

Active Shooter: Preparing for and Responding to a Growing Threat

Chapter 6

Internal and External Communications

Systems and Platforms

From a very young age each person experiences the importance of communications. Teachers when asking students what their opinion would be on the topic of the day desire only complete thoughts. Attorneys hope to present a persuasive argument for their client before the jury and judge. Lecturers through their communications skills want the audience to embrace their theories and points of view. However, during emergencies situations communications isn't designed to solicit debatable dialogue or presented under a need-to-know basis, but one of action.

Unless a recent news broadcast peaks the individual's attention or the individual is traveling away from home, the security and safety of these people rests with the business solely in their view. Tourists traveling to exotic locations just want to have fun and do not want to be dissuaded from their vacation by entertaining the notion of an emergency event ruining their trip. Practicing life-boat drills on luxury liners is a requirement on every ship that sails the high seas. However, asking a hotel guest, who has just arrived after two business meetings and a four-hour plane flight, to participate in a fire drill will not be tolerated. Thus, the emergency practices and procedures fall squarely on the shoulders of the business and its employees. Employees on the other hand are working on a business deadline or performing exceptional customer services skills on each potential customer do not routinely deliberate on emergencies or consequences of their actions or inactions. So how do the employees and each guest under the care of the business react to the emergency? The answer is by communicating the appropriate message, under the right format, over a recognizable platform, in all areas of the property, and to all people regardless of their age, disabilities or station of life. Let's ask another question to set the stage of this chapter, during an emergency situation when you are with your loving spouse and two exceptional small children, and their lives potentially rest with that message, what message would you like to receive?

People are generally reactionary to a threat and the compelling need of the individual to eliminate and remove themselves from personal injury is their primary driving force, once the threat is known. Unfortunately, people do not heed warnings and signs that there is a problem, nor do they approach the threat at the same level of urgency as implied by the message. When a fire alarm sounds people do not immediately evacuate because they are accustomed to a supporting message, such as "We are investigating the cause of the alarm and will advise as soon as possible". People will wait and continue their normal course of business until a clarifying message is received. A second internal qualifier that people encounter is a false alarm. Because this event happens so frequently it nullifies immediate emergency reactions by people to expend any effort other than waiting and anticipating an all clear message. These internal actions are counterintuitive to what the sender expects.

Looking at the active shooter emergency from an alarm notification process, such as a fire alarm or a tornado siren, there is no nationally recognized alarm or siren for an active shooting. If there was a national alarm or siren for an active shooter would people know what it meant or the location of the active shooting? A fire alarm provides a visual and audio alarm to all individuals within the area of concern, regardless of their country of origin, age or disability. However, please remember there are people with disabilities who will not understand the message or problem, be able to reaction physically

or mentally to the alarm, or acknowledge that they received the fire alarm warning. The same challenges are also true of tornado sirens or any outdoor warning system that essentially expect people to take shelter indoors because it is not safe outside.

During an active shooting emergency there is no platform tantamount to a false alarm that is being investigated and resolved. Prematurely or inappropriately communicating an active shooting is only possible in a message form and not by a siren or pull alarm. Thus, any communication platform warning, beyond the immediate impacted area or department, rests on the shoulders of the message sender.

Platforms of Communication

When considering platforms of communication during an active shooting emergency businesses contemplate what is available at the time of the crisis, if they have not seriously diagrammed and planned a solution. The person in charge may routinely turn to the public address (PA) system without considering other alternatives. This action is quite common and at the same time the individual believes that have fulfilled their duty without rendering an opinion on the choices effectiveness in reaching potential victims in this time sensitive emergency. The dynamics change when the manager realizes the company does not have a PA and placing a call to 911 will not raise the consciousness of those potential victims in the active shooter sights.

Each business realizes that the world consists of choices based on needs, abilities and budgets, thus one platform of communication will not reach the entire intended or affected audience. The implication of one system places limitations on effective communications. Unfortunately, many businesses have not invested in a PA system or any system as the main communication platform. Even if a property uses a PA system will that system reach to all areas, departments, exterior buildings, tenant spaces, rooms and parking areas of the business? Active shootings have occurred in almost every area listed above, thus the method of communicating to potential victims in these areas should translate into an action item for the business. Further, the platform must imagine how each person on property will receive the communications, where the person is on property, recipient have the ability to understand the message and appreciate the urgency of the message.

