

## Defensive Strategies



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An active shooter is a situation where a shooting is in progress. It differs from a mass murder, which may require a specific minimum of victims and which will be completed before anyone knows it happened. Mass murders, like ordinary murders, are investigated long after they occur. An active shooter situation is an immediate, ongoing circumstance, where both police and others may have a chance to intervene and make the shooter stop before s/he would have stopped on his/her own.

The FBI keeps lots of documentation on these events. They published an excellent report, "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013." Google that title to see the whole—less than 50-pages—eminently readable report, including short descriptions of each and every incident.

There were 160 active shooter incidents during that 14 year period. They are becoming much more frequent. In the first seven

## Surprises and Lessons from Active Shooters

years there was an average of a bit over six per year; in the final seven years, an average of over 16 active shooters per year.

Not only are these incidents occurring more often, the casualties (killed plus wounded) in each incident are also going up. In the first seven years, there were 35 casualties per incident; in the ending seven years, casualties tripled, to 113.

So, it is not just the press making a big fuss over these incidents. They really are becoming much more frequent, with much higher body counts.

Think all active shooters are male, acting alone? Think again. In 6 of the 160 incidents, the shooters were female, and two incidents involved two shooters. Lone male is by far the typical shooter, but not the only one.

How big a part does domestic violence play in these shootings? In at least nine incidents, the shooter first shot and killed one or more family members in a residence before moving to a public location to continue shooting. In several other incidents, the shooter's relationship with one of the victims might be central to what set the rampage off.

Where are these incidents most likely to happen? Schools might come to mind first, but they are a distant second to commercial spaces. Nearly 50% (precisely, 45.6%) of the incidents were in

commercial locations (most in the kinds of businesses that have pedestrian traffic, fewer in businesses that don't have pedestrian traffic, very few in malls). Most of the commercial space incidents ended when the shooter committed suicide before the police arrived, after the police arrived, or at another location they fled to; the remaining shooters mostly were killed or apprehended by police; only three involved unarmed citizens restraining the shooter before police arrived.

How about schools? Here we mean pre-K through college and related things like school board meetings and administration functions. The 39 education incidents were 25% of the total; half as frequent as commercial sites, but they had some unusual characteristics. Two of the six female shooters were in schools. Several of the highest body count incidents occurred here including Virginia Polytech and Newtown. No law enforcement personnel were killed in any school-related incident. In almost all of the Middle School and High School incidents, the shooter was a student at the school.

In 10 school-related incidents, unarmed bystanders were able to control the situation before police arrived. These were where a middle- or high-school student was the shooter and a teacher, coach, principal or other unarmed school

official was able to take charge and successfully intervene.

Lesson: It is certainly possible for some unarmed civilians to stop active shooters, if the shooters are school kids. That technique is not likely to work so well with older shooters in other locations.

FBI's introduction acknowledges that, "the active aspect inherently implies that both law enforcement personnel and citizens have the potential to affect the outcome of the event based on their responses." What role have citizens actually played, outside the school environment?

What about armed private citizens? Have they ever stopped one of these shootings? Yes. Absolutely, yes. Quoting from the report's conclusion, "In 6 (of the 160 incidents), armed off-duty police officers, citizens, and security guards risked their lives to successfully end the threat. These actions likely saved the lives of ... others present."

Let's take that apart. In some places, police are automatically entitled to carry concealed when off-duty, in other places, they are not, and if they want to carry off-duty they must go through the procedure to obtain the same kind of license to carry that non-police can get.

Thus Kenneth Hammond, the off-duty police officer who helped stop the Utah Mall shooting has never been called a private citizen, so I assume that in Utah all police can carry off-duty.

Security guards are an ambiguous situation. They might be police moonlighting, using the authority of their law enforcement job to carry a gun, or they might be private citizens who have obtained a license to carry (LTC) as

well as a paying job where they can go armed. Let's look at the FBI's description of an incident of this type:

"On December 9, 2007, at 12:29 a.m., Matthew John Murray, 24, armed with a rifle, two handguns, and smoke bombs, entered the Youth with a Mission Training Center in Arvada, Colorado, and began shooting. Two people were killed; two were wounded. He then walked seven miles overnight to the New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and began shooting again. The shooter had been expelled from the training center three years prior to the incident. Two additional people were killed there; three more were wounded. The shooter committed suicide after being shot by church security. A total of four people were killed; five were wounded."

Looking deeper, it is easy to learn that the "church security" person who ended this 9-victim rampage was Jeanne Assam, a woman who was a former police officer. I don't know of any jurisdictions where former police are automatically allowed to carry, so she must have had a license to carry, not a badge, to make her carry legal.

Here's another incident:

"On May 25, 2008, at 2:25 a.m., Ernesto Villagomez, 30, armed with a handgun, began firing inside Player's Bar and Grill in Winnemucca, Nevada. Two people were killed; two were wounded. The shooter was killed by a citizen with a valid firearm permit before police arrived."

Again, looking deeper, it seems that citizen was also a Marine. Last I knew, the Marines did not allow active, on-duty personnel

to go into a bar and grill with a loaded, concealed handgun. Only a LTC could have given him the authority to carry in that situation. Thank goodness he had the permit and the gun and the training to stop that shooter.

Final lesson: The chances of encountering an active shooter are vanishingly small, but if you ever do, the best response is a trained and armed one. Don't just carry; get the training you need to be certain of your ability to deal with an active shooter.

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