

School Safety Monthly

January 2015

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Active Shooter Training Revisited

Photo: Rachel Wilson, Safe Havens International

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Message from the Editor in Chief

By Chris Dorn

Welcome to our new monthly e-newsletter! For several years, we have published our electronic journal, *The Safety Net*, with full-length articles, news briefs and other detailed information on various topics in school safety. We are now expanding our publications to provide more timely and concise information for the school safety professional. With the increased public awareness of school safety issues, we have seen a rise in requests for our thoughts on topics ranging from active shooter response and school terrorism to public health issues in schools.

We have also expanded our staff in the past year with the addition of more than 30 new adjunct analysts and an intern

to help expand our service offerings. You'll hear more about our adjunct analysts in coming months – for now I'd like to go



Photo: Rachel Wilson, Safe Havens International

In this photo our intern Morgan Billinger portrays a classroom teacher during a video shoot for an upcoming installment in the Safe Topics video training and assessment system. The cover photo from this issue is also from that video shoot.

ahead and introduce you to our intern, Morgan Billinger. Morgan has been working with Safe Havens International since 2014 and helps with a variety of tasks including website upkeep and developing new infographics and publications. We are excited to welcome her to the Safe Havens team and we look forward to releasing more publications with her assistance in 2015.

If you have any comments or suggestions on *School Safety Monthly*, contact us at our site www.safehavensinternational.org or by visiting us on Facebook ([Facebook.com/SafeHavensIntl](https://www.facebook.com/SafeHavensIntl)) or Twitter ([@SafeHavensIntl](https://twitter.com/SafeHavensIntl)). We look forward to hearing from you!

-Chris

Safe Havens International analyst named Regional School Safety Specialist for the High Desert Education Service District in Redmond, Oregon



Photo: Rachel Wilson, Safe Havens International

Chris Dorn, Safe Havens International analyst and co-founder, was recently selected as the Regional School Safety Specialist for the High Desert Education Service District (HDESD), which covers Crook County and Deschutes County in central Oregon. Chris will be providing a variety of services to school districts and non-public schools in these two counties. These services will include school safety assessments, assisting in the development

of emergency plans and procedures, school safety staff development training, assisting in drills and exercises and in general facilitating safe school environments for the region. Chris will remain in his service with Safe Havens International as an adjunct senior analyst on his personal time. We are proud of Chris and his accomplishments and look forward to the added expertise that he will bring to HDESD in his new position.

- Safe Havens International

One Percent for Art in Ketchikan, Alaska

by Senior Analyst Chris Dorn



Photo: Chris Dorn, Safe Havens International

These photos are a great example of a concept known as “territoriality”. Territoriality is a component of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED is a research-based field of knowledge that focuses on ways to improve safety and security through good building design and community planning. Specifically, territoriality is the concept that the level of safety and security in the built environment can be improved by tying the occupants of that space to the facility and giving them the motivation and ability to protect that space.

Student artwork and murals are one great way of accomplishing this in schools. These photos were taken at Ketchikan High School and Fawn Mountain Elementary School during our assessment of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District in Southeast Alaska. Since 1975, Alaska has had legislation known as “Percent for Art” that requires 1% of capital construction costs of public buildings to be used for the acquisition and installation of permanent artwork. According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, a total of 25 states have public art or percent

for art programs. Like many communities in Alaska, Ketchikan has taken this opportunity to incorporate native art and local themes into these projects. The example on the bottom left pays tribute to the native culture and heritage of the region. Some of the artwork featured in Ketchikan schools also contributes towards education, as shown in the photo below.



Photo: Chris Dorn, Safe Havens International



Photo: Chris Dorn, Safe Havens International

For more information on Alaska’s “Percent for Art”:

www.eed.state.ak.us/aksca/visual.html

For more information on public art programs nationwide:

www.nasaa-arts.org/Research/Key-Topics/Public-Art/State-Percent-for-Art-Programs.php

For Chris Dorn’s full bio, visit the “About Us” section [on our website](#).

Active Shooter Training Under Fire Again

By Executive Director Michael Dorn

Training Criticized in National Media

Advising students and staff to keep canned goods on their desk to throw at a gunman is inherently dangerous and illogical, yet this very suggestion was recently made by one school administrator. This is one symptom of a number of “options-based” active shooter training approaches that have gained popularity since the Sandy Hook attack despite gaps in research and quality. These types of active shooter training programs have already resulted in millions of dollars of workers compensation claims due to injuries during training. We anticipate considerable litigation against trainers, schools, and law enforcement agencies that provide unsafe active shooter training programs as a result of these injuries. My experience as a school safety expert witness is that it will be very difficult to defend some of these training methodologies during litigation. For example, while police officers typically use protective gear during close quarters combat training (CQC), options-based active shooter training videos that we have reviewed show trainees throwing objects and hitting one another with fists and chairs without protective gear.

