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TREND ANALYSIS

Active Shooter Response: On-Site Incident Management

SUMMARY

The *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* team analyzed 30 active shooter After Action Reports (AARs) and identified trends in on-site incident management procedures during a response to an active shooter incident. The active shooter AAR research and analysis showed that establishing on-site incident management during an active shooter incident, in order to maintain situational awareness, is an important aspect of the response effort. The analysis across the AARs indicated that the establishment of Incident Command (IC) can affect the following response capabilities:

- Operational Coordination
- Planning
- On-Scene Security and Protection
- Operation Communication

To assist organizations with addressing the capabilities identified in this document, the *LLIS.gov* team has provided recommended plans and resources for emergency managers.

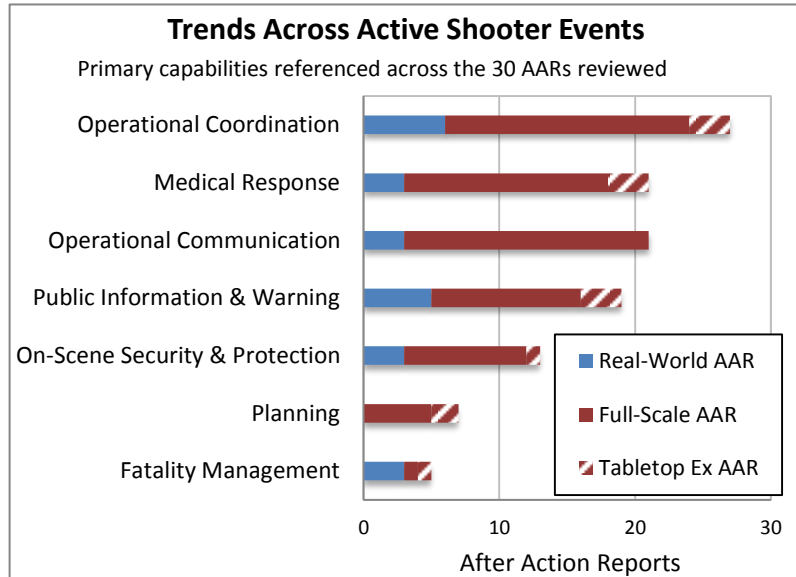


Figure 1 illustrates the frequency in which primary capabilities are referenced across the 30 AARs reviewed.

Key Findings:

- ◆ Establishing an Incident Commander, an Incident Command Post, and a Staging area minimizes response delays and enables asset tracking to maintain the safety of responders and promote the effective use of limited resources.
- ◆ The consistent use of interoperable communications throughout the response efforts ensures Incident Command and on-scene responder's situational awareness is maintained as strategies are implemented and priorities evolve.

LLIS.gov describes a Trend Analysis as "an analysis comparing similar events, activities, capacities, or capabilities over a predetermined time period to detect patterns or relationships between factors or variables."

DESCRIPTION

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “an active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearms(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims.”^{vi} In 2012 alone, there were nine active shooter incidents that took place in a variety of venues, including educational institutions, places of worship, and business and entertainment establishments.

The *LLIS.gov* team analyzed 23 exercise AARs, published between 2008 and 2013, and seven real-world AARs and incident reports, published between 2006 and 2013, to identify trending strengths and areas for improvements. The analysis identified trends and issues regarding on-site IC related to the following topics:

- Incident Commander and Command Posts
- Personnel and Resource Accountability
- Interoperable Communications



*Law Enforcement during an Active Shooter Exercise
(Source: United States Air Force photo library)*

Trends and Recommendations

Incident Commander and Command Posts

The response to an active shooter incident is rapid and dynamic, making it important that on-scene personnel follow emergency response protocols to effectively and efficiently carry out operations. In order to successfully direct and control incident management activities, the first responders on the scene should establish an Incident Commander and the location of the ICP.

Out of the 30 exercise AARs analyzed, 15 AARs discussed the effects of establishing an Incident Commander, setting up an ICP, and forming a Unified Command on the ability to manage the incident. In exercises performed where IC was not properly established—whether it was because an Incident Commander was never established, an ICP was not formed or because command and operational staff was not assigned—cascading issues affected subsequent response operations.

