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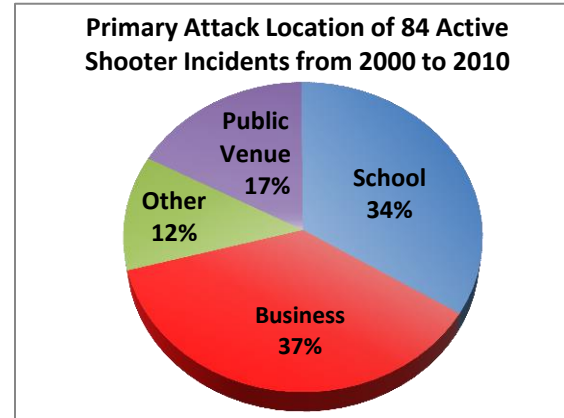Enhancing Preparedness
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Lessons Learned Information Sharing
LLIS.gov

TREND ANALYSIS

Active Shooter Response: Public Safety and Security

SUMMARY

The *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* team analyzed 30 active shooter After Action Reports (AARs) to determine trends in active shooter responses related to public safety and security. The team analyzed these AARs to find recurring issues emergency managers and responders frequently come across to help minimize the impact of an active shooter incident and ensure proper security within the affected area. The analysis of AARs demonstrated a variety of efforts that organizations carry out to ensure that the public is safely diverted from hazards and are kept apprised of the situation. The analysis also revealed that capabilities being used in real-world incidents, such as fatality management, are rarely exercised.

Primary Attack Location of 84 Active Shooter Incidents from 2000 to 2010

Location	Percentage
School	34%
Business	37%
Public Venue	17%
Other	12%

(Source: Texas State University's Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Publication)

DESCRIPTION

When emergency personnel respond to the scene of an active shooter incident, they are primarily focused on neutralizing the threat and providing life-saving medical care to the wounded. In addition to both of these tasks, responders have the added responsibility of reducing the impact of the event by securing the incident scene, providing emergency public information, and sustaining operations from response through recovery. The findings of the analysis revealed trends in the following areas that responders should be aware of when supporting public safety and security capabilities during response efforts:

- Public Information and Warning
- Scene Access and Control
- Scene Documentation

Key Findings:

- Prompt delivery of reliable information—through the use of a Public Information Officer—helps minimize the impact of the incident on the community and during the response effort.

- Controlling access to the scene, by establishing perimeters and having a plan to manage impacted individuals, alleviates security concerns and ensures response operation efficiency.

- Integrating fatality management operations into response plans and exercises ensures that response efforts transition smoothly once the incident scene is stabilized and helps facilitate information exchange between officials and families for postmortem activities.

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."

Trends and Recommendations

Public Information and Warning

The fast dissemination of content through media can inform the public of ongoing incidents almost as quickly as responders are informed. As a result, in addition to providing emergency response, on-site responders have the dual task of making sure the public is safely diverted from hazards and information about situational developments is accurately being disseminated to on-site personnel.

(Source: FEMA)

In order to inform the public of the incident, agencies should consider activating alert systems that notify the surrounding community of the situation. Sending out notifications to the public ensures that people are aware of the status of the threat or hazard and the actions being taken by responders. Notifications, specifically on a college campus, can alert students and faculty to take action, such as whether they should shelter-in-place or evacuate the area. Recently, during mass casualty incidents, agencies have used social media to pass on important information to the public—taking advantage of its broad base of users. Regardless of the specific system or tool that an agency employs, alerts and updates on the incident's developments are typically disseminated on a regular basis throughout the response effort. The following are recommendations made in AARs related to the timely dissemination of alerts:

- "All key facts should be included in an alerting message, and it should be disseminated as quickly as possible, with explicit information."[i]
- "Work with pubic information resources during large scale exercises. Provide training regarding Crisis Communication and the role of Social Media in developing Situational Awareness."[ii]

In addition to regularly disseminating notifications to the public, agencies should expect to manage the presence of the media throughout the incident. In order to manage communications with the media, Incident Command should consider appointing someone as the Public Information Officer (PIO).[iii] The PIO is responsible for disseminating information to the media and ensuring that all agencies are represented under a unified message. The following recommendations address factors that responding agencies should consider during response efforts:

