Coming to Grips with
the Known-Known of

Active Assailant Incidents

LowersRiskGroup®

Introduction

Former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, helped shed light on quadrants of knowledge when it comes to risk management when he mentioned "unknown unknowns" (Rumsfeld, 2002). Those quadrants of knowledge (known known, known unknown, unknown known, and unknown unknown) can help organizations understand and explain the nature of risk and to prioritize their risk mitigation strategies. It is a particularly enlightening way of looking at the sad reality of active shooter incidents in the United States today. Active shooter situations have risen squarely into the quadrant of a "known known" and organizations must now treat it as such.

In 2018, active shooter incidents injured an average of 5 people per incident. Already in 2019 there have been an average of 1.2 mass shootings per day in the United States. Collectively, we no longer wonder "if" another shooting will happen, but "when and how many will be killed this time."

While everyone is looking for answers to this complicated modern scourge, there is no quick fix. Active shooter situations are unpredictable in terms of when, where and how they will play out and they are quick to evolve, making them extremely difficult to deal with. Still, organizations must come to grips with the fact that these situations no longer fall in the realm of the unknown. Disgruntled workers will continue to retaliate against employers, disturbed teenagers will persist in exacting revenge for perceived wrongs, and groups will keep settling disputes with firearms.

As a society, we can no longer plead ignorance and "hope" it doesn't happen to us. Mass shootings are now a part of everyday living in the U.S. When an active shooter situation arises in the workplace, or in an environment where we're responsible for the safety of others, we must be prepared. Employers must have reasonable measures in place to reduce the likelihood of active shooter situations in the workplace, know how to respond in the event it does occur, and understand how to deal with the aftermath.

1.2
mass shootings per day in 2019

2019:
A Sampling of Gun Violence

MIDLAND-ODESSA, TX

Eight people were killed, including the perpetrator, and twenty-five were wounded when a gunman opened fire on police and civilians after fleeing a traffic stop.

EL PASO, TX

22 people were killed and 24 were injured at a Walmart in a Hispanophobic massacre.

COLUMBIA, SC

A man opened fire on patrons at a bar, killing two and wounding two others, after being kicked out.

NORTH LAS VEGAS, NV

An after-school fight led to a shooting in a neighborhood; five teenagers were wounded.

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA

A gunman killed twelve people and injured four others at a city public works building.

SAN ANTONIO, TX

A man opened fire on his co-workers at a moving company, injuring four, after a disagreement escalated.

In this whitepaper, we lay out the case for proactively preparing your workplace for an active shooter incident and having an organizational response plan ready.

Active Shooters & Mass Shootings: On the Rise

Not all active shooter scenarios involve mass casualties, but most do. The major U.S. governmental agencies define an active shooter as "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area." So while mass shooting deaths represented less than two percent of all gun deaths in the U.S. in 2016—homicides and suicides made up the vast majority of gun deaths—they resulted in an average of 5 people killed or injured each time.

There is no broadly accepted definition for the term "mass shooting." Some data sources exclude organized crime or gang-related violence, some do not include the perpetrator in fatality figures, and others only include shootings in "public" places. In 2013, the FBI refined its criteria to define mass shootings "as a single attack in a public place in which three or more victims were killed."

Whether they occur in public venues, homes, or workplaces, the one thing mass shootings do have in common is incidents involving multiple victims of firearm-related violence. And as of August 31, 2019, there were 297 mass shootings in the U.S. in 2019 alone, resulting in 335 fatalities and another 1,219 people injured.

While government, parents, public health agencies, lobbyists, and others try to define the root causes of these incidents—from ready access to assault rifles to mental illness to video games—the sad fact of the matter is that there is no easy answer. Mass shootings are showing no signs of stopping, and we can't simply hope they will magically disappear.

Even schools have recognized this reality. In the 2015–16 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics asked schools whether they had drilled students on the use of selected emergency procedures. About 95 percent of schools had drilled students on a lockdown procedure, 92 percent had drilled students on evacuation procedures, and 76 percent had drilled students on shelter-in-place procedures.