ALICE Training & Canned Goods

Many people have asked my opinion regarding recent news stories about a letter to parents

urging them to have their children bring canned goods to school for use in defending against an active shooter. The letter from a school principal states that local police suggested that students throw these cans at a gunman during an attack. This concept is influenced and supported by an organization known as the ALICE Training Institute, according to their website. ALICE, which stands for “Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate”, is one of a number of programs that attempt to teach CQC concepts to staff and students. No matter what people selling these approaches may say, any program that teaches people to physically attack an armed aggressor is asking them to carry out close quarters combat, regardless of what friendly name it uses. This is not the first instance where options-based active shooter program instructors have advised schools of similar tactics.

Other Concerns

As we have mentioned in a previous blog, one Iowa insurance carrier has already paid more than \$300,000 in emergency room medical bills for participants who have been injured from these types of training sessions. They estimate that final costs including follow up surgeries, physical therapy, and other treatment will reach



Photo: Rachel Wilson, Safe Havens International

more than \$1 million – just in this one state alone. Fortunately, Iowa Homeland Security Officials have discontinued funding for this type of training and injuries have since begun to drop dramatically. However, Iowa is far from the only state where school employees have been seriously injured in options based active shooter training sessions. For example, we recently learned from one of our school clients that their curriculum director witnessed numerous injuries during an ALICE training program that she participated in. While serious training injuries may occur even with well-designed programs, they should be rare rather than relatively common. In two decades of law enforcement, I cannot recall any training program where officer injuries were so prevalent.

Results Often Fall Short

I have now worked in this field for 34 years. I have worked eight

K-12 active shooter events and hundreds of other incidents that are far more typical when it comes to violence in schools, including single-victim shootings, stabbings and other school crisis events. I have actually been shot at on campus and have survived an attack by an armed aggressor using close quarters combat techniques when I did not have a gun. In my opinion, telling students with limited to no training to carry cans of canned goods to throw at a gunman is unsound. In my experience, this approach will

Terror Management Theory at Work

Last year, I attended an excellent expert witness conference where a speaker explained a concept known as terror management theory. He described the powerful human tendency for people to become convinced that they are likely to experience bizarre and extraordinarily rare catastrophic events. Many people experience this even when they are provided with solid evidence that the chances they will personally experience such events are beyond remote.

Just as terrorism can make many people feel they are more likely to be victimized than is statistically likely, major acts of violence like active shooter events in schools can have this effect. While research in terror management theory explains that this is only natural, this type of reaction can be extremely dangerous.

Photo: Rachel Wilson, Safe Havens International



clearly increase overall danger to students and staff for a host of reasons. These experiences have taught me that options-based training requires much more training than these programs offer. Contrary to statements made by many instructors, these concepts have never been validated as effective for civilians with limited training. Just as importantly, our analysts have seen alarming responses in our controlled simulations with educators trained in options-based active shooter training programs.

I have personally had two ALICE trainees respond to a suicide threat scenario by saying they would “attack the gunman” despite the fact that the “gunman” in this scenario was a student with a semi-automatic handgun pointed at his forehead with his finger on the trigger. I should point out that in this scenario the student is depicted as being about ten feet away with other students in close proximity. In this situation, an attack response would be incredibly dangerous. We have seen similar results with test subjects who have viewed the

“Run. Hide. Fight.” video. Test subjects who had viewed “Run. Hide. Fight.” and completed a five-hour training based on the video scored noticeably lower than school employees in the same district who had not completed the training. Law enforcement officers in this district modified their training practices after seeing the responses their trainees were giving (including graduates of the training who opted to attack a student threatening suicide with a gun to his temple). These results from controlled and scored simulations serve as reminders that the results of training may be different from what is intended if the training is not structured properly. Statistics show that there are eight times as many suicides on K12 school campuses as active shooter situations (with twice as many deaths from suicide), making this finding even more alarming (to view the data, read [Relative Risks of Death in U.S. K-12 Schools from our resources page](#)) Telling staff and students to arm themselves with canned goods to defend against an active shooter is an approach that could create enormous liability exposure for

any school or police officials who are involved. Many school security experts and insurance personnel feel significant litigation is inevitable given the staggering numbers of injuries to trainees around the nation. More importantly, this approach can dramatically increase the chances that serious injury or death will occur in the types of situations that are statistically more likely to occur in K12 schools.

