



See Something, Say Something, Do Something: The Expanded Role of Bystander Intervention in Active Shooter Response

by **Steve Crimando, Behavioral Science Applications**

WWW.EVERBRIDGE.COM



See Something, Say Something, Do Something: The Expanded Role of Bystander Intervention in Active Shooter Response

The Evolving Active Shooter Threat

Events over the past year in San Bernardino, Orlando and other locations around the U.S., as well as international incidents such as Nice, Paris and Belgium demonstrate the potential for complex and devastating attacks in crowded gathering places. Discussion of active shooter incidents has increasingly included the importance of preparing for additional weapons involvement, such as explosives, knives and other edged weapons, and even vehicles. The concept of using multiple means of attack, as well as potentially teams of attackers operating at one or more locations simultaneously, is not new. Attacks including those at the school in Beslan, the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, even Columbine High School, involved multiple attackers using a combination of shooting and bombing, and in some instances hostage taking, are categorized as “hybrid targeted violence.”ⁱ

Quickly following the Orlando shooting, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) published a guide urging jihadis to carry out more ‘lone wolf’ operations in the U.S.ⁱⁱ The guide praised the shooter and proclaimed, “First: This operation is considered to be among the most successful Lone Jihad operations, meaning that it will inspire others to wage similar operations especially because the number of those killed was too high with regard to these types of operations.”

Individuals, organizations and communities must understand and prepare for the changing nature of active shooter threat, and enhance their capabilities to respond and recover from incidents of mass violence of all types and sizes.

Understanding the Response Gap

Unlike other violent crimes, the “active” aspect of an active shooter incident inherently implies both law enforcement personnel and citizens have the potential to affect the outcome of the event based upon their responses.ⁱⁱⁱ

A 17-year-old [Boy Scout](#) in Houston came across a man crying in pain on the ground. He had inadvertently walked into an active shooter situation resulting in two deaths and six injuries. The teen, along with other bystanders, helped the victim by calling 911, creating



a tourniquet, and keeping the man calm until help arrived, all skills he learned as a Boy Scout. In an active shooter situation everyone on scene is a potential first responder.

What is known from research into active shooter incidents is that they evolve very quickly and the shooter always has the tactical advantage at the onset of the attack. In most cases, the shooter has engaged in preparation, acquisition of weapons and/or other harmful devices, has researched the target, often rehearsed the attack, and finally, at the time of their choosing, moved forward to execute the attack. The attack is usually a total surprise to everyone but the shooter. There is an old adage in police work, “action beats reaction every time.” The targeted organization or individuals are thrust into an immediate response to a high-stress, deadly force encounter with the shooter or shooters, with little time or capacity for clear thought.

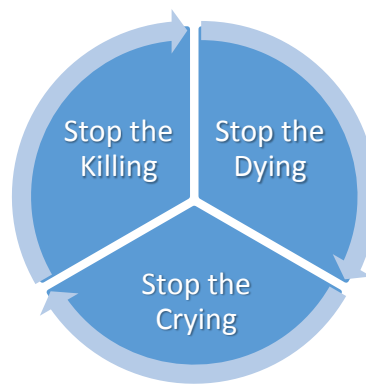
The most recent FBI report stated that in those incidents where a timeline could be ascertained, 70 percent ended in five minutes or less. The national average for police response times is 11 minutes. Many factors affect response times, including geography and jurisdictional issues. Understandably, more rural communities may have longer wait times simply due to the proximity of police when a call is made. The “response gap” is the time between when the first shot is fired and the arrival of police and other emergency responders. The dynamics of the incident change quickly when police arrive and shooter transitions from being the hunter to the hunted. Roughly half of such events end with the shooter taking their own life. In the response gap, those inside the active shooter incident are the initial first responders, and what they do or don’t do can have life and death consequences.