297
mass shootings in the U.S. in 2019

Public Mass Shootings*:
A Trend with No Signs of Slowing

YEAR	KILLED	INJURED
2018	80	66
2017	117	463
2016	71	83
2015	46	43
2014	17	28
2013	31	13
2012	67	68
2011	18	21
2010	8	2

*Includes events defined as a single attack in a public place in which at least three people were killed, not including the gunman.

Source: TIME

Run, Hide, Fight:
Is it Good Enough?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is among the agencies attempting to prepare the public on how to respond in an active shooter situation. The Run, Hide, Fight approach is one such strategy. Public education materials like these are laudable, and no one would argue that we shouldn't promote them, yet they only address the health and safety of select individuals. They do not adequately address the employer's responsibility to protect their people and manage the reputation and financial well-being of their organizations.

As an employer, it's arguably not enough to prepare employees. Workplaces need to proactively mitigate risks, have deployment plans in place for use during an actual incident, and know how they will respond to employees and the public post-incident.

A Three-Pronged Approach to Dealing with Active Shooter Events

With thousands of mass shootings under our collective belts, these episodes now fall squarely within the realm of "known knowns." They are low-probability, high-impact events, and if workplaces aren't taking reasonable steps to provide a safe environment, they are going to be held responsible. Plaintiffs' lawyers are showing no qualms about pursuing legal action in these situations.

Organizations must have strategies in place to:

1 **Reduce the likelihood of a workplace shooting through comprehensive risk mitigation**

2 **Respond in the face of an active shooter scenario**

3 **Manage the aftermath**

1. Risk Mitigation

Communicate with Law Enforcement

A good first step is to introduce your organization to local law enforcement agencies. Tell them what you are trying to accomplish and ask for their feedback and recommendations at every phase, from what kinds of threats to report, to how to evacuate during an actual incident. Invite them to speak with your team and maintain an ongoing relationship with them.

Threat Assessment

Researchers and law enforcement have enough case studies under their belts to know that someone considering workplace violence will often exhibit warning signs preceding the event. In an article by the HR Daily Advisory, Jeffrey Nolan, an attorney with Dinse, Knapp & McAndrew, explains, "The research has shown the pathway to violence goes from the idea stage to the planning stage, then progresses to the perpetrator acquiring the means to do harm, and ends with the implementation stage." At each point in the process, the opportunity exists to stop and reverse the progression. While most people never leave the idea stage, according to the article, if they do, they move rapidly.

The Los Angeles Times, in conjunction with a study funded by the National Institute of Justice, has taken the research further by identifying four commonalities among the perpetrators of nearly all the mass shootings they studied. The majority of shooters had:

- **A history of early childhood trauma**
- **Experienced a crisis in the weeks leading up to the shooting**
- **Studied the actions of other shooters and sought validation for their motives**
- **Had the means for carrying out their plans**

While the average employee should not be expected to know these specific traits, they can be trained to report troubling behaviors. We can't always predict who is going to be violent, but there are some warning signs of a person in distress. They include such behaviors as inability to focus, crying, social isolation, threatening behavior, concerning posts on social media, or complaints of unfair personal treatment. A sudden change in behavioral patterns, or in the frequency or intensity of these behaviors, is also a red flag.

"At each point in the process, the opportunity exists to stop and reverse the progression."

Reporting

The value of a threat assessment is only as good as the training you provide your team to report this type of behavior when a possible threat comes to light. It should be reported to immediate supervisors and followed through to human resources, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) personnel and/or law enforcement, as the situation dictates. Reporting concerning behavior is no longer a case of being a "whistleblower," but rather taking preventative measures to protect the workplace and its people; it's a business necessity.

The challenge, of course, is educating your team to understand the delicate balance that exists between the employer's responsibilities to other employees (and third persons) and the rights of the troubled employee.

