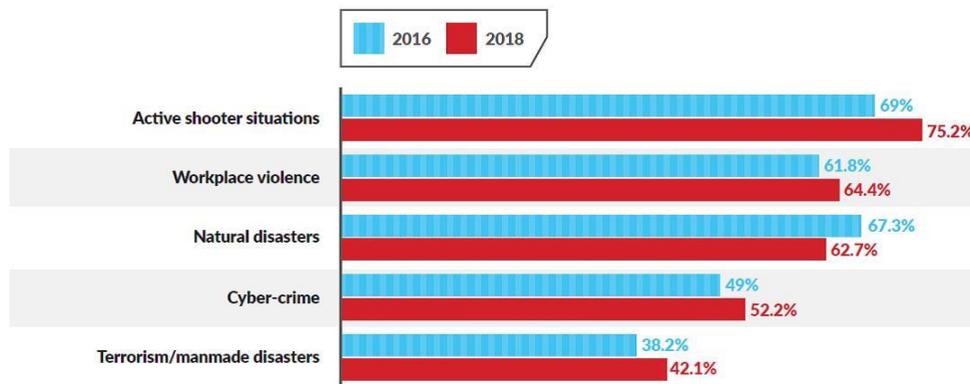


ACTIVE SHOOTER RISK MANAGEMENT: ACCESSING THE THREAT

By Art Crow

It seems that hardly a week goes by without a report of mass shooting or an active shooter event. As a result, more and more organizations and their senior management are looking to develop and implement mitigation strategies to protect against and respond to active an active shooter event. As evidenced by the 2018 Active Shooter Preparedness Survey¹ conducted by Everbridge[®], Inc. in partnership with Security Management magazine, which “surveyed 630 corporate security and emergency preparedness leaders regarding their active shooter incident preparedness, response readiness and overall perceptions of evolving threat”, active shooter events were listed at the #1 threat organization were preparing for; followed by workplace violence, natural disasters, cyber-crime and terrorism/manmade disasters rounding out the top five.

What are the top threats your organization is preparing for? (Select all that apply)



Source: 2018 Active Shooter Preparedness Survey, Everbridge[®], Inc.

But when we consider the likelihood of an active shooter event occurring in the workplace as opposed to the other 4 of the top 5 threats, it is easy to say without a deep data dive that incidents of workplace violence, natural disasters, cyber-crime and manmade disasters occur on a regular/daily basis, whereas active shooter events are very rare in comparison. In a recent Campus Safety Magazine article *Is active shooter training worth it? Use common sense when training non-security employees* (featured in the April 19, 2019 IFMA Insider newsletter), the author, Robin Hattersley-Gray, wrote “Although lockdown drills are important, organizations are focusing way too much attention on active shooter response at the expense of other training, drills, exercises and solutions that will save many more lives.” “It’s time for us to adjust our perspective on the active shooter threat. The chances of anyone being killed by a gun at a school, university or hospital are extremely remote, and the chances of them being killed by an active shooter anywhere are even lower. A student is much more likely to die on his or her way to or from school or suffer a life-threatening injury while playing interscholastic sports.” This astute observation deserves further consideration as it applies to the workplace active shooter threat in general.

Understanding the Threat

While the Everbridge[®] survey findings identified key areas of concern, organizational preparedness levels and forward looking recommendations, I have some concern with the framing of the active shooter threat as it pertains to the workplace which, is the focus of the report: workplace active