Expanding the Concept of Bystander Intervention

Although different organizations have coined various terminology for immediate civilian response to an active shooter ranging from “run, hide, fight” to “avoid, barricade, confront,” much of what has been shared in terms of guidance has been focused on the brief period of time between “shots fired” and “shooter down.” While this timeframe is important for surviving the attack, the immediate post-attack timeframe is also critical for surviving the physical and psychological trauma experienced in the incident. By expanding the potential for bystander intervention beyond fighting the shooter, many additional lives can be saved.

Fighting an armed attacker may seem unimaginable to most people. Research published by Peter Blair and his colleagues at the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center at Texas State University examined 83 cases, 40 of which ended before police arrived. In 16 of those 40 incidents, the shooter was stopped by bystander

intervention.^{iv} People can and do take on shooters, often with positive outcomes. Recent shooting events are causing crisis intervention trainers to reconsider the existing advice that fighting a shooter should always be the last resort. Crime scene investigation and eye witness reports from the Orlando nightclub shooting indicated many of those in a crowd of approximately 300 club-goers ran and hid as per the widely publicized guidance. Sadly, many ran and hid in restrooms where they became trapped and unable to escape the shooter who followed them into those confined spaces. It may be possible that teaching “run, hide, fight” as linear, sequential actions may limit the possibilities of fighting the shooter earlier in the attack cycle, especially if the shooter is in close quarters. It may be more effective to teach that “run,” “hide” and “fight” are independent options, and based upon the situation at hand and the judgement of those in the hot zone, “fight” may be the first and best response in certain instances.



When considering the entire attack cycle, it becomes clear there are other critical ways bystanders can help. When applying the model of “Stop the Killing, Stop the Dying, Stop the Crying,” running, hiding and fighting are all possible options for stopping the killing. But beyond stopping the killing, another critical priority is stopping the dying. Victims who experience massive trauma don’t have much time and can often bleed to death in as little as three minutes, long before police and EMS are on scene. It is also important to remember that inbound police are trained to leave the wounded and continue to move toward the sound of shots to stop the shooter. It is quite possible those injured may not receive emergency medical care for a considerable length of time. In active shooter incidents, stopping the dying means B-CON: Bleeding Control.

The pressing need to expedite medical care has resulted in new models of EMS deployment. The Joint Committee to Create a National Policy to Enhance Survivability from Intentional Mass-Casualty and Active Shooter Events was founded by the American College of Surgeons (ACS). In July 2015, the ACS recommended the implementation of the Hartford Consensus III^v. Based upon combat casualty care lessons learned in theater in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Hartford Consensus established guidelines for training and



equipping EMS to work alongside law enforcement responders in the warm zone providing "care under fire." This approach has evolved into the development of the Rescue Task Force (RTF). RTF members work with the first-arriving patrol officers to deliver immediate medical intervention for readily treatable injuries, like severe bleeding and airway compromise, which stabilizes victims for evacuation to definitive care. RTF providers do not wait for police to secure the scene while victims lay bleeding to death inside the perimeter. They respond with police into the warm zone to find victims, even as other officers search for and neutralize the suspect.

Given the harsh realities and serious injuries that can result from a shooting incident, communities and organizations across the nation have also begun to train and equip citizens in bleeding control, also referred to as "B-CON." Regular citizens can make a critical difference with the right knowledge and equipment. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently started the "Stop the Bleed" campaign as a national initiative to assist initial responders and reduce the number of casualties in violent events. Schools and businesses have begun pre-positioning B-CON supplies in "throw kits" designed to provide quick, easy access to essential bleeding control medical equipment. Bystanders are already 'first on the scene' so leveraging this human resource saves lives and reduces physical and psychological trauma.

Psychological trauma support can also be initiated by bystanders on scene. It is well established that for psychological support to be effective it needs to be both early and ongoing. Victims and survivors may be forced to remain in hiding, in lockdown, or prevented from leaving the scene until providing statements to investigators, therefore being unable to connect with their natural support systems. Envisioning the potential fear and stress within a safe room, it would be important to provide immediate stress support for anyone overwhelmed by the situation. Psychological First Aid is considered the intervention of choice in the 0-48 hours post-incident. The zero hour begins with "shot fired." There are many examples of the idea that in a crisis people will either be part of the problem or part of the solution. Helping calm and focus those who may be on the verge of losing emotional control can be important to their survival and the survival of those around them. Psychological First Aid is the recommended approach to "stopping the crying."