Below is a list of potential options for a communications platform. There is no perfect system as each business is unique in marketing offerings, size, operational design and configuration. Think of the solution from this perspective, “what system or platform should the company use if you are located in one end of the building, your spouse is located on the third floor with a group of foreign visitors and your two infant children are located in the nursery on the first floor?” The following methods of communications may be available at the business.

- Fire Alarm - pulled or initiated whenever a fire emergency occurs or when a full evacuation is required. Fire alarm will also provide both an audible sound and visual notification.
- Public Address Announcement (PA) - specific directions or information can be issued to all individuals on property. Each situation will require specific directions and can consist of its own unique pre-scripted message.
- Emergency Text Alert - A Short Message Service (SMS) text message utilized when specific directions or information must be issued to only registered recipients. Individuals must subscribe to this system, so only subscribers will receive the alerts and messages. It may be utilized in conjunction with an alarm or PA announcement
- Mass notification systems – mass notification across multiple platforms and in multiple languages

- Cell phones
- Tablets and laptop computers
- Social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace)
- Online conferencing programs, such as Skype
- Two-way cell phones and text messaging
- Walkie talkies or business handheld radios
- Private warning subscription providers
- PBX phone tree patterned and call-down system
- Nationalization or local news coverage
- Visual images and information monitors to use text for hearing impaired
- GPS for alert and notification
- Teleprompter or closed caption on monitors
- Hardline telephones
- Television – hotel/resort home channel or property television network

Once the solution has been selected for the business now consider the individuals on property with a disability. These individuals may have limitations that interfere with the receipt of and response to information and will need information provided via methods they can understand and use. They may not be able to hear verbal announcements, see directional signs, or understand how to get assistance due to hearing, vision, speech, cognitive, or intellectual limitations, and/or limited English proficiency. Thus, in your solution consider providing information in alternate formats (e.g. Braille, audio recording, large font, text messages, e-mails, multiple languages, etc.) in order to fulfill the needs of disabled employees and guests.

Social media

Five years ago, if someone suggested or even hinted that social media would transform into a vibrant and innovative communication platform, people would have laughed. It was inconceivable and farfetched to rely on social media during times of emergencies. First responding agencies and federal partners believed the system was unreliable, the information could not be trusted and problematic, and the source of the messages was self-serving. However, today social media has reshaped the communication environment like nothing has ever done before. If a person hiding out in a dark office with the lights out and furniture blocking the door cannot keep dialing 911 over and over again, they soon turn to social media for help, reassurance and information. The social media may provide information on news reports, timely pictures of emergency which may offer some comfort if determined on the other side of the business. Social media may provide contact with loved ones who can provide information, intelligence, guidance, and a perspective of the problem from someone not in darkness.

Naturally, social media is not the primary or secondary communications platform for a business or an emergency response, but it does provide information and intelligence. First responders are actively engaging in social media platforms and even exploring systems to be able to locate where individuals are hiding out in the active shooter emergency. The problem with social media is the same with the hundreds of telephone calls that are received by 911 and PBX operators. Each entity painstakingly must filter through these calls to concentrate on people trapped in the life-threatening emergency, rather than those individuals who have safely escaped the danger and want to hear a familiar soothing voice. The process takes time and time is at a premium for first responders who are charged with neutralizing the threat.

Now add into the communication solution these questions:

- What method of communication is designated for Areas of Refuge or Assistance? These areas are designed for individuals with disabilities or limitations or an area where they may receive assistance from first responders. Areas of Refuge or Assistance are generally located emergency stairwells and are large enough to receive wheelchairs. Check to see if the business has any communications platforms in this area.
- Did the method of communication take into consideration primary and secondary platforms as one system may be overloaded or malfunction?
- Did the method(s) of communication consider what happens when the power goes out?

The ideal time to construct a solid communications platform is prior to any emergency and under all threat conditions, not just active shooting. Walking the property, testing the communications systems, soliciting the aid of employee, tenants and contractors to help in the process will ingrain in each group that the business is a well-organized and well-disciplined organization that places the safety and security as a high priority.