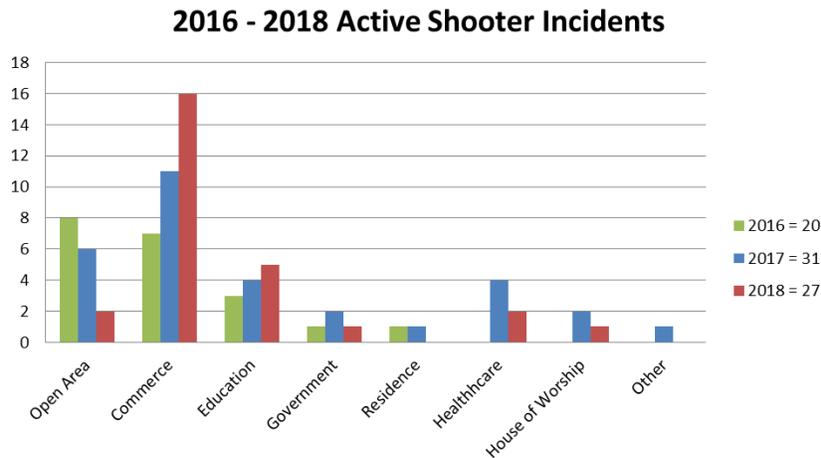
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shooter preparedness; the key point being that active shooter events and mass shootings are not synonymous with each other.

In summarizing the active shooter scenario, the report says...“Since our last Active Shooter report in 2016, there have been 686 mass shootings involving over 3,100 casualties in the U.S. 810 people tragically lost their life during these attacks.” These statistics are sourced from [Gun Violence Archive](#), an organization that tracks “all” gun related violence in the US. This information can be somewhat misleading when taken in the context of the survey report; workplace active shooter incidents. While Gun Violence Archive and similar organization statistics include all mass shooting incidents, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Active Shooter report “does not encompass all gun-related situations. Rather, it focuses on a specific type of shooting situation. The FBI defines an active shooter as one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.”² According to the FBI’s 2017 & 2018 reports, there were a total of 58 active shooter incidents over the 2 year period, with 227 people killed and 724 wounded; including the Las Vegas Harvest Festival incident with 58 killed and 489 wounded.

The data also indicates a steady rise in incidents in commerce (+9) and educational (+3) environments, with all other categories remaining the same or experiencing drops in incident occurrence over the same 3 year period.



Source Data: 2016 – 2018 FBI Active Shooter Reports

This is not to say that 686 reported mass shootings with 3,100 casualties is not tragic in and of itself, but it is important to make the distinction between “all” incidents and the ones which pose a specific threat to an organization, and which management has the ability to take reasonable proactive measures to mitigate; active shooter events in the workplace.

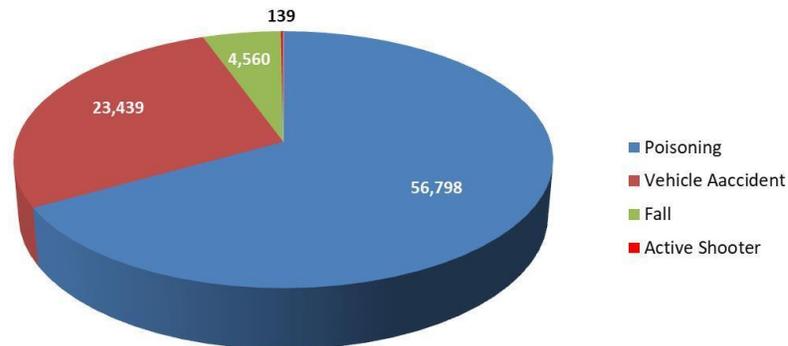
When we compare the number of deaths in the 25-64 age groups in the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) 2017 Unintentional Injury Death report (most recent report) with the FBI 2017 Active Shooter Report deaths, we find that a person was:

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- 33 times more likely to die from an accidental fall
- 169 times more likely to die in a motor vehicle accident
- 409 times more likely to die from accidental poisoning

2017 Unintentional Deaths -v- Active Shooter Deaths



Source Data: 2017 CDC Unintentional Injury Deaths Report (ages25-64) & 2017 FBI Active Shooter Report

Although it is quite clear that someone is much more likely to die from an unintentional fall, motor vehicle accident or poisoning than from an active shooter incident in the workplace, that doesn't mean we should take our eye off the ball when it comes active shooter emergency planning and response. Just like every other natural or manmade disaster an organization develops emergency action plans for, plans for active shooter events need to be based on a risk analysis that weights likelihood of occurrence against impact. It is safe to say that while the likelihood of occurrence is actually very low, the potential negative impact on the organization will always be very high.