- "Public safety agencies need to have trained PIOs on their staff to help sort through information that can and cannot be released to the public and to act as field PIOs for the JIS/Joint Information Center (JIC)."[iv]
- "A Public Information Officer should be established . . . in order to minimize the dissemination of incorrect information and to minimize undue stress to citizens. Once the PIO is established, an alternate should be assigned, and both should be trained to work with the media in emergency situations."[v]
- "When the PIO responsibility shifts from one person to another, a full briefing should occur. Once the transfer is complete, the media should be informed. Always give the media a place to go and a person to talk to."[vi]

Due to the large amount of attention active shooter incidents tend to receive in the media, it is important for the response effort and for the affected community to obtain accurate information, especially if relayed by the media. If information dissemination is not properly

managed, the media risks reporting unconfirmed rumors (e.g. additional shooters in the area), and as a result, agencies may have to devote scarce resources to verify and address these claims—hindering response effectiveness and efficiency. To manage media requests during incident response, AARs recommend considering the following:

- "Strong media and public relations are a key ingredient to successful outcomes."[vii]
- "It is incredibly important to schedule frequent news conferences in order to ensure that the appropriate information is disseminated to the public. Additionally, when resources are available, key personnel should be available to assist the PIO with news conferences and media questions."[viii]
- "Any delay in establishing a local Public Information Officer (PIO) for the incident can cause frustration for the media and the public."[ix]
- "Locations [for press conferences] were chosen because the buildings are equipped with the necessary technology, parking is accessible to satellite trucks and other press vehicles, and both locations are also on the outer edge of campus for easy ingress and egress for the press corps."[x]
- "[Expect to] proactively manage media requests for 72 hours."[xi]

On March 18, 2013, a gunman on the University of Central Florida (UCF) campus pulled the fire alarm in the Tower 1 dormitories with the intention to harm fellow residents using a firearm and explosives. A 9-1-1 call from the gunman's roommate prompted a quick response from law enforcement to the dormitory, where the shooter had committed suicide instead of carrying out his plan. During the response effort, UCF officials leveraged social media, text message, and email alerts, as well as University online homepage message updates to inform students and the public of the developments. On the day of the incident, UCF officials sent more than 1.3 million texts and email alerts through the UCF alert system, posted 21 updates to their Facebook page, and published 21 twitter updates about the incident. Additionally, officials held multiple interviews with the media and used a Dropbox Account (file hosting service) to facilitate the whole community's access to public records related to the shooting incident.[xii] The coordinated delivery of prompt and actionable information through the use of a variety of accessible mediums kept the public informed of the threat, the actions being taken by responders, and the assistance available to those affected.

Scene Access and Control

A multi-agency response effort inherently involves the management of response personnel from various disciplines, both within and surrounding the incident site, to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of response operations. While securing access to the scene ensures that responders can operate without hindrance, it also serves as a way to divert the public from potential hazards. In order to manage both of these concerns, responders should consider setting up a perimeter around the affected area and plan to manage impacted individuals around the incident site.

Personnel exiting the cordoned-off scene during the Accent Signage shooting in Minneapolis (Source: Accent Signage Mass Shooting AAR)

The establishment of a perimeter should be initiated as soon as the incident is stabilized. A perimeter provides responders with a specific geographical area in which they can operate without disruptions. It also has the potential of helping personnel orient themselves while operating in an area with which they may not be familiar. Furthermore, formally establishing an inner and outer perimeter between the hot, warm, and cold zones can help responders better understand the limits of where they can safely deploy. Throughout the incident, ensuring points of ingress and egress are managed provides for an easy flow of resources and personnel between on-scene perimeters. AAR content related to the establishment of a scene perimeter provided the following recommendations:

- "[Ensure] that someone takes control of immediately identifying perimeters and is accountable for the resources assigned to those tasks."[xiii]
- "Lack of command and control of the perimeter . . . created blocked ingress and egress routes for all first responders. Someone needs to take responsibility to ensure that ingress and egress routes are open for all responders."[xiv]
- "Law enforcement utilized . . . Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) as a 'force multiplier' to staff roadblocks and help maintain perimeters, which enable law enforcement officers to control the scene closer to the 'hot zone'."[xv]