This approach can easily result in conditioning staff and students to react to anyone with a gun on school property as if they were an active shooter. Incident data clearly demonstrates that the majority of violators with guns on school property are not active shooters. The opportunities for needless death and serious injury from this approach are significant and very real. A student or staff member might misread a situation and throw canned goods at an armed person who is not actually intent on using a gun. Staff members might attack a



Photo: Rachel Wilson,
Safe Havens International

student who is threatening suicide with a gun, triggering them to shoot themselves or others around them. Students might trigger a multiple-victim shooting by attacking someone who plans only to shoot one specific victim or someone who is intent on taking hostages but not intending to shoot anyone without provocation.

The results of thousands of one-on-one school crisis simulations have shown that people who focus intently on active shooter incidents often develop this deadly predisposition. As the saying goes, “to a hammer, every problem is a nail”. When police officers are trained in the use of force, they are typically required to successfully demonstrate these techniques by responding to a wide variety of scenarios participating in extensive scenario-based training, not just one expected scenario they have been told in advance they will have to address. The close quarters combat training I received was taught over two weeks, including role-playing in a wide array of weapons and non-weapon scenarios. Even then, I was very lucky to survive the attack where I attempted to use these types of techniques under actual field conditions. The 80 hours of CQC training I received was far more advanced and in-depth than any of the options-based active shooter training programs currently we have seen taught to school officials. Sadly, I can think of few situations where the types of reactions explained

by terror management theory (described in the sidebar on the previous page) have caused so many intelligent and well-meaning people to dramatically increase danger while they are attempting to reduce it.

Conclusion

We believe the anticipated litigation against schools and law enforcement agencies using these approaches will result in an abandonment or significant modification of these training approaches over time. This will also require re-training for staff who have been trained in these techniques. This is what I observed during my law enforcement career when tactics that had been taught to officers were found to be dangerous. There are a number of concepts that have been demonstrated to reduce risks associated with school violence that are often being ignored while concepts that sound good to many but have never been validated are implemented in our schools. We urge schools and their law enforcement partners to realistically test options-based active shooter training programs before they are implemented. If they are likely to work under the extreme stress of an actual event, they will work even better when tested under the less stressful conditions of simulations using a wide array of scenarios in a real-time fashion.

For Michael Dorn's full bio, visit the "About Us" page on [our website](#).



School Safety Tools Highlight

New Free School Safety Resource – *Seven Important Building Design Features to Enhance School Safety and Security*

Safe Havens releases many free [school safety resources](#) each year. For example, Safe Havens has posted more than fifty free training and staff development videos and web courses on our website in the past several years. We also produce some excellent topical papers as free resources. Last year, we produced

two research papers which were released by state departments of education. The most recent paper is titled [Seven Important Building Design Features to Enhance School Safety and Security](#) and was released by the Indiana Department of Education's School Safety Specialist's Academy in November. This

twenty page guide is loaded with vivid photographs provided by our analysts and our staff photographer Rachel Wilson. The paper was produced by a team of twelve Safe Havens staffers and has been very well received. To download the guide, visit our resources page by going to [safehavensinternational.org](#) and clicking on "Resources".

Thinking Tactically in a Tactical Situation

By Adjunct Analyst Stephen Satterly,

A gunman skulks into a classroom and immediately the valiant students respond by throwing anything at hand at the gunman. They then swarm him like a pride of lions taking down a gazelle and handily take him down while the rest of the class escapes with their lives. Except for the hapless gunman, who is going to jail, they all live happily ever after.

While being used to illustrate a point, the video shows a teacher and students who are clearly anticipating what is about to happen and a gunman who is unusually slow to react in contrast to real-life aggressors. The situation illustrated by the video is so contrived and unrealistic that it might as well be a fairy tale.

which in the law enforcement field is called Use of Force Training.

Distraction Theory

The act of throwing items at the gunman is based upon Distraction Theory. This approach is reliant upon diverting the attention of the gunman from their goal of shooting victims because their startle reflex is triggered by objects suddenly approaching their face. Police and military forces use distraction concepts when they use "flash-bang" grenades prior to entering a room or building. This is an extreme form of distraction theory as it physically overwhelms the senses of anyone in the room. When a police tactical team or military special operators use distraction techniques for a dynamic entry

Setting aside the fact that there is a very low probability of a shooter ever assaulting any specific school let alone classroom, the tactic being described in the video, distraction followed by close-quarter combat (using physical force to overwhelm and restrain or eliminate a threat), should be examined closely. Any training provided in responding to any situation should include training on the decision-making process,



to a space occupied by an armed aggressor; they are equipped with body armor, advanced weapons systems, and have extensive practice as a team which allows them to rapidly advance and apply significant violent force to attempt to neutralize the aggressor with gunfire. Even then, aggressors are still sometimes able to kill before being stopped by gunfire.