Statically speaking, it is virtually impossible to predict when, where or by whom an active shooter event will be perpetrated. In its updated analysis of the 2000 – 2013 Active Shooter Report released in 2017³, the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) echoed the 2002 Secret Service⁴ study of school shootings that "no typical profile by any demographic characteristics is useful for predicting where or by whom an active shooter event will happen." As part of the study the BAU developed a Quick Reference Guide that provides useful information on shooter pre-attack behaviors. The guide notes that "While impossible to predict violent behavior, it is possible to prevent some attacks via effective threat assessment and management strategies." Some of the highlights include:

- 73% of active shooters had a known connection with the attack site
- 79% appeared to be acting in accord with a grievance of some kind
- 35% had job-related stressors
- 29% had conflict with friends/peers

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- While approximately one-third of active shooters in this sample victimized only random members of the public, *most active shooters arrived at a targeted site with a specific person or persons in mind.* (Emphasis added)

Two items of special importance for planning/threat assessment purposes are:

- 55% of 40 active shooters who had a specific target made threats or had a prior confrontation.
- 51% of active shooters leaked intent to commit violence. *No instances of observed leakage were reported to law enforcement.* (Emphasis added)

Assessing the Threat

The success of an active shooter emergency response plan should not be measured solely on how well it prepares and trains the workforce to respond to an active shooter incident. Rather, it should be weighed more heavily on how well it trains the workforce and management to identify potential threats and the actions to be taken to mitigate those threats. An effective means for accomplishing this is through the use of Threat Assessment Teams (TATs) consisting of corporate and site level management.

“Generally, a TAT serves as a central convening body with representation from a variety of community stakeholders with training in threat assessment and threat management. Having a centralized team minimizes the chance that problematic behaviors will be considered isolated incidents. A TAT can assist in recognizing patterns of concerning behaviors from persons who might otherwise “slip through the cracks.” Using structured professional judgement, the TAT works to assess whether or not the person of concern truly poses a threat of violence and what steps can be taken by the host organization to mitigate the risk of harm. A TAT typically is most effective when staffed with a diverse array of stakeholders, such as health care professionals, corporate security personnel, human resource specialists, general counsel/legal, and other key representatives from within the corporate structure.

TATs review troubling or threatening behavior of persons via a holistic assessment and development of a management strategy that considers the many varied aspects of the person’s life. More than focusing on warning signs or threats alone, a TAT assessment involves an overall analysis of dynamic and static behaviors, considering such areas as threats made, security concerns, stressors, conflicts, family issues, and work and relationship problems. After assessing the concerning behavior, a TAT can develop a course of action to mitigate the threat whether through law enforcement/security action, counseling, or other intervention. Guiding a person of concern away from violence does not typically rely upon a single solution, but instead involves strategic and collaborative interventions that are tailored for the individual within his or her particular life circumstances.”⁵

If the person of concern has acted out violently or has communicated a threat to commit a violent act, the TAT should, in addition to conducting its internal assessment, consider employing the services of a private investigator to do a complete background check on that person. The background check should include a national criminal history check, court records and credit check, which could indicate stressors or activities outside of the workplace that might lead to a heightened level of concern. As information

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contained in this type of check can provide unfavorable information on the person, it must be kept in strict confidence. Furthermore, it should never be used for any other purpose than for the assessment of the potential threat to the workplace. Any other use of this information could leave the company open to a negligent liability claim for improper use of post-hire checks if the information is used for any other purposes by the employer.

If the person of concern has physically assaulted someone in the workplace or the TAT has made a determination that the person poses a significant risk of violence, the company must take immediate actions to exercise its “duty of care” to provide a safe and secure workplace. In the event of a physical assault or threat against a person, the person of concern should, as a minimum, be placed on suspension while the TAT conducts its assessment. Since it is incumbent upon the victim of an assault to file a criminal complaint with law enforcement, most police departments will not take the complaint if an organization calls to make it. The victim should be encouraged to report the incident to police, and all accommodations should be made to provide a private location in the workplace for the victim to meet with police. In the event of a threat against the company, a company representative should notify law enforcement immediately and provide formation on the nature of the threat. Any witnesses should also be made available to law enforcement for follow up investigation into the threat.

