



Active Shooters on Campus: Plans, Products, and Prevention

As active-shooter situations have spread to college and university campuses over the last decade, administrators in higher education have established policies and protocol to protect students and faculty members during actual active-shooter events. College and university administrators should ensure that a practical safety plan is in place to address this situation if it were to occur but also practice this plan regularly.

Crafting the Plan: Ensuring Safety

Even with the most exhaustive planning efforts, an active shooter plan will not protect each individual on campus. The purpose of the plan is to minimize casualties. With these thoughts in mind, college and university administrators must face difficult questions.

1. Who will be part of the safety planning committee?

Administrators must provide the building block of the committee. Knowledge from faculty and personnel is also beneficial because these individuals know interior and exterior areas of the campus better than most.

2. What are the roles of administrators and personnel?

Each administrator should have intimate knowledge of the plan. Faculty and personnel should have enough information to protect themselves and students. Since there have been cases of faculty on faculty shootings, some details of the safety plan should be reserved for administrators and safety plan committee members only.

3. What should we include in the safety plan?

Each plan should contain detailed maps of the college or university with room numbers, if applicable. This information should also be shared with local emergency responders, including campus police and security. Procedures for locking down classrooms and lecture halls are

crucial. Students, faculty, and personnel should also be advised as to how the administration will maintain communication in the event of an active shooting.

4. How will the campus be “locked down”?

Since college and university campuses are typically large, this poses an immediate concern. However, students and personnel should be advised of their roles during an actual event. Students or personnel who choose to leave a building are making themselves physically vulnerable within a large area outside of the structure.

Conducting Active Shooter Drills: Ensuring Preparedness

Indisputably, the most problematic issue facing college and university administrators is the execution of drills for the safety plan. Students and faculty members are not on campus at the same time; therefore, drills must be spaced at different time intervals. If drills are not conducted on campus, there is no meaningful reason to craft an active shooter safety plan. Furthermore, all personnel and students will have no procedures to follow which will lead to more casualties and pandemonium.

Precisely how drills are to be conducted will be left to the administration and those chosen for the planning committee. Campus-wide messaging services are an excellent way to communicate information to students and personnel. In order to prevent chaos, the message will need to indicate that the activity is indeed a drill. As faculty members and students gain an understanding of their safest locations to shelter in place, the impulse to move into action during an act of violence will become instinctual.

Through the planning and implementation process, an important factor is establishing rapport with emergency personnel in the area. In fact, many of these individuals wish to be included in the planning stage of an active shooter safety plan. When the plan is complete, each emergency agency should have a copy on file in the event of an actual emergency. When drills are scheduled, it is imperative to notify first responders. This is to ensure that no false alarms are raised during the drill.

Enacting the Plan: Cost

Many colleges and universities have original fixtures, such as classroom doors. Replacing all classroom doors with those that can be locked

from inside the classroom is a much-needed repair for older colleges and universities. Furthermore, all classroom doors should have relatively small wire glass windows, which can easily be covered to prevent being seen by an active shooter.

Emergency buzzers in classrooms and lecture halls are also a wise investment; however, the location should only be known to faculty and personnel in an effort to avoid false alarms. Lastly, ensuring that your campus police force and security officers are fully staffed and trained in handling active shooter situations is vital.

After the Plan: Next Steps

Unfortunately, active shooter safety plans tend to be created, printed, placed in a binder, and filed away into oblivion. The safety plan, however, should be a living document. As we learn from future acts of violence on campuses, all safety plans should be updated immediately. Accordingly, new recommendations may also result from further knowledge gained.

After updating the safety plan, items pertinent to faculty, personnel, or students should be disseminated. Drills should also be performed when significant changes are made to the active shooter



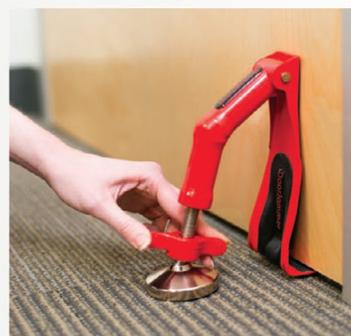
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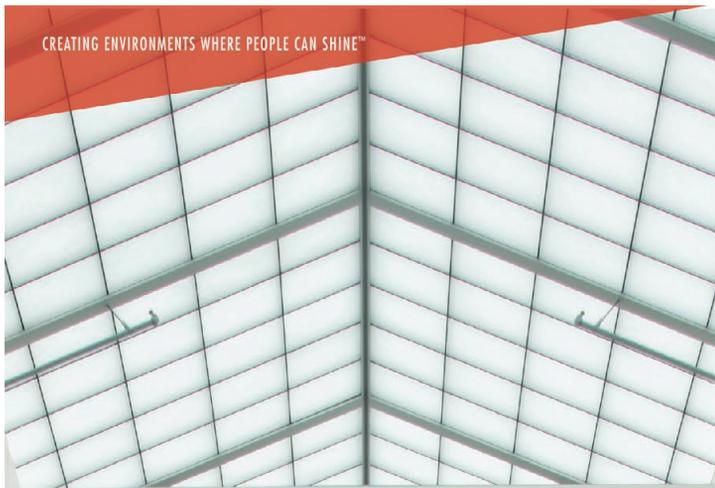
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safety plan. Drills, as a whole, should be evaluated to determine perceived weaknesses and failures with protocol originally implemented in the initial safety plan. This allows for immediate changes to the safety plan and hopefully a decrease in the amount of casualties during an active shooter emergency.