Another important aspect of managing access and control of the scene is the ability to direct/redirect pedestrians, the media, and impacted individuals throughout the response effort. While a perimeter will provide a buffer between the public and the incident scene, handling individuals in the immediate vicinity of the incident requires careful consideration. The UCF shooting incident at the campus housing towers highlights the importance of having a plan to manage impacted individuals. When law enforcement arrived at Tower 1, a building that houses 500 students, its residents had already evacuated because of the fire alarm. Those students were only be allowed back into their apartments once the investigation was completed, 16 hours later. During that time, UCF housing staff assisted the displaced students by offering shelter and providing food, linens, and attending to specific requests from students.[xvi] A plan for sheltering students and providing basic care allowed UCF personnel to focus on the response effort and provide adequate accommodations that lessened the impact of the incident on the affected community.

Of the 15 AARs that discussed public safety and security, lockdown/evacuation procedures lacked the most consistency across exercises. Factors ranging from the number of shooters, potential secondary hazards, location of the incident, and number of impacted individuals all influenced the decision to either evacuate or initiate lockdown procedures. Generally, each exercise determined whether to evacuate or lockdown depending on the unique characteristics of the incident. All six real-world AARs mentioned the need to manage impacted individuals as an aspect of the response effort. AARs recommended the following suggestions for dealing with individuals in the immediate proximity of the scene:

- "A protocol needs to be developed to address the management of impacted individuals at all crime scenes (i.e. the transportation, housing, and sheltering of impacted individuals)."[xvii]
- "In some areas it may have been prudent to evacuate versus shelter in place. The exercise play called to shelter in place only, but participants should assess best practices in their own facilities."[xviii]

Scene Documentation

The response to an active shooter incident often requires a criminal investigation and fatality management operations. Once life-saving operations end—typically when the threat is neutralized and the wounded receive medical treatment—the incident transitions from a tactical operation to efforts focused on fatality management. This involves recovery of forensic and physical evidence, and the examination, recovery, and transportation of the deceased. Of the 30 AARs analyzed, several real-world incidents mentioned fatality management operations, but only two exercise AARs mentioned exercising the fatality management capability.

Regional Fatality Management Techniques and Procedures Training in Jersey City, NJ
(Source: U.S. Air Force)

To carry out fatality management operations, a coroner or medical examiner is deployed to the scene of the incident and responsible for victim identification and mortuary services. Recommendations to consider when integrating fatality management operations in preparedness planning include the following:

- "Interagency training and exercising needs to involve the Coroner and his deputies more often in order to foster working relationships and understanding of agency responsibilities."[xix]
- "The [Office of the Chief Medical Examiner] OCME should participate in disaster or national security drills and exercises to plan and train for effects of a mass fatality situation on [medical examiner] operations."[xx]
- "Future exercises need to focus on fatality management, be designed in conjunction with the County Coroner, and involve all emergency services so that they understand the transition that will occur in their typical roles when the incident moves from emergency response into fatality management."[xxi]

Although varying by state, the coroner/medical examiner typically coordinates with multiple agencies to organize and manage a fully operational family assistance center (FAC). A FAC is a location where families communicate with officials to receive up-to-date information about the incident, provide ante-mortem information to assist with the identification of the deceased, and are notified of the positive identification of the deceased. Within the FAC's operations, the coroner/medical examiner is responsible for fatality management and notification of death to the family. To improve FAC operations during response efforts, AARs made the following recommendations:

- "The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) should work along with law enforcement. . . chaplains, Department of Homeland Security, and other authorized entities in developing protocols and training to create a more responsive family assistance center (FAC)."[xxii]
- "The Coroner needs to identify who to use for data collection and identify different locations throughout the County that could be used for Family Assistance Centers."[xxiii]

- "OCME and Family Assistance Center(FAC) personnel should ensure that a media expert is available to manage media requests effectively and that victims are not inundated with intrusions that may increase their stress."[xxiv]

Response planning for active shooter incidents should also consider integrating investigation and documentation into the response framework. The investigative activities carried out during the response effort are important because they can lead to the identification, apprehensions, and prosecution of the perpetrator(s). Intelligence gathered throughout the response effort can also be used to identify and disrupt additional acts of violence that are potentially connected to that specific event.[xxv] Several real-world AARs cited the intelligence acquired during response as playing a crucial role to determine if other shooters/threats remained, or if the threat was an isolated incident.