Alarm, Employee Notification, Verbal Warning or Observation

A business may be confronted by incidents and events daily or weekly that may pose a potentially serious threat to the business. Protocol and procedure direct the business staff to investigate the incident or event to prevent an emergency evacuation alarm or warning message to be prematurely activated. However, due to the nature, seriousness, magnitude and type of threat, such as an active shooting emergency, a business cannot assume the business will be the first notification source guests and employees receive, and the business will not investigate the source of the problem as would be expected in fires and leaks. For many guests and employees on property the first indication the business is experiencing an emergency is when:

- An Audible Alarm (internal to business or external) sounds
- A Verbal warning over Public Address System is broadcast
- Verbal warning from an employee, guest or emergency first responder is issued
- Personal Observations of the threat

In the business's emergency communication planning process once the types of notifications have been identified then the active shooter plan should be activated. A second consideration is if the business uses the same notification alarms and sound for more than one type of emergency. The following points should be considered in the planning, training and education process for employees and the business to consider during emergency situations:

- A fire alarm may be the only source of emergency notification system the business utilizes. Additional notification methods should be considered to ensure all guests, employees or visitors are duly warned of the threat.
- The business may use the fire alarm system as an emergency evacuation system for all or several different types of emergencies and threats.
- Guests may not understand, without an additional verbal warning message, that the fire alarm is being used by the business for more than one type of emergency and threat.
- An audible fire alarm system without strobe lights will not accommodate the needs of deaf guests and employees.

- A verbal warning message over the public address system will not accommodate the needs of deaf guests and employees.
- Employees and contractors working in the business are responsible for communicating the verbal warning from a guest or emergency first responder and personal observations of the threat according to the business policies and procedures.
- Each employee and contractor working in the business should be instructed and trained in the proper protocol for crisis communications.
- Employees and contractors working in the business are responsible for knowing the type of alarm sounds available in the building so they may be communicated to the guest, visitor and new employees.
- All business and employee emergency plans should include all community warning alarm sounds to avoid confusion and properly inform employees and guests of the purpose of the warning alarm sound.

Messages during an Active Shooting

As a society we expect communications to stabilize the challenges of the active shooting, support personal issues and needs, direct relief efforts, remove anxiety, and demonstrate leadership in a chaotic environment. Each individual hopes they will not be forgotten or minimized as insignificant during and after the shooting. Those individuals swept up in an active shooting will undoubtedly hope for reassuring words, timely direction and professionalism from the business under each aspect of this brutal emergency.

The issue of broadcasting a message during an active shooting isn't always simple. Businesses or even buildings that contain several businesses do not always have a common communication platform. Secondly, there may not be sufficient time to warn anyone inside the building because it is a fast moving emergency or the business is not a large facility and each employee or guests are engulfed in every terrorizing sound. Lastly, even if there is time the business may not know the proper concise warning message that would not be a catalyst for panic and hysteria. This is not always the case that panic will be the direct result of a message as long as the author of the message provides a clear, concise, accurate and informative message. Panic and hysteria will not resolve the emergency, nor will these unproductive actions allow the potential victim to focus on their options. Ineffective emotions that dominate actions are counterintuitive. We have already seen that people want information, demand details, options and timeframes to operate within.

During the shooting what message should be sent over the communication platform?

Unlike a fire that an employee or guest can pull the alarm from almost any location and on each floor, there is no identifiable alarm or siren that can be transmitted to sound the emergency. Active shooters according in the "Active Shooter Events from 2000 to 2012" by J. Pete Blair, Ph.D., M. Hunter Martaindale, M.S. and Terry Nichols, M.S. in 93% of the event will use a gun to dispense death to the innocent victims. The weapons used include a pistol 59%, shotgun 8% and a rifle 26% of the time. The first sound victims and witnesses may hear will be a gunshot, which may or may not be discerned as a gunshot. Some witnesses report the



gunshot sounded like a pop pop pop, not a bang bang bang, while others believe the noise was a car backfiring. In either case unless the witness saw the shooting, they need further confirmation of the emergency. The sight of people running and some wounded prompt the witness to communicate a message. Back to the above question, how would you answer?