On-Scene Incident Management

Incident Commander is the first responder on the scene who automatically takes charge of the scene. Their job is to task Command staff with identifying and assessing the problem, devising a plan to deal with it, and acquire resources to carry out the plan. As the incident progresses, the role of Incident Commander may be transferred to meet the needs of the incident.

Command Staff is responsible for management functions, including setting incident objectives, strategies, and priorities. Additionally, Command staff is responsible for incident safety, maintaining liaisons with other participating agencies, and providing information to stakeholders.

Unified Command (UC) consists of the Incident Commanders from the various jurisdictions and disciplines operating together to form a single command structure in the field. UC forms a single IAP and coordinates together to deploy resource to meet the highest priority objectives.

When an Incident Commander is not formally established, the risk of information sharing gaps across disciplines increases significantly. Close to 50% of AARs reviewed reported that these information sharing gaps caused a substantial delay in what is considered a time-sensitive response. The delay is a result of not having a common operating picture to effectively manage available resources. In addition to these delays, the safety of first responders can be compromised if a common operating picture that establishes secure zones and provides the status of the shooter(s) is not communicated to all response units. To avoid these operational challenges, AAR recommendations included the following actions during response to an active shooter incident:

- "A plan for staffing a Communications Center or Incident Command Post needs to be formulated and included as part of the Active Shooter Law Enforcement response, and training on any new procedures should be conducted."ⁱⁱ
- "Fire and EMS representatives should collocate with law enforcement staff to allow for a formal unified command structure."ⁱⁱⁱ
- "Have all first responding agencies' personnel that would be identified in the IC/UC to come together and exercise the transition from IC to UC to make the shift routine."^{iv}
- "Create an Incident Action Plan (IAP) and revise it on a regular basis to maintain a consistent, up-to-date guidance across incident command."^v
- "In all Active Shooter situations, the first person on scene after the initial entry team will establish command, and will transfer that command to a commanding officer if needed when further resources arrive."^{vi}
- "Utilizing personnel in Command Staff positions, as well as the different sections of ICS, will assist with information overload and dissemination."^{vii}

On September 28, 2010, an active shooter began firing shots on the University of Texas at Austin campus while making his way to the campus library. The shooter, carrying an AK-47 and wearing a ski mask, entered the library and took his own life on the sixth floor of the building. The first responders on scene, University of Texas at Austin Police Department (UTPD), established an Incident Commander and an ICP within minutes of their arrival. As the incident response expanded, the initial Incident Commander transferred command to a superior officer and assumed the role of Operations Section Chief (OSC). Additional law enforcement agencies arrived, establishing a Unified Command. Unified Command established three objectives, the first of which was to hold a perimeter and shelter the campus community while searching all campus buildings for a possible second shooter. The OSC was then given the responsibility to coordinate the building searches. Once this objective was actualized, Unified Command shrank the perimeter and coordinated a staggered release of individuals from surrounding buildings.

**University of Texas at Austin
Unified Command Response Objectives:**

1. Maintain the safety and security of the community in and around the perimeter
2. Hold a perimeter and shelter the community while searching all campus buildings
3. Preserve the crime scene

(Source: [University of Texas at Austin Active Shooter / Suicide After Action Report](#))

The prompt activation of IC, coupled with the development of an IAP, allowed first responders to quickly respond to the incident on campus. Specifically, the efficiency of establishing an Incident Commander can impact other components of the response effort, including personnel and resource accountability, and interoperable communications.

Personnel and Resource Accountability

The accountability of personnel and resources during response operations allows IC to streamline utilization of assets by monitoring needed quantities and the best placement during operations. Furthermore, as long as the shooter and other threats, such as improvised explosive devices or a possible second shooter, remain a viable threat, personnel accountability is paramount.

In order to manage personnel and resources arriving at the scene, IC is in charge of formally setting up a staging area. The Incident Commander assigns a Logistics Chief to deploy, manage, and keep track of resources. AARs made the following recommendations regarding staging areas:

- "Make it clear in policy and procedures that a staging area in a safe location should be established. Assure that all responding units are notified of the staging area and respond there [when they arrive]."^{viii}
- "Implement the use of the staging area and staging area managers for all responses in the city that include response cars, special events, or planned events."^{ix}

Along with making sure that assets are assembled in the staging area, the Planning Section Chief is responsible for tracking assets once they are deployed to the scene. 13 out of the 30 AARs addressed personnel and resource accountability as major factors in both real-world incidents and exercises. These AARs provided the following recommendations to successfully manage assets throughout an incident:

- "[Responding agencies] should create Personal Accountability Report (PAR) checks."^x
- "Ensure ICS tracking protocols are established and maintained throughout the incident/event."^{xi}
- "Responding units must take their direction at the scene from the Incident Commander or the Unified Command."^{xii}

To keep track of assets conducting on-scene operations, several AARs recommended using tracking tools. The following methods are recommended when using the tools to maximize efficiency:

- "Need to develop and implement a resource tracking system for multi-agency use by incident command."^{xiii}
- "[A personnel] accountability system could consist of a sign in system at the staging area, a roll call through radio dispatch, or another identified system that can be practiced in smaller incidents and can be scaled for larger events."^{xiv}
- "Enhance command staff situational awareness by identifying resources, their progress and the target/hazard areas on a map or status board."^{xv}



*Search Teams conducting building sweeps during the University of Texas shooting incident.
(Source: UTPD)*

For instance, when Unified Command, during the 2011 University of Texas at Austin active shooter incident, decided to search campus buildings to look for a possible second shooter, personnel and asset tracking was carried out to provide command with situational awareness. OSC assigned two scribes to record the activity of each search team. Each team was assigned a building to sweep and scribes would record the deployment time of each team and when the teams returned. As the building sweeps took place, OSC kept Unified Command informed of each team's progress, allowing them to modify and update objectives and to provide operations with additional resources to complete their objective.

Interoperable Communication Systems

The response to an active shooter incident often involves multiple agencies across several disciplines, coordinating together to meet incident objectives. During response, participating agencies share valuable information to coordinate activities with one another using interoperable communication systems. Inadequate communication can result in a delay in the response effort, confusion about priorities, and wasteful use of resources.

Of the 30 AARs analyzed, 17 identified interoperable communications as an area where issues occurred. The most frequent issue across AARs stemmed from not having all agencies operate on a common radio frequency. The reasons identified were twofold: some agencies did not have the proper equipment to support an incident command channel, and some lacked the necessary training and plans to trigger the switch to a command channel. The AARs analyzed recommended focusing on the following areas to address these issues:

- "All responding agencies should continue to explore avenues that will connect communications systems, in order to streamline transmissions and ensure adequate information dissemination, and develop a plan for the addition of equipment in the future."^{xvi}
- "Examine the use of a second radio channel for command communications, and that Fire and EMS commanders/supervisors be included on this command channel to facilitate unified command."^{xvii}
- "Develop planning, training, equipment, and exercises for communication interoperability."^{xviii}

At the scene of an event where various agencies are present and the situation evolves over time, information relay between responders and IC is essential. A detailed and timely relay of critical information from response teams ensures that command staff have the knowledge to manage the incident. Issues arise when IC does not receive necessary information about on-scene activities. To avoid these problems, AARs recommended the following considerations:

- "Units dispatched to the incident should move off of their normal dispatch channel and contact the Incident Commander using the county mutual aid channel."^{xix}
- "Develop reporting procedures for tactical elements to pass information up if the information you are getting is not timely."^{xx}
- "By providing very specific information regarding entry point locations, routes of travel within the structure, the use of stairwells, location of subjects, persons, suspicious devices and other pertinent observations, the efficiency of the operation can be greatly enhanced."^{xxi}

Plans and Resources

To learn more about the response considerations discussed in this report, the following documents expand on additional response issues:

[Fire/Emergency Medical Services Department Operational Considerations and Guide for Active Shooter and Mass Casualty Incidents](#)

Developed as a fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) resource, this paper can be used as a guide to support planning and preparations for active shooter and mass casualty incidents. In developing this paper, USFA consulted with individuals and groups engaged in fire and pre-hospital EMS, law enforcement, and hospital medical and trauma care to formulate guidelines to assist fire/rescue and EMS agencies in preparing for and responding to an active shooter incident.

[4 Best Practices for Active Assailant Incident Management](#)

This white paper, written for law enforcement and fire/EMS responders, discusses observed best practices for the management of active shooter incidents and for primers on Staging, Triage, Treatment, and Transport.

[Firefighter Support Foundation Mass Shootings: Planning and Response](#)

This presentation provides first responders, emergency management, school systems, and others with basic tools and information needed to develop or assess a multi-agency mass shooting response plan. This resource can also help familiarize first responders and command staffs about trends during active shooter incidents.