To provide guidance on how various disciplines can integrate investigative/intelligence functions within the command structure to possibly include investigative, intelligence, forensic, missing persons, mass fatality management, and investigative support branches, FEMA released the NIMS: Intelligence/Investigations Function Guidance and Field Operations Guide. This document provides guidance on how to integrate Intelligence/Investigations (I/I) function into the Incident Command System (ICS) structure for incidents that may require an investigative component to determine the cause and origin of the incident.
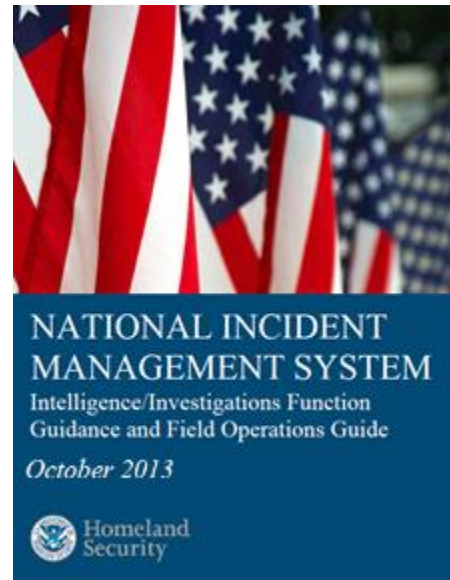
CITATIONS

[i] Virginia Tech Review Panel. Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech: Report of the Review Panel. August 2007.

[ii] Ohio Emergency Management Agency. Franklin County Emergency Management & Homeland Security 2013 Domestic Terrorism/Hazmat Full-Scale Exercise AAR/IP. April 2013.

[iii] Federal Emergency Management Agency. *National Incident Management System* (NIMS). December 2008.

[iv] Teton County Emergency Management. 2013 *Teton County Mass Violence Functional Exercise AAR/IP*. February 2013.

[v] Park County Emergency Management. Platte canyon High School Shooting After-Action Report. December 2006.

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] Ibid.

viii Ibid.

ix Ibid.

x University of Texas at Austin Police Department. *University of Texas at Austin Active Shooter/Suicide After Action Report*. September 2010.

xi Ibid.

xii University of Central Florida. UCF Tower #1 Shooting Incident After-Action Review. May 2013.

xiii City of Minneapolis Police Department. Minneapolis Accent Signage Mass Shooting After Action Report. November 2012.

xiv Ibid.

xv Teton County Emergency Management. 2013 *Teton County Mass Violence Functional Exercise AAR/IP*. February 2013.

xvi University of Central Florida. UCF Tower #1 Shooting Incident After-Action Review. May 2013.

xvii City of Minneapolis Police Department. Minneapolis Accent Signage Mass Shooting After Action Report. November 2012.

xviii Santa Clara County, California Public Health Department. *Santa Clara County Hospital Active Shooter Exercise AAR/IP*. March 2011.

xix Teton County Emergency Management. 2013 *Teton County Mass Violence Functional Exercise AAR/IP*. February 2013.

xx Virginia Tech Review Panel. Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech: Report of the Review Panel. August 2007.

xxi Teton County Emergency Management. 2013 *Teton County Mass Violence Functional Exercise AAR/IP*. February 2013.

xxii Virginia Tech Review Panel. Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech: Report of the Review Panel. August 2007.

xxiii McDonough County. *WIU Active Shooter Full Scale Exercise AAR/IP*. May 2009. Accessed October 2013.

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xxv Federal Emergency Management Agency. Crosswalk of Target Capabilities to Core Capabilities. December 2011.

APPENDIX

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

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DISCLAIMER