- An active shooting is a very violent, shocking and harsh event, but also one that ends, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation report on September 16, 2013 titled, "A study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013", approximately 56.3% of the time the active shooting ends before law enforcement arrive. This means in a great number of active shootings the business or witnesses never had an opportunity to deliver any message other than to those potential victims being warned by people running and yelling or according to that same report, 13% of the time the shooter was stopped by the victims.
- Let's say the security control room receives a call from an employee providing details of the active shooting, the security control room issues what message? Same question just a different source.
- The health care industry uses a "Code Silver" to warn the occupants of the building that an active shooting is occurring. The code alerts employees there is an active shooter, but it does not necessarily help patients, visitors of patients or visiting medical teams or therapists of the direction of the threat, nature of the threat or even on which floor, wing or building the active shooting is occurring.
- Many schools across the nation train and use a lockdown process. A sample message may be, "This is an emergency, go to lockdown. This is not a drill". There are two schools of thought on a school lockdown procedure. First, a lockdown of students is an appropriate measure for elementary students who are too small to run or fight. This also establishes a barrier between the shooter and potential targets. Second, if the teacher and students can safely evacuate the school because of the distance between the shooter and students, then get away, don't wait to become a statistic.
- Some business may decide to deliver a message such as, "Shelter-in-place we have an active shooter". There is a difference between a lockdown and shelter in place. Shelter-in-place as defined by FEMA, <http://www.fema.gov/faq-details/When-to-prepare-for-shelter-in-place-1370032119700>, stated, "Emergency officials would likely advise individuals to shelter-in-place when the chemical is expected to dissipate in a short time period, there is not time to evacuate...." Shelter-in-place is not the appropriate description for an active shooter emergency. People may get the wrong impression.
- Some businesses may decide to deliver a message such as, "We have an active shooter on property, hide out, now". Since active shooters use more than guns, such as knives, axes, scalpels, hammers and swords, an active shooter does not describe the formidable threat. Secondly, legal departments are debating both sides of the argument when a business tells a customer or employee to hide, when they have a clear chance of safely evacuating, but the person obeys and decides to hide, then becomes a casualty. A business safeguards individuals and directs these individuals according to their facility wide information sources presumably

away from the threat. However, when the victim solely bases his/her decision on the business to protect them are they liable?

- Consider this message, “Attention, attention, this is not a drill. There is a man with a gun, wearing a red shirt, shooting at people on the first floor of the main lobby. Take appropriate actions to protect yourself”. This short emergency message provided seven different important points for any potential victims to consider.
- The last point to consider is to develop your own message now with an advisory committee, otherwise whatever message that is delivered or not across all corners of the business will be left in the hands of the person sitting in front of the communications platform.
- What would your message be? Discuss among the group and write one now.

Pre-scripted Message

Many people will debate whether or not an active shooter message can be pre-scripted. One side indicates there are too many variable and unknown facts that cannot possibly be identified to validate the message. The other side indicates an accurate and timely message that is designed to help preserve life can be broadcast to aid individuals and can be pre-scripted now. A second undeniable debate centers on the fact that if there is not a pre-scripted message that can be relied upon, then whatever message is broadcast over the entire communications platform means that it was abruptly scripted at that very moment in time. Right or wrong, good or bad the business’s first authoritarian and constructive communicative guidance message, when facing an active shooter emergency, is then left to chance, luck or experience? Which one applies?

The active shooter message is not a standard message that conforms to all threats, disasters, crises, or emergencies. As we will discuss shortly there are different types of options for consideration and different locations employees and guests may be caught in during the active shooter emergency. The initial message and update messages broadcast in an active shooter crisis is quite different than in natural disaster or natural gas line rupture. If the author places himself or herself in the preverbal shoes of the individual engulfed in the emergency, then an instructional and poignant message may be the byproduct of this exercise.

If there is time the business must decide what protective action(s) or options are appropriate the business desires the employees and guests to take before an active shooter message is issued and then put that guidance and options into the message. The recommended protective action(s) or options must be fully identified and described in the message, and broadcast over all communications methods, formats and platforms. The message content may consider what specific areas are at risk and where safe areas are located or what choices are available to all individuals in the emergency.

If the business chooses to pre-script messages in different platforms, methods and formats for employees and guests with limited English and persons with a disability, it is advisable to develop messages ahead of time. A preapproved messages or a series of messages, based on the nature of the threat, can be developed, approved by management, prepositioned on all methods of communication platforms and tested during training exercises. The best time to prepare a clear concise message that is accessible to all categories of employees and guests is well ahead of the emergency.

The active shooter message and updated messages may be a lifeline to the safety of each employee and guest. Each message can be customized for each group and person with a disability category thereby increasing the ability of these individuals to plan and survive in the event of an emergency. Considerations should be afforded to the various pre-scripted messages and updated messages as part of every emergency plan, as well as incorporated in false alarms, test messages and training exercises.

