



School Safety Monthly

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Active Shooter to Active Assailant: Time to Shift the Paradigm



Photos: Rachel Wilson



Message from the Editor

In this issue we address the concerns raised by active shooter and active assailant incidents. We chose the cover photo to illustrate a few of the types of weapons that represent a more likely risk than a firearm in a school. Knives are the most commonly carried and used weapons in schools - but this arsenal was assembled from items we found unsecured in a single unlocked room in an elementary school.

It seems as though every day there is a new concept for us to learn about; some new method of thinking, training, or vocabulary term to correct. This can make it very difficult to focus on our task

at hand. As we encourage you to shift your thinking from Active Shooters to a broader Active Assailant mindset, remember that this is nothing more than the tried and true all-hazards approach that we have been advocating for years.

The terms we use to describe these events might seem like a minor detail, but our choice of words is important because they will define similar cases for years to come. We must be careful when using these terms when speaking to the public and the media but also as we help establish an understanding of our prevention, preparedness and response measures.

As this year comes to a close we invite you to continue to join us here at Safe Havens International in our ongoing mission to keep schools safe. The ticking of the clock leading up to midnight is a

reminder that ours is a task that can not be accomplished in a mere number of hours, days or even years. It is not a project where you can simply complete tasks and check off a list to show that we are finished. Safety is a living process for you and your staff to nourish as part of your every day culture. Here at Safe Havens International we pledge that we will continue to grow and learn ourselves, even as we work to teach and train others, so that we can better serve you and those that you protect.

As my last editor's message of 2016 comes to a close I want to leave you with a warm message of gratitude for all that you do, and a reminder that we at Safe Havens stand behind you as you move forward and continue to keep our nation's most precious resource safe.

-Rachel





Active Assailants & Active Shooters: Shifting the Paradigm

by Chris Dorn

November's gruesome active assailant attack at Ohio State University has us once again asking what could have been done and what can be done to prevent future attacks. Based on our work on more than a dozen planned active shooter and active killer cases (school weapons attacks), we know that it is difficult to make many firm conclusions about this event without seeing all of the investigative documents and details of the case. In our experience the case file almost always looks quite different from the picture painted by media coverage of the event.

There are a few initial lessons we can gather from the incident: 1) This attack pointed out the difficulty of responding to active assailants when we are operating in the context of an active shooter; 2) There appears to have been confusion over whether to use Run, Hide Fight or lockdown 3) This attack reiterates the need to prepare for combination attacks.

1. Active Shooter Tunnel Vision

"Active Shooter" has been one of the most overused terms in school safety over the past 4 years. Since Sandy Hook there has been a flood of information in the form of studies and news stories claiming that school violence, and in particular, active shooter incidents, are on the rise. Aside from the potentially misleading use of data, the big risk here is that we focus so much on active shooter incidents that we forget about the very real risk of other types of attacks. Other parts of the world have extensive experience with knife attacks and can attest that these can be just as horrific as an active shooter incident. In 2014 a knife attack at the [Kunming Railway Station in China resulted in 33 deaths and 143 injuries](#).

This is not simply a question of termi-

nology – we run the risk of operating in a sort of tunnel vision if we focus only on a single type of attack that is already outmoded.

2. Combination Attacks

We have written extensively about the risk and danger of combination attacks. Attacks using multiple methodologies (in this case a car and a knife) have been the standard operating procedure for international terrorists for some time now and has been used on multiple occasions by domestic school shooters as well. The earliest incident we are aware of is the bombing/fire/shooting attack carried out by Andrew Kehoe in Bath, Michigan in 1927. More recently, the shooter at Arapahoe High School in Colorado used a firearm as well as improvised Molotov cocktails during his attack. The attackers at Columbine used firearms and attempted to use explosives and fire to complicate their attack as well. Just last week an attacker in Berlin used only a vehicle to kill 12 and would dozens more.

3. Oversimplified approaches to crisis response

As we outlined in our book *Staying Alive*, there are a number of concerns about the blind application of concepts like Run, Hide, Fight in schools and other environments that differ from the intended audience of the video. Our analysts have been told by multiple federal agencies and trainers that Run, Hide Fight was intended for large public areas experiencing an attack with multiple shooters. We have also been told by staff involved in the video's production that it was intended as a response to attacks like the highly coordinated Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008. One could summarize the intent of Run, Hide Fight as preparing the general public to respond to a shooting in an area with limited lockdown capabilities like

a shopping mall, large office building or other environment designed for ease of public access. Contrast this with a K-12 school full of lockable spaces and regular drills for staff and students. Colleges, universities and hospitals are somewhere in between because they do have large open spaces and some areas that cannot be locked, but these organizations do have more capacity to train and prepare a regular user group than a shopping mall or movie theater.

While it is too soon to make analysis of this incident in regards to the 'success' or failure of Run, Hide Fight, we did see some of the symptoms that are common among the schools that we evaluate who use these types of oversimplified options-based approaches. One example is the message from the school calling for staff and students to Run, Hide and Fight while another concurrent message called for a "shelter in place" procedure (which in it's most common usage is actually intended for HazMat situations).

There is currently no "best practice" or "standard of care" related to the use of any options-based training program. We have heard increasing reports from schools that they are being told that A.L.I.C.E. or another options-based program is now the officially accepted "standard of care" or "best practice" for schools. The reality is that the large majority of schools (and other organizations, including the U.S. Capitol and White House) still use the proven model of traditional lockdowns. Furthermore, there is no officially recommended model by the U.S.D.O.E. other than the model plans provided by FEMA that are based on the lockdown concept.

Chris Dorn is a Senior Analyst for Safe Havens International.



Photo of the Month



Chris Dorn/Safe Havens International

This month's featured photo shows an excellent safety practice in a school shop area. These pressurized tanks can be extremely dangerous when not stored properly because if punctured they could become missiles, even punching through a wall. These tanks should be kept in an area with controlled access and secured from falling over either by accident or through tampering. This school has done an excellent job of securing, labeling and locking these tanks up to prevent this type of injury. The signage indicating that all tanks should be chained, and the storage area sign that depicts tanks chained to the wall, are excellent additional measures to increase the likelihood that these practices are followed.

School Safety Monthly

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