In the ideal scenario, the individual will be matched with mental health resources to work through any relevant personal issues. "How we interrupt (the cycle) is through an employee assistance program, fitness for duty evaluation, through time off, through job rotation, through coaching— there's lots of opportunities to knock people off this path," according to Steve Albrecht, a human resources consultant and trainer, in the Daily HR Advisory article.

Training Program

A comprehensive training plan will encompass everything from learning to identify and report warning signs, to sharing info about available employee support resources, to knowing what to do in an active shooter situation. Training needs to be geared to all levels and stakeholders in the organization, from employees, to volunteers, to customers, to visitors.

The Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) recommends that all employers have their employees watch the FBI's video "Run. Hide. Fight." In addition, you should arm the team with floor plans, first aid kits, emergency contact information, and other relevant resources. Floor plans with clearly marked exit routes should be displayed on every floor.

Just as you prepare employees to respond to other emergencies, such as fires or tornadoes, with practice drills, you should prepare them how to react in the event of an active shooter or other workplace violence. This may include helping them recognize what gunshots sound like, know how to evacuate the building quickly, where to hide, how to barricade themselves, how to behave when law enforcement arrives, and even how to act out against a shooter as a last resort. The more they practice, the less likely they will be to freeze in the event that the unthinkable happens.

Physical Security

Workplaces are also well-advised to adequately equip their environments with an appropriate level of physical security measures. The nature and scope of those measures will vary depending on the size, volume of daily traffic, and nature of the business. For example, while the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 94 percent of public schools controlled access to school buildings by locking or monitoring doors during school hours during the 2015-16 school year, only four percent utilized random metal detector checks in that same time period.

Physical security may include:

- **On-site Security Personnel**
- **Identity Verification (ID badges, biometric scanners)**
- **Surveillance Devices (security cameras, motion detectors, drones, undercover personnel)**
- **Detection Tools (metal detectors, sniffing dogs)**
- **Defenses (shelters-in-place, emergency exit plans, weaponry, radios)**

Background Screening

Applicant screening is already a firmly entrenched part of most organizations, particularly those whose employees work with vulnerable populations. Though background checks and red flag laws will not filter out every person with violent intent, it may weed out some. According to an annual report published by Everytown for Gun Safety, Mass Shootings in the United States, in at least one-third of mass shootings, the shooter was legally prohibited from possessing firearms at the time of the shooting.

1/3
of shooters illegally possessed firearms

2. Situation Response

Even with all the right planning and preparation in place, a workplace shooting may still happen. In addition to educating employees on how to maximize their safety in such a scenario, the business needs to have plans in place that ensure the organization's well-being.

Keeping People Safe, Minimizing Lives Lost

This goes back to the training and preparedness of your workforce, as described earlier. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security produces a variety of resources, including its Active Shooter: How to Respond guide, which gives a thorough overview on how to respond in an active shooter scenario. Everyone in your building, for example, should be well-versed on the fastest escape routes.

For people who find themselves in the third part of the "Run. Hide. Fight." strategy, the decision to fight has the potential to save dozens of lives. The quicker the shooter is neutralized, the less people who are killed or injured. This excerpt from Art of Manliness provides some sobering, yet helpful, thoughts on whether to utilize this approach.

Most civilians don't think they can take on an active shooter because, well, the shooter has a gun and they likely do not. But here's the thing: it is possible for unarmed individuals to subdue or chase away an armed shooter. Anthony Sadler, Spencer Stone, and Alek Skarlatos — the 3 friends who rushed a terrorist aboard a train to Paris — did it, saving dozens of lives. So did Frank Hall, a football coach who ran down a shooter and chased him out of a high school in Ohio before he could wreak massive carnage.

Yes, some studies have suggested that armed civilians can reduce the number of fatalities in an active shooter situation compared to situations where there were no armed civilians. But what these same studies suggest is that just having civilians — armed or not — quickly take action against a shooter can reduce the number of victims, too. So even if you don't plan on carrying a firearm yourself, commit to the idea that if you absolutely have to (and, again, we're talking last resort here), you'll attack an active shooter quickly and devastatingly.