Content of Warning Messages

Regardless, if the message is pre-scripted or developed at the time of the emergency, the warning message should tell individuals the basics of what, where, when, how and why of the active shooting and identify options for people to avoid harm. The message should be specific, clear, concise, accurate, consistent and timely. The active shooter warning message and follow up messages should contain the following aspects:

- **What are the options and guidance?**
 - During any emergency people want to understand their options and desire guidance on what to do now. Guests with and without disabilities are not completely familiar with the business, what they should do to protect themselves and where they will be safe. Thus, the safest option in their mind is to remain where they are at the moment of the message. The message sender should understand that people may not know what constitutes an appropriate protective or safe action or where they will be safe.
- **What is the location?**
 - It is important to communicate the location of the threat to the people at risk as well as communicating to people not at risk so they too may consider their options and actions. Describe the area, department or location of the active shooting, which may be described by landmarks within or outside of the building. Alerting where to go and not to go during the emergency event will potentially place individuals in a safer location. Avoid giving compass directions especially since many people do not know where is north or south, once they enter a building, let alone when individuals are in a life-threatening emergency, compass direction have almost zero value to the average person. Further, remember the individuals may include an entire spectrum of disabled individuals and international guests.
- **How much time?**
 - It is important to communicate how much time the employee and guest have to respond or react to this emergency. Communicate any known time before an emergency event may impact the building so employees and guests may consider their actions based on physical abilities and time constraints.
- **What is the hazard?**
 - Describe the emergency hazard and exact threat to employees and guests are facing in order to identify and remove misconceptions and exaggerations of the threat. If an active shooter situation is occurring describe what type of weapon, plus a physical description of the shooter(s) and clothing will aid those individuals at risk. However, an active shooter designation does help people who do not know or understand what is an active shooting, thus a possible message could be, "a man with a gun". Also remember not all active shooters use guns. Several murders have

used knives, swords and razors, thus consider using the words, “active threat” to help describe the emergency.

- **Who is the source?**
 - If the warning message is authorized by the business indicate accordingly. The source of the message is important because it has a consequential impact on whether people believe the warning and can override the negative impact of having a not credible source issue a warning

Should you send a Second message out to individuals inside the business?

Whatever message was or was not delivered throughout the business, people are hiding out from the active shooter or trying to escape. If they are evacuating people want to know they are running in the right direction. If they are hiding out, they may not have had the capacity to move their frightened legs or the physical ability to move due to their health or disability or saw the shooter heading their way and their escape route was blocked. Regardless of the reason these people may hide out. Hiding out may mean hiding under a desk and locking the door or having sufficient time to move filing cabinets, desk, and tables to block entrances. These individuals generally will stay in this position until they know they are safe. There are two different schools of thought on sending messages to individuals hiding out.

- Some believe no second message should be sent across any platform for fear of the active shooter hearing the message, which may aggravate the shooter into looking behind every door and in every room.
- Conversely, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation report on September 16, 2013, titled, “A study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013”, approximately 23.1% of the active shooters commit suicide before encountered law enforcement response teams. If the shooter hears a message that law enforcement is search the building right now, then he or she may commit suicide.
- If a business were to deliver a message across the communications platform, would the message be similar to this, “Attention, attention, law enforcement is in the building right now, take appropriate actions to protect yourself”.
- Some people may believe if the message indicates the location of the shooter or last known location, then the individuals hiding out may decide to leave their concealed positions to seek safety. This may be the case, but also consider these people are there for a reason and add they have been hiding out for a period of time without being detected.
- What would your message be? Discuss among the group and write one now.

What is the update message the business will send out to the employees and guests hiding out from the shooter?

Let’s assume the business had the ability to send out message initially and when first hiding out, but as the active shooting emergency endlessly seems to drag on and on and on, the people hiding out are not feeling any safer. Their minds echo the same fears with no sign of relief. In active shooter situations law enforcement will clear the entire business in search of additional shooters, casualties and victims. They cannot rely on the fact that according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation report on September 16,2013 titled, “A study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013”, approximately 98.7% of the active shooters act alone. Law enforcement will not provide any communication that indicates one active shooter has been neutralized and they are searching for the other. Thus, people hiding out will continue to wait.

- Some properties may deliver the same message listed above, just to reassure these people that they have not been forgotten or ignored. It should be noted that, depending upon the size of the business, the law enforcement search may take hours.
- Some businesses may still believe no message should be provided. A question within a question; “if businesses provide messages and updated messages on fire alarms, why not active shooting?”
- What would your updated message be? Discuss among the group and write one now.