Action Binds Anxiety

Crisis communications expert Peter Sandman summarized the need for information and direction during a crisis with the memorable phrase, "Action binds anxiety." Giving people clear information about the nature and severity of the hazard at hand, what to do, and how to do it, is critical to facilitating an effective response to an emergency. In an active



shooter event, emergency management authorities now encourage the use of “clear text” in crisis messaging, rather than codes that may be confusing or unclear. The response curve in an active shooter incident is extremely steep. There is little time for discussion or clarification. Any information to be shared in such an emergency must be ready to launch at a moment’s notice. Templates and pre-developed crisis messages must be at the fingertips of those charged with initiating alerts and notifications. It is also important to remember few people will be able to access desk phones or computers and will be more reliant on handheld and mobile devices, so crisis communications technologies and mass notification systems must have redundant capabilities so the simultaneously blast out messages via different channels, such as SMS, voice and email.

The very best way to thwart an active shooter is to deny them their targets. Rapid, accurate communications can help get people out of harm’s way and mitigate the impact of an attack. Picking the right tools, from trauma kits to emergency notification technologies, providing the right training and equipment, and promoting the idea that all us of are potential first responder, can put individuals, organizations and communities in a much better position to survive a sudden, violent event. As with other types of hazards it is important to remember we cannot be passive observers to our own safety. After all, safety and survival are shared responsibilities and we all must be prepared to act quickly and decisively to stop the killing, stop the dying and stop the crying.

Frazzano, Tracy L., and Snyder, Mathew G. “Hybrid Targeted Violence: Challenging Conventional “Active Shooter” Response Strategies.” *Homeland Security Affairs* 10, Article 3 (February 2014). <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/253>

“Inspire guide: Orlando Operation Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), July 2016.

A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013.

Blair, John P., Nichols, T., Burns, D., and Curnutt, John R. Active Shooter Events and Response. CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, Boca Raton, FL. 2013.

See Something, Do Something: Improving Survival. American College of Surgeons Bulletin. September 2015, Vol. 100, Number 15.

[Incident with teen Boy Scout](http://abc13.com/1361533/) -- <http://abc13.com/1361533/> (should be #4 (iv) but I don’t know how to add it without messing up the endnotes.



About Everbridge

Everbridge provides a unified critical communication suite that helps clients be better prepared, make better decisions, and respond quickly and confidently during disruptive events. When an incident happens, whether it's a natural disaster or an IT service outage, we automate communications to ensure that the right messages get to the right people at the right time.

Widely recognized by analysts as the market leader, Everbridge solutions are trusted by clients in all major industries and government sectors to connect with over 50 million people around the world.

THE ONLY END-TO-END PLATFORM

- **Planning:** Everbridge is easy to set up, maintain, and organize, meaning that you're always ready for a quick, coordinated response. Everbridge ensures that the right messages get to the right people - with the most advanced opt-in portal on the market, streamlined integration with internal and external data sources, and simple group and contact management.
- **Assessment:** When trouble strikes, you need rich insight, presented simply - so you can quickly assess potential impact and make an informed decision to avoid loss. Everbridge offers the only solution on the market that meets these demanding requirements, with the most advanced interactive dashboard in the industry.
- **Response:** In critical situations, ease-of-use can mean the difference between an effective response and a mistake that carries serious consequences. Everbridge is engineered to be simple to use under pressure, with a user interface that accelerates time-to-message and reduces the likelihood of errors.
- **Delivery:** Even during large-scale disruptions, Everbridge stays on. The most advanced platform in the industry ensures that you reach your contacts - every time. And with worldwide coverage and capabilities, including globally local calling infrastructure and data storage, we're ready to support you wherever your people are in the world.

Visit www.everbridge.com to learn more.