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Security Response

Your security response should include measures such as access controls (e.g., keys, system pass codes), posted floor plans, personnel lists and contact information, crisis kits (e.g., radios, flashlights, medical supplies), and an emergency notification system.

If you have security personnel on-site, they should be well-trained on how to respond in an emergency scenario, whether that be taking down the shooter, escorting employees to safety, activating the emergency notification system, or securing the building in some other manner.

Law Enforcement & Communication During the Event

All of your key stakeholders should know how your emergency notification system works. That system may include notifying people on premise, at remote locations, law enforcement, or area hospitals. An up-to-date employee roster with emergency contact information will not only help account for all employees during and after the event, but to notify family members.

Assuming law enforcement has been notified of the event, your team should know what to expect and how to follow their guidance. For instance, your employees will likely be asked to keep their hands visible and empty or even be pushed to the ground by the police for their own safety.

3. Post-Situation Response

Workplaces affected by active shooter violence face enormous obstacles moving forward.

Even if the business is able to maintain operations in the weeks that follow, the physical and emotional recovery can take months or years. In addition to fine-tuning business continuity plans, revamping physical security, and addressing possible lawsuits, companies also have a responsibility toward their employees (and in some cases, their customers and/or vendors) who have suffered severe emotional trauma.

To recover from an active shooter event, restore business operations, and support employees, businesses need to focus on personnel matters, communication strategies, and business continuity planning.

Victim and Bystander Support

The first priority of businesses will be to communicate immediately with family members of employees and stakeholders, especially of those who were killed or wounded. Employers should make themselves available to help the victims' families. This may include providing access to grief counselors, transportation to the hospital, or offering financial assistance for medical bills.

Employees may not show immediate signs of trauma, as negative emotions make take months to surface. "Depression and PTSD are rarely going to emerge in the first hour. Your body is still in shock," says Larry Barton, a crisis management consultant. As a result, the availability of EAP resources becomes even more critical. They are confidential and provide counseling, assessments, and referrals to workers who are struggling with personal or work-related difficulties arising from the event.

Community Response & Support

Companies that are proactive in creating crisis communications in advance of an actual crisis will be one step ahead of the game. These can be prewritten messages that refer to specific types of event types, such as an active shooter or an onsite fire. They can be quickly modified and sent out to the media and the public after the incident. Ideally, they should address the range of questions that might arise (e.g., number of casualties, types of security measures in place, nature of the incident). In addition, the business should network with area providers to offer grief counseling, community support (e.g., financial, food), fundraisers, memorial services, or any other post-incident support that will aid grieving families.

These efforts will also serve to preserve the reputation of the organization, while keeping the broader community informed. In some cases, interest will be so great that companies set up a special website with the latest available information about the incident. And, while social media is an effective way for communicating with the public, it should never be used to notify victims' families.

