colleagues and warn them
- Prevent others from entering the area

Planning Your Escape

How did you do? During an active shooter incident, an immediate response can be the difference between life and death.

Your first resort during an incident is to evacuate. If you have the option, get yourself out of harm's way as quickly as possible. You should have escape routes planned from any of your frequent locations at your worksite: your office or cubicle, conference rooms, break rooms, restrooms, and more.

Leave your belongings where they are. Trying to get them could waste valuable seconds.

Evacuate immediately, even if others do not. Some people may not be willing to leave the area during an incident. If you have the opportunity, take it.

You may find yourself in a situation to help others. For example, in a crisis, some people may freeze in place, unable to respond. Help them to evacuate if you can, but you should always maintain your situational awareness.

If others are entering the area, warn them and urge them to evacuate.

If you encounter wounded people, do not attempt to move them. It could be dangerous for the injured person and prevent you from escaping.

As you evacuate, you can assist security personnel and law enforcement by keeping your hands visible and following their instructions.

Feedback on Reflection Activity 1: Evacuation

- Go immediately to the fire escape
- Secure your belongings

- Find your colleagues and warn them
- Prevent others from entering the area

Evacuation Plan Activity

Now go back to the Active Shooter Awareness Plan you started earlier. Take a moment and fill out the Evacuation Plan section.

Begin in the second row of the table and identify the nearest available exits that can help you, including emergency exits and fire escapes.

Next, map your route to the best exits, either in words or in a brief sketch. It can be surprisingly easy to forget basic details in a crisis. You should have a plan for exactly what path to take.

Once you've identified the best exits and routes to them, go back to the first box and write a brief overview of your plan. If your office has a designated area for evacuees to meet, describe how you will get to that location.

Finally, list your options if you are away from your workstation. Identify exits and routes for other locations you frequent.

Reflection Activity 2: Sheltering in Place

Now consider this situation. You are in the hallway with several colleagues on your way to a conference room for a meeting. You hear the unmistakable sound of gunfire nearby and may not have time to evacuate. How should you respond?

Select all that apply.

- Get to a room with enough space to move around if necessary
- Blockade the door
- Turn up the volume on a radio or television to cover other sounds
- Call 911 as quietly as you can

Sheltering in Place

If an active shooter is at your location and you cannot evacuate, your next resort is to shelter in place. You may only have a moment. You'll need to act quickly.

Your most important task is to remain out of view and out of the line of fire. Choose an office with a door you can lock, ideally one that doesn't restrict your options for movement should you need to take action against the shooter, and blockade the door if possible.

Once you've taken cover, do what you can to avoid detection. Hide behind large objects, preferably ones that could stop a bullet fired in your direction. Silence your phone and any other devices, and remain as quiet and calm as possible.

If you can, quietly call 911 once you're behind cover. You can remain silent on the call if necessary.

If you find yourself under fire, crouch down and make yourself as small a target as possible. This could also help protect you from ricocheting bullets. In 2023, handguns were most often used by active shooters, though rifles were also often used.

If you need to take shelter from a grenade, lie flat on the floor with your feet pointed toward the blast to protect your head.

Feedback on Reflection Activity 2: Sheltering in Place

- Get to a room with enough space to move around if necessary
- Blockade the door
- Turn up the volume on a radio or television to cover other sounds
- Call 911 as quietly as you can

Shelter-in-Place Plan Activity

Now go back to your Active Shooter Awareness Plan. Take a moment and fill out the Shelter-in-Place Plan section.

As before, start in the second box. Identify any rooms you can get to that have locking doors.

In the third box, list out rooms with heavy furniture you could use to barricade a door or hide behind.

Then go to the first box and write a brief description of your plan. If, for example, a supervisor's office is easily accessible and defensible, write how you will get there.

Finally, remember to list your options if you are away from your workstation. You may have three or four different plans depending on where and when the attack might occur.

Reflection Activity 3: Taking Action

Now consider one more situation. You are in your office's breakroom when shots are fired immediately outside. You have no way to run or hide, and in only a moment the shooter will appear in the doorway. How should you respond?

Select all that apply.

- Throw a chair at the shooter
- Attack the shooter with a pen
- Yell as loudly as you can
- Grab for the gun

Taking Action

If you can't evacuate or shelter in place, your last resort is to take action against the shooter. You should only do so if your life is in imminent danger and you have no other options.

Consider: From the years 2019 to 2023, civilians intervened in active shooter incidents 22 times. They often succeeded in stopping the shooter, but 7 of the 22 died doing so.

So if you must take action, do everything you can to disarm or disable the attacker. Be as aggressive as you can: throw nearby items, improvise weapons, yell. You will only have one opportunity.

Feedback on Reflection Activity 3: Taking Action

- Throw a chair at the shooter
- Attack the shooter with a pen
- Yell as loudly as you can
- Grab for the gun

Taking Action Plan Activity

Now go back to your Active Shooter Awareness Plan. Take a moment and fill out the Take-Action Plan section.

Starting in the second box, consider what risks you're willing to take. Are you willing to throw objects but not to charge the attacker? These considerations need to be part of your decision making.

Next, identify any items that could be used as weapons. Think about heavy or sharp objects you could easily grab.

Finally, in the first box, write a brief overview of your plan, exactly how you will respond in the most likely scenarios.

Cooperating with First Responders

When first responders arrive at the scene of an active shooting, their primary goal is to stop the active shooter as quickly as possible. First responders often arrive in teams of four to find and neutralize the shooter. They will wear uniforms and hold firearms and may shout commands at bystanders. They may also use pepper spray or tear gas to control the situation.

It is vital to stay safe by remaining calm and following their instructions. Put down any items you may be holding, raise your hands, and spread your fingers. Keep your hands visible at all times. Avoid making any quick movements toward the officers, such as trying to hold onto them for safety. Avoid pointing, screaming, or yelling.

Do not stop to ask officers for help or direction. Just follow any instructions you are given. Since their goal is neutralizing the shooter, first responders will not stop to assist the wounded. Instead, rescue teams will follow behind them when it is safe for them to do so. At this time, any able-bodied bystanders may be asked to assist in moving the wounded.

You will wait in the designated secure area until first responders can identify and question all witnesses. They will instruct you when to leave.

Short Conclusion

The possibility can be unthinkable, but active shooter incidents happen in American workplaces every year, and they have happened at military installations and federal offices. If you find yourself in an active shooter incident, your quick reaction could mean the difference between life and death.

Use the Active Shooter Awareness Plan to plan out how you will respond. Your first resort is to evacuate to safety using the nearest, quickest route, while preventing others from entering the area. If you cannot evacuate, shelter in place, lock and barricade the door if possible, and remain quiet. If you can't evacuate or shelter, your last resort is to take action. Be aggressive and do everything you can to neutralize the shooter and stay alive.

When first responders arrive, follow their instructions, and don't do anything that could threaten them or prevent them from neutralizing the shooter.

You have completed the Active Shooter Awareness Short. You should now be able to develop a plan to remain safe from an active shooter.