One significant question related to the use of this form of distraction is that throwing items may not be enough to distract the gunman. While multiple items are in the air, they may or may not be in the face of the gunman who is focused on seeking a target. This focus will keep the aggressor on task, unless an object finds its way to the aggressor's eyes, at which point the instinctive response of flinching may or may not activate. In any case, the stimulus of throwing items toward the gunman will most likely not be overwhelming in an actual event because it is likely that many students will freeze or be too slow to react without extensive training and practice. The next major concern is that the distraction may not be long enough and the level of force that can be applied by lightly trained and practiced students and staff is far less than what is achieved with gunfire. While police tactical officers do sometimes subdue aggressors by other means, they receive far more training and practice

than is being afforded by current options-based active shooter training programs.

Advocates of this approach often assert that using these tactics is better than "doing nothing." They also typically utilize inaccurate and highly emotive assertions that not using this approach leaves people to die while "cowering in a corner." One response to that is the question: are we training people to do something better than nothing, or are we training people in effective decision-making under stress that will allow them to use correct and proven tactics successfully? This notion that we should focus our energies on such desperate tactics is especially disturbing when we do have other approaches available that are far less dangerous, easy to apply under stress, and which offer greater opportunities for survival. Safe Havens International has released a series of free HD training videos that outline several of these

concepts based on the heavily researched book [*Staying Alive – How to Act Fast and Survive Deadly Encounters*](#), which covers these concepts in depth.

Use of Force

Here are a few questions for the many law enforcement officers who advocate these programs: Are you training lay-people in the manner in which you were trained? Do you focus most of your training time to learn how to react to a single type of incident by using close-quarter combat techniques rather than an array of situations? Do law enforcement officers train to employ the same type of use of force to every situation they encounter? Training one way and one way only is not proper tactical training. This is not done in the U.S. military, nor is training typically done this way in law enforcement agencies in the U.S. Let us examine more closely why these questions are so important. Change the above scenario to a student entering a classroom to



Photo: Rachel Wilson,
Safe Havens International

kill himself or herself. If even one student were to throw an object at the student with a gun, what is likely to happen? How will school and police officials who provided the training defend the approach in the court of public opinion or in a court of law? A person who is attacked will likely react defensively, leading to the use of a gun. Change the scenario now to a gunman pushing a hostage into the room ahead of him or her. What is likely to result if several students rush the aggressor or throw objects at them? While active shooter incidents receive intensive media coverage, they represent only a very small fraction of school weapons incidents and fatalities. For example, suicides on campus occur eight times more often and result in twice as many deaths on school property. For more information on the data from schools, view the report [Relative Risks of Death in U.S. K-12 Schools](#) at the Safe Havens website.

Overly simplistic, one-dimensional training is counter to the way that military and law enforcement personnel are trained. Why should we expect educators with no other use of force training or experience to be able to rapidly size up and react to various situations if we focus their training on only one type of extraordinarily rare type of weapons incident? Without providing them with scenario-based training for the weapons

incidents they are much more likely to experience they will be woefully unprepared for the types of incidents that cause the majority of violent deaths in American schools.

Proper law enforcement training reinforces the tactical decision-making process by providing the officer with similar scenarios with different tactical characteristics that help the officer learn not only how to make a decision, but when to make a decision. This type of training is lacking in current “options-based” responses. Just as officers who are not run through “no shoot” scenarios are more prone to shoot when they are not supposed to, singular outcome active shooter training is likely to condition people that anyone with a gun on campus is an active shooter.

Training People to Decide

Running, hiding or engaging in close quarters combat all require tactical decision-making. Current “options-based” responses only teach the rudiments of the ‘how’ of responding to an armed threat, but provide little if any training on the ‘when’ in contrast to situations that do not involve an active shooter. This may endanger not only the person making the decision for themselves, but can expose others to increased danger.

Law enforcement trainers and all who are responsible for training

others in tactics need to assess how they are training people. They need to train for both the ‘how’ and the ‘when’ of tactics. Utilizing tactics like distraction theory may be appropriate for some specific but rare situations, as long as people are adequately trained on when to apply them and are able to practice these skills extensively.

If we are truly concerned about protecting people, we will give them all the tools they need to protect themselves, including the knowledge of when - and when not - to use them.

Stephen Satterly Jr. is a Safe Havens adjunct analyst and co-author of Staying Alive: How to Act Fast and Survive Deadly Encounters.

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