Whenever a determination is made to terminate employment as the result of an actual or perceived threat of violence in the workplace, management should consider the use of a workplace violence intervention consultant for the termination process. While incidents on the low spectrum – such as abusive language, harassment, etc. – may be handled within standard HR guidelines, any incident where an assault has occurred or where a threat of violence has been communicated and the preponderance of evidence from the threat assessment indicates a potential for further violent behavior, consideration should be given to bringing in a workplace violence intervention consultant to effect a resignation on the part of the person of concern. Rather than firing the person, it gives them the opportunity to self-terminate. The process usually entails the consultant meeting with the person, discussing the incident and getting them to admit they were wrong, having them write/sign a statement about the incident, and having them sign a no trespass notice with the understanding that if they return to company property, police will be notified and they will be arrested for trespassing. In return for the resignation and no trespass agreement, the company usually agrees to provide a small severance package (~30 days salary; vacation time due), not to contest the person’s unemployment claim for 6 months, and to provide only employment dates, job title and salary compensation information on any future employment reference checks. While this approach entails a cost for the consultant, the severance package and unemployment benefits, these costs are far less than any cost the company might incur from loss of life, personal injury, property damage and damage to corporate image should the person return as an active shooter.

A threat often missed in emergency response planning and in most security procedures – arises when a worker comes in with a restraining or protective order awarded against another person (the subject). What provisions should be in ready? This is a very sensitive and private matter that a person may be very wary of sharing with their employer, or they may share it with a colleague or Human Resources (HR), but no one else. All too often, this information is not shared with security. At times even HR does not share the information with security. This is a high risk practice that can leave the facility

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susceptible to violence in the workplace or even an active shooter event, should the subject show up on site with intent to do harm to the person (victim) who took out the restraining order.

Security should always be provided with a copy of the restraining order (for presentation to local law enforcement), a description of the subject (including recent picture) and a description of the subject's vehicle (including license plate number). Additionally, there should be procedures in place for what to do if the victim reports that the subject followed them to work, as well as procedures for what to do if the subject shows up at the facility. If the subject shows up at the building lobby and says they are there to visit the victim, how will the reception able to identify the visitor as the subject of the restraining order? A simple procedure such as calling the security operations center or a designated manager as saying "(Subject's name) is here to visit (victim's name), do you know if he/she is available?" can be code to the receiver of the call to let them know the subject is on site and to notify law enforcement. After the receptionist hangs up the phone they can tell the subject to take a seat and someone will be down shortly to escort them. Procedures should also be in place for how to notify the victim that the subject in on site so they don't unwittingly go to the lobby while the subject t there."

In summary, while the likelihood of an active shooter event occurring in the workplace is very low, but the risk of adverse impact if an incident occurs is very high, making it imperative that organizations include guidelines in their emergency action plans for accessing and responding to potential and/or actual active shooter incidents. Understanding the specific threat as it applies to their environment, as opposed to relying on overly broad data sets, will allow managers to develop realistic and reasonable mitigation strategies tailored to their workplace.

All incidents of violence in the workplace should be assessed by a cross-functional TAT that can provide a "structured professional judgement" on the threat, and then take appropriate actions to mitigate the threat. If the TAT makes a determination that there is a potential for further violent acts, structuring a resignation and minimal severance agreement for the employee concerned can prove to be much less costly as opposed to outright termination, which could increase the stressors on the person, leaving a burning grievance and desire to exact revenge.

What is ahead? Next month, Art Crow will take up active shooter emergency planning and preparedness – what happens if threat becomes reality.

¹ *Everbridge® press release and link to downloadable report*

² *FBI Active Shooter Reports: 2016 – 2017, 2018*

³ *FBI Active Shooter Report, 2000-2013*

⁴ *2002 Secret Service School Shootings Final Report*

⁵ *Developing Emergency Operations Plans: A Guide for Businesses (FBI March 2018)*

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