Continuity Plans

In the aftermath of a violent event, the work site may be closed for hours, days, or weeks as law enforcement assesses the scene and the circumstances surrounding the shooting. Employers should have continuity plans in place to cover such needs as payroll, operations, and distribution. It's also advisable to have an offsite location in mind for continued operations should the business be closed for an extended period, as well as consider business interruption insurance.
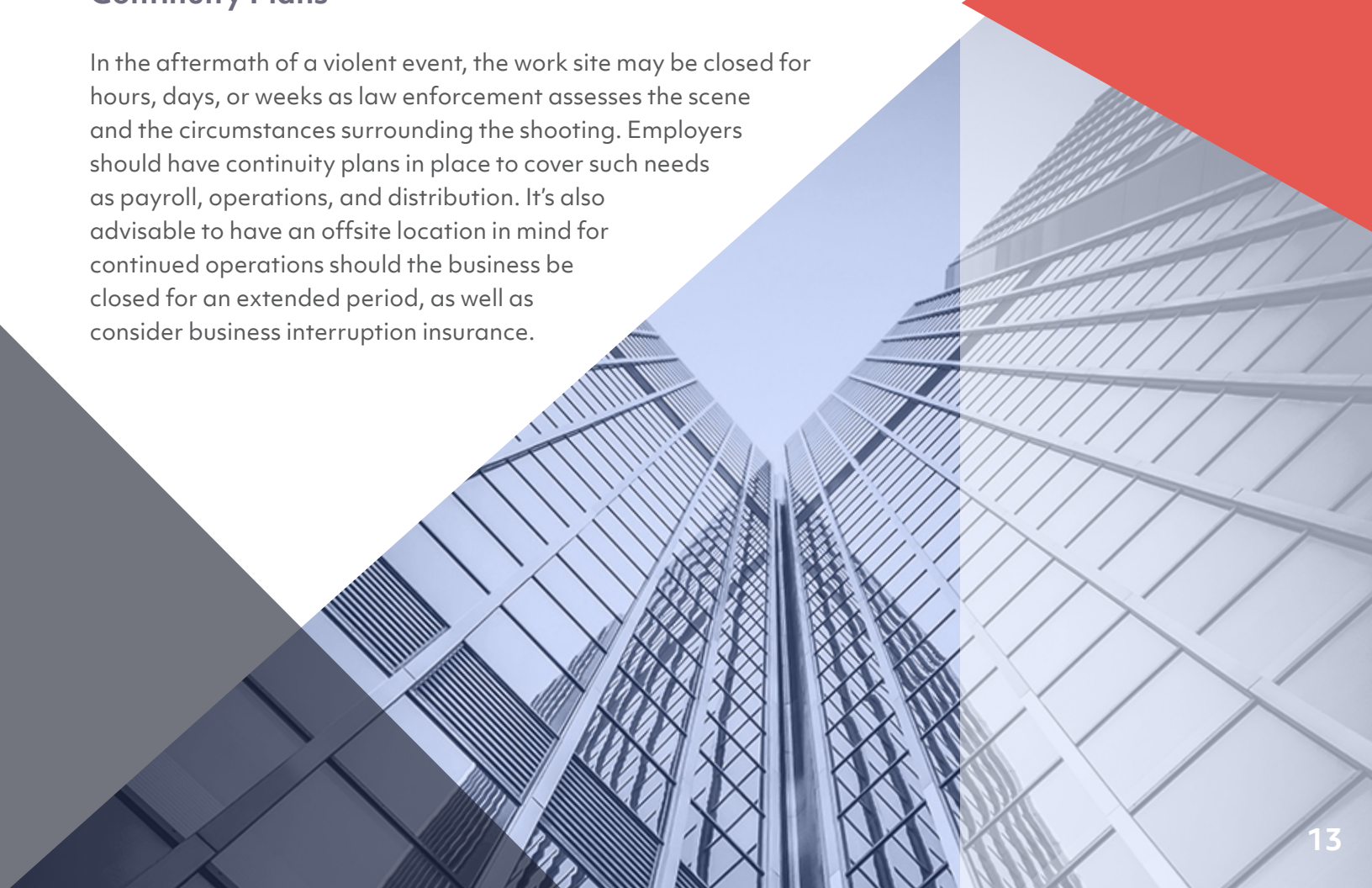
Staying Ahead of the Curve

As a society and as employers, we can no longer afford to bury our heads in the sand when it comes to mass shootings and workplace violence. These events are now a part of our everyday lives in the U.S. Should an active shooter choose to enact revenge in or near our workplace, we become responsible for the safety of others.

With so much at stake, business leaders must take proactive steps to plan for, react to, and recover from active shooter scenarios.

LowersRiskGroup has the resources to help you make the case for such plans and implement measures to protect your team, your investment, and your business. Please contact us to schedule an initial consultation.

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