Constructing "Safe Rooms"

New products have been invented which afford private colleges and universities the ability to construct classrooms that are effectively "safe rooms" by using fiberglass panels that provide security against bullets fired from outside of the classrooms.

Safety companies have created additional bullet-resistant material for items such as reception desks at the front of buildings, whiteboards at the front of classrooms and lecture halls, as well as classroom doors.

Companies are also now developing desks and tables for students to safely hide under. This provides an additional layer of protection in university classrooms and laboratories. Additional classroom furniture, such as armored podiums, have also been developed to potentially protect faculty members during an active shooter event.

Little Time to React

During active shooter situations, students are often found in the crosshairs with little time to react to the unfolding event. Students are often unable to evacuate the building where the shooting is taking place and must resort to finding an area within their environment to shelter in place.

Bulletproof backpacks are being manufactured to add an extra layer of safety for students. Similar to a bulletproof vest worn by law enforcement officers, bulletproof backpacks can prevent students from being hit by gunfire while running away from the shooter.

Additionally, once students have sheltered in-place, bulletproof backpacks can be used to protect students' chests and heads. These backpacks are relatively light in weight and do not weigh much more than standard backpacks. As a parent, I must weigh the cost of a bulletproof backpack, considering it to potentially save the life of my child.

Parents would have to deal with choosing how devastatingly difficult it would be to "add item to cart" in the first place versus their child not being protected in the event of an emergency situation while at school. It is an awful decision to consider.

Securing Doors and Offices

Many active shooter safety products have focused on securing classroom and office doors. Devices can be placed at the base of doors to prevent an active shooter from gaining access to other rooms.

Another device has been created to be placed at the top of door hinges to prevent doors from being opened. These options are readily available for purchase online and are relatively inexpensive. There are also magnets made specifically to be placed over a door's lock. The purpose of these magnets is to keep the door locked at all times, but prevent the door from completely closing so that students may come and go on normal school days.

If there is a lockdown or the door needs to be secured, the magnetic strip can be removed and the door will fully close. This saves valuable time as faculty and staff do not have to search for keys to successfully lock a classroom door in time.

Planning Matched with Products

While products are clearly needed to assist in protecting all stakeholders from active shooter events, the need still exists for colleges and universities to develop campus security plans. The latest school

safety product inventions have a place in helping to protect faculty, staff, and students from active shooter events but must be coupled with an effective campus safety plan.

Campus administrators, faculty, staff, and students also need to be well-trained in how to operate many of these latest innovations. Publishing these plans and making sure that faculty and students are aware of these plans, as well as appropriate evacuation routes, in the event of an active shooter emergency should become common protocol in the upcoming school year.

Informing students and their parents of what your school is doing to enhance school safety measures may be an added benefit because they will know that this topic is being taken seriously and that proper precautions are in place.

Are Armed Students Safer?

Statistical evidence from the United States Department of Justice suggests that allowing students to arm themselves on university premises may not improve students' safety. In fact, the Justice Department stated that ninety-three percent of violent crimes that involved college students occurred off campus. Students are more likely to be victims of violent crime in their off-campus residences or going grocery shopping than while attending class.

When this call began in 2016, some college professors were apprehensive concerning the possible changes to concealed carry laws on college campuses. A dean at the University of Texas-Austin had resigned because he did not agree that individuals should have the ability to carry firearms on campus. Academic freedom could also be stifled under this new legislation.

Professors have stated that they have been asked to modify their curriculum by university administrators: examples of these modifications include removing topics from various courses, in addition to avoiding some talking points altogether because they could incite anger and rigorous debate among students—students who will now be able to carry firearms on campus.

Campus Carry Policies

The issue of campus carry policies may open the door for potential active shooter situations. Since individuals are now allowed to carry firearms under these guidelines, people who wish to inflict harm to students and staff at colleges and universities could potentially go unnoticed. In essence, it would be difficult to distinguish a potential active shooter from the general population.

This would put additional pressure on law enforcement officers who would be trying to neutralize a dangerous situation. In addition, students who are bystanders during an active shooting could intensify any hostile situation by approaching the shooter, if there are no restrictions as to who may possess firearms on campus.

Even if well-intended individuals are armed, there is no guarantee that students and faculty members would be able to neutralize an active shooter in the event of an actual emergency. Authorizing the possession of firearms within campus buildings does not increase the likelihood that students and faculty members will have additional protection in the event of an active shooter situation.

There would likely be an increase in the number of casualties among staff members and students if an active-shooter situation did occur on the campuses of colleges and universities where students are allowed to carry firearms.

Best Practices and Lockdown Drills

There is no question that active-shooter events are a genuine threat to faculty and students in our nation's colleges and universities. However, lockdown drills and accepted best practices should be used when generating active shooter safety plans. In addition to lockdown drills, best practices for colleges and universities include the use of required identification cards for faculty and students, adding closed-circuit security cameras, and installing panic buttons in classrooms and lecture halls.

As a society, it is important that higher institutions of learning remain free from restrictions of academic freedom. If armed individuals were allowed into college classrooms, students and professors may be less likely to engage in educational conversations that are intended to create intense debates among the students in each classroom.

As active shootings on campuses are relatively sparse, it would appear that campus carry policies would only serve to curtail academic freedoms, as well as to potentially create the precise hazardous conditions that the law intends to prevent.



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