What is your message when the shooter has been neutralized to the entire building?

With tensions and fear running high neutralizing the active shooter is the most dominant action on everyone’s minds. Law enforcement response teams want nothing less than stopping the shooter with any means possible and as quickly as possible. When the shooter is neutralized as confirmed by the first responders as a result of committing suicide, surrenders to first responders, subdued by individuals at the scene or killed by non-law enforcement officers, what message would be broadcast throughout the building?

If the shooter is neutralized through one of the above actions, there are two schools of thought on whether a message should be broadcast over the properties communication system or not.

- One side believes law enforcement should be the only party to approve any message broadcast throughout the business. First responders will continue to search the business and during the clearing process in determining if there was a second shooter or not, communicate with each area that individuals are hiding out. This may not be as easy as one would think, especially when these individuals have no idea if the law enforcement officers are really officers or the shooter acting as one. The process of clearing rooms with people hiding out is a slow process and one that reinforces safety for all parties involved as covered in the previous chapter. Verbal commands issued by law enforcement officer search teams has been effective in clearing rooms. If a room is barricaded and the occupants are still resisting opening the door, consider a coordinated approach by having the business contact these individuals over a landline inside the office.
- Another side believes a familiar voice over the same communications platform will add value and reassurance to those hiding out. The message is not an “All clear” message, but one of support and encouragement.
- It is important to note that all messages should be coordinated with the first responders since response and search teams are actively working to neutralize the shooter. Messages such as: “Law enforcement teams are currently clearing the second floor” or “The shooter has been arrested, come out” will jeopardize the safety of first responders and those individuals hiding out in the business.
- What message would you want to hear? Discuss among the group and write one now.

Who prepares all the above messages and who communicates?

As noted above the proper message, if carefully scripted, may spark immediate action, offer encouragement in a brutal emergency and stabilize overwhelming fear. Conversely the wrong unscripted message may do just the opposite. The dialogue presented will be remembered by those immersed in this unprecedented nightmare as the beacon in the storm or the subject of witness testimonies that attempt to paint a less than favorable picture of the business’s leadership. A pre-

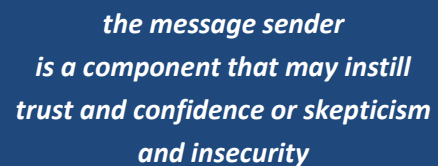
scripted message can be offered up as proof of what was exactly expressed without relying on fragmented memory and overextended emotions.

Lastly, the message sender is a component that may instill trust and confidence or skepticism and insecurity. Choosing the message sender wisely will not marginalize and diminish the importance of the message. In school students hear the same familiar voice to relay important school functions, and in business the same familiar voice may be heard after fire alarms have been activated. However, that the same familiar voice is only familiar to those individuals working on property, such as an employee, tenant and contractor. Any voice is new to a guest. Preplan on who will be the message sender during all emergency situation not just a select one or two.

Internal and External Communication

Communications, both internal and external, during and after the active shooting resonates across employees, contractors, tenants, vendors, customers, neighboring businesses, victim's families, and law enforcement immediately and for months to come. Appendix C outlines only a few communication areas that must be addressed by the business in negotiating the destabilizing events of an active shootings. Reconciling potential communication pitfalls and anticipating fundamental troublesome cracks in the social fabric will go a long way in reducing rumors and gossip, while also dissuading toxic peaks from imposing unnecessary obstacles in response and recovery efforts.

First responders also need timely communication and assistance throughout all areas of the building. Since the business knows what communication systems work, know what communication gaps are present and the company can be valuable partner in resolving the active shooting. Open line of communications is a necessity between both first responders and the business. For any emergency the business cannot be a silent, but an inactive partner or only expect the first responders to shoulder all emergency roles just because 911 were called.



*the message sender
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and insecurity*

During an active shooting the first responders will need to synchronize the response inside the business to aid individuals who are hiding out or injured. As an example, when individuals are hiding out in the human resources department room 235 and will not open the door to the first responders for fear the active shooter is trying to trick them into opening the door, the business can use the landline or computer to contact the occupants. The business's command center or security control room might be able to text the individuals believed to be in the room by comparing employee cell phone contact numbers, then sending a text. The text can be a simple message, such as, "This is Mr. Smith, law enforcement officers are outside room 235. Listen to their commands." Additionally, the business may receive information from individuals hiding out and then direct first responders to their location. The business can maintain contact with these people until rescued. It should be noted that first responders will not race to these locations, but will methodically advance, even after the active shooter has been neutralized.

