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Active Shooters in the Workplace: Don't Wait Until It's Too Late

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As [recent events have made tragically clear](#), the number of active shooter events in the workplace seem to be becoming increasingly common. As a result, employers are struggling with how best to prepare their employees and protect the workplace in the event such a horrific situation occurs.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) defines an *active shooter* as an individual who is engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. In most instances, an active shooter uses a gun and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. Generally, an active shooter will continue to move throughout a building or area until stopped by law enforcement, suicide or other intervention.

Here are three steps an employer can take to effectively prepare for an active shooter event in the workplace:

1. Train Employees

An employer is under no legal obligation to conduct active shooter training in the workplace. Nonetheless, it's critical to establish awareness among staff of effective techniques to use if confronted with an active shooter. In some cases, an employer may decide that it lacks the needed expertise and resources to effectively train its employees. In that instance, your organization may choose to bring in a local law enforcement agency or a security expert.

However, if cost and time is a factor, look to the DHS for training materials to incorporate when it comes to employee training. In fact, the DHS has recently issued materials, including videos, reference guides and posters, to assist an employer in training its staff and implementing measures to protect the workplace.

Most notably, the DHS promotes the “Run, Hide, Fight” mindset for determining what option is appropriate in responding to an active shooter. Accordingly, an employer should pass on the following recommendations (in preferred order) to employees who find themselves in such a situation:

- Run: If possible, an employee should use the safest route and exit the building;
- Hide: If escape is not a safe option, an employee should hide in a safe place (e.g., a room with a locking door, thick walls and few windows);
- Fight: As a last resort and only if found in imminent danger, an employee should attempt to fight and try and disrupt or incapacitate the shooter.

An employer should also stress to employees the manner in which they should act [when law enforcement arrives on the scene](#). Clearly, employees must understand that the area will be a crime scene and that they will be detained and questioned until instructed to leave. Law enforcement plays a critical role in these situations so an employer may find it beneficial to reach out to a local agency for guidance and training tips.

2. Conduct Active Shooter Drills

An employer would also be well-advised to conduct active shooter drills as it may do with a typical fire or evacuation drill. An active shooter drill would increase the chances of employees retaining certain response techniques and strategies. It will also allow employees to practice getting to different escape routes and shelter sites since, in a real-life event, one needs to know all the possible ways to escape the building quickly.

An active shooter drill can take several forms depending on the size of the facility and staff and on employer resources. However, an employer should ensure that a drill assists an employee to:

- Recognize the sound of gunshots;
- React quickly when gunfire is heard and/or when shooting is witnessed;
- Know when and where to call 911;
- React appropriately when law enforcement arrives; and
- Adopt the survival mindset during a time of crisis.

Another critical component during the drill is identifying those employees with disabilities or other functional needs who may be unable to evacuate the premises on their own. Also, as with any drill, an employer should provide employees with feedback on how they performed.

3. Perform a Safety and Security Audit

It is also important to conduct an audit to identify and correct any gaps in security and safety issues, such as broken locks and malfunctioning security systems. An employer should also coordinate with the facility manager as many of these issues may require his or her input and/or assistance. For example, an employer may need a facility manager to:

- Institute controls, e.g., keys, security pass codes;
- Distribute floor plans, keys and personnel lists and telephone numbers;
- Assemble crisis kits containing radios, floor plans, personnel lists, first-aid kits and flashlights;
- Active the emergency notification system when an emergency situation occurs; and
- Ensure that the facility has at least two evacuation routes.

An organization may also determine that it needs a procedure to account for its employees during a given time. This information can prove critical in the aftermath of an active shooter event when an employer and law enforcement need to account for the employees present at the time of the incident. As a result, consider implementing a sign in/sign out system for the workplace. It's also worth requiring employees to update their personal information and emergency contact information regularly.

These steps are just a piece of an effective active shooter preparation program. Employers are encouraged to review these measures in more detail, along with others, in the new [How to Prepare for an Active Shooter Event in the Workplace](#).

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