



# Violence and the Active Shooter in the Municipality

BY VICTOR SORDILLO

The purpose of this article is to alert government officials and staff on the rare yet potentially devastating threats of violence that can occur on a municipality property and the best practices of prevention, preparation and reaction to the threats to ensure the safest possible environment for the public.

## Introduction:

Each day, employees in all workplaces experience situations that may threaten their safety. Occurrences such as slips and trips, lifting injuries, or small cuts and burns are common. Employees have been trained on best practices to mitigate these occurrences and workplaces have been improved to produce a safe environment. However, there is a rising concern for risks that are brought into the workplace by those who want to cause harm to other individuals and/or disrupt operations. These attacks include but are not limited to active shooters, bomb threats, and suspicious packages. They are threats that one would not normally expect to encounter in a workplace but are becoming more common. As leaders and employees, we must address these threats by recognizing them as well as preparing to mitigate the potential damages.

## Workplace Violence

NIOSH defines workplace violence into four categories as follows: criminal intent, customer/client, worker-on-worker and personal relationship.

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/index.htm>

According to the US Department of Labor; <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/>

“Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors.” Within this definition, approximately 2M people report being subject to violence in the workplace each year.

Government policy must ensure there is zero tolerance for workplace violence stemming from internal sources. Staff should be encouraged to report any activity that is considered a threat or an actual incident of violence. Each incident needs to be investigated and documented. Engage outside help if your municipality lacks the experience or resources to control the risk.

Some examples of internal risk factors that could lead to violence include:

- Alcohol or drug use in the workplace
- Suspicious or Change in behavior of an employee
- Job performance issues
- Inappropriate language or actions
- Social detachment
- Disrespectful behavior

Workplace violence can be mitigated by strong policies and procedures and an appropriate intervention program. When prevention is not successful, the engagement of law enforcement may be necessary.

### Active Shooter (Armed Violent Intruder)

One of the most devastating events that can happen in a municipality is the violence perpetrated by an active shooter. Most often the shooter is a present/former disgruntled employee or spouse with a domestic violence history.

The prevention of an active shooter attack is nearly impossible in the average workplace environment. However, we may prepare for an attack to potentially control the losses that occur.

Between the years of 2000-2013, there were 73 active shooter incidents in the workplace. There were 210 people killed and another 272 injured.

<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view>

Public officials are often targets and the attacks can occur anywhere in the city or town. We all remember Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford's shooting at a supermarket in Arizona and Congressman Steve Scalise who was shot at a charity baseball game. One YouTube video of an active shooter at a School Board meeting in Florida has been viewed almost 2M times. What can we learn from it? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQjQOIJvMzE>

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has identified three key actions to defend against an active shooter.

**RUN. HIDE. FIGHT.** Staff should first identify a safe escape route and run from the attack. If that is not viable, they should hide in a room that has a lock and barricade themselves inside by blocking the door or hiding under their desks or behind equipment. If the employees cannot run or hide, they should fight the active shooter with improvised weapons to incapacitate them. <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/active-shooter-how-to-respond-2017-508.pdf>

A recent active shooter in the workplace incident occurred in Annapolis, Maryland at a newspaper. Tragically, 5 people were killed during the shooting and many more were seriously injured. There are reports that many employees tried to escape through a backdoor but they could not because it was locked. They had to resort to hiding under their desks. The employees employed best practices by first attempting to run, identifying the option was not viable, and then hiding from the active shooter.

Like any emergency preparation we need to train our staff for an active shooter attack. It is recommended to establish an emergency plan that includes the following:

### Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

- Investigate any threats of violence
- Establish emergency escape routes
- Install an emergency alert system that all employees will be able to identify
- Determine which access doors can be safely barricaded to prevent shooter from entering if one is identified
- Assign roles to each employee and manager in terms of locking doors, identifying safest possible route, contacting 911
- Create small groups to ensure each member is accounted for when they escape or hide
- Identify potential weapons in the building that would be most damaging to the shooter (fire extinguisher, chairs, staplers, heavy bags, and small tables)
- Practice your plans and teach staff to identify those threats in the workplace

Call 911 immediately if there is a threat of an active shooter. Your police department is prepared for violent occurrences and should be engaged in the security of the property and the training of staff.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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