CITATIONS

ⁱ Active Shooter Booklet "U.S. Department of Homeland Security Active Shooter Response."

ⁱⁱ Hood River County Department of Emergency Management. *Hood River Sheriff's Department Active Shooter Drill AAR/IP*. December 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ North Las Vegas Police Department. *Zombies Go Rogue 2013 Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. March 2013. Accessed October 2013.

^{iv} McDonough County. *WIU Active Shooter Full Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. May 2009.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Park County Emergency Management. *Platte Canyon High School Shooting After-Action Report*. December 2006.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} McDonough County. *WIU Active Shooter Full Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. May 2009. Accessed October 2013.

^{ix} City of Minneapolis Police Department. *Minneapolis Accent Signage Mass Shooting After Action Report*. November 2012.

^x Arlington County Office of Emergency Management. *Operation Early Dawn AAR/IP*. March 2012.

- ^{xi} North Las Vegas Police Department. *Zombies Go Rogue 2013 Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. March 2013.
- ^{xii} San Luis Valley Exercise Design Team. Adams State College Active Shooter/Terrorist Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP. January 2007.
- ^{xiii} Illinois Emergency Management Agency. Eastern Illinois University Active Shooter Exercise 2012 AAR/IP. June 2012.
- ^{xiv} City of Minneapolis Police Department. Minneapolis Accent Signage Mass Shooting After Action Report. November 2012.
- ^{xv} North Las Vegas Police Department. *Zombies Go Rogue 2013 Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. March 2013.
- ^{xvi} Park County Emergency Management. Platte Canyon High School Shooting After-Action Report. December 2006.
- ^{xvii} City of Minneapolis Police Department. Minneapolis Accent Signage Mass Shooting After Action Report. November 2012.
- ^{xviii} Santa Clara County Public Health Department. *Santa Clara County Hospital Active Shooter Exercise AAR*. March 2011.
- ^{xix} San Luis Valley Exercise Design Team. Adams State College Active Shooter/Terrorist Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP. January 2007.
- ^{xx} New Hampshire Department of Safety. City of Concord/Central NH SOU 2011 Exercise AAR/IP. June 2011.
- ^{xxi} Montgomery County. Montgomery County Active Shooter 2010 AAR/IP. December 2010.

APPENDIX

The Appendix contains a list of resources that the LLIS.gov research team analyzed for this document.

- Arlington County Office of Emergency Management. *Operation Early Dawn AAR/IP*. March 2012. Accessed October 2013.
- California State University Fullerton. *California State University Fullerton Active Shooter Drill AAR/IP*. January 2011. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/California-State-University-Fullerton-2011-Active-Shooter-Drill-After-Action-Report-and-Improvement-Plan>. Accessed October 2013.
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- City of Aurora. *Century Theatre Shooting Aurora Fire Department Preliminary Incident Analysis*. April 2013. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/century-theatre-shooting-aurora-fire-department-preliminary-incident-analysis>. Accessed October 2013.

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Hood River County Department of Emergency Management. *Hood River Sheriff's Department Active Shooter Drill AAR/IP*. December 2008. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/Hood-River-Sheriffs-Department-Active-Shooter-Drill>. Accessed October 2013.

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North Las Vegas Police Department. *Zombies Go Rogue 2013 Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. March 2013. Accessed October 2013.

Ohio Emergency Management Agency. *Franklin County Emergency Management & Homeland Security 2013 Domestic Terrorism/Hazmat Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. April 2013. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/franklin-county-emergency-management-homeland-security-fcemhs-2013-full-scale-exercise-after>. Accessed October 2013.

Park County Emergency Management. *Platte Canyon High School Shooting After-Action Report*. December 2006. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/Platte-Canyon-High-School-Shooting-AAR>. Accessed October 2013.

San Luis Valley Exercise Design Team. *Adams State College Active Shooter/Terrorist Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. January 2007. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/Adams-State-College-Active-ShooterTerrorist-Full-Scale-Exercise-After-Action-Report>

Santa Clara County, California Public Health Department. *Santa Clara County Hospital Active Shooter Exercise AAR/IP*. March 2011. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/Santa->

[Clara-County-Hospital-Active-Shooter-FSE-After-Action-ReportImprovement-Plan-AARIP](#). Accessed October 2013.

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