The telephone calls that are received into the PBX operators may contain revelations that only the business will know. The business understands the internal dynamics and the direct byproduct of these discriminating facts could ultimately result in the protection of people. This information should not be

retained but shared with first responders for tactical considerations. As an example, relatives of employees hiding out may be in direct contact with the loved one, neighboring properties may see individuals waving their arms out the window, or a guest may relay hearing screams and shots directly above them that could identify the exact location of the active shooter.

What message should be communicated to tenants?

Not every business has tenants, but if they did the tenant employees may face the same upheavals as the rest of the company during an active shooting. However, not all tenants are tied into the business's main communication platform, thus a notification method can be established in monthly tenant meetings or individually prior to any emergency. Tenants may also request that their particular business receive emergency messages over one platform, such as a text message or cell phone call, while another tenant may desire emails. This factor alone will suggest that simultaneously messages should be sent across multi-communication platforms.

Ideally the same message should be sent unilaterally across all communication platforms regardless of the location within the business. Multiple initial messages may be misconstrued, cause confusion and hinder a timely option to consider when facing an active shooting emergency. In a fire a business may consider a phased evacuation, partial evacuation or full evacuation depending upon the location of the fire. Since active shooters can be mobile and can move between floors, department and even buildings within the same complex in a short period of time, a universal message is the appropriate method to warn individuals throughout the entire property and complex.

What message should be communicated to employees reporting to work?

Not every business has three shifts to interact with guests and customers, or twenty-four-hour operations for such aspects as information technology, facility maintenance or a customer service call center, but if the business is open longer than an eight-hour shift, employees will arrive to work without knowing there is a problem, call to see if they are still needed, or just call off.

- If the employee, contractor, or volunteer physically arrive at the business, they definitely will not be allowed to enter the company. They will however either be told to go home and wait to be called to work or recruited to assist in the emergency evacuation assembly area function. As the active shooting escalates and the impact of the emergency is realized, trusted employees may fortify and stimulate the business's response to individuals.
- If the employee, contractor, or volunteer call into PBX the same two options apply. Naturally the individual will not be allowed to enter the building and since the business will be a crime scene, the employee shift will be unlikely. However, if the employee function falls under the United States Department of Labor Office of Safety, Health Administration (OSHA) OSHA 29 CFR 1910.38 (c) for Evacuation Plans and Procedures section 1910.389(c)(3) Procedures to be followed by employees who remain to operate critical plant operations before they evacuate. If the employee position concerns the critical plant operations, that employee may be needed even though the business will be a crime scene.

Should a message be provided to your PBX department when people call?

During emergency situations the business will receive approximately nineteen different types of telephone calls into the PBX department. If the type of telephone call can be anticipated and plotted prior to the emergency, then the process for effectively administering a favorable outcome is the

byproduct. When the type of business concerns customer service effectiveness, then each misstep will automatically translate as a gap in efficiency and replicated many times over. By identifying the compendium of likely calls and predetermined transfer extensions some problems may be avoided. Secondly, many people who call have no prior knowledge there is an active shooter emergency occurring at the time of their call. Thirdly, the PBX operator may be the lifeline and only outside contact of those individuals hiding out in the active shooting zone. The types of phone calls that the PBX operators may receive include the following:

- First responders (law enforcement, fire, emergency management, EMT, federal agencies)
- 911 operators
- Individuals hiding out
- Disabled guests and employees
- Injured guests and employees
- Customers making reservations
- Vendors delivering supplies
- People asking about business services and show times
- Relatives of employees
- Relatives of guests
- Relatives of contractors
- Relatives of volunteers
- Employees for the next shift
- Neighboring properties
- Tenant properties
- Inquisitive people trying to find out what is happening
- Volunteers, religious organizations, American Red Cross,
- News media
- People who agree with the active shooter and desire to reconfirm the cause, even though they have no idea the reason behind the shooting

The operator desires to forward and clear no-life-threatening calls as fast as possible to allow affected people the attention they deserve. These individuals may have timely information on the exact location of the active shooter or be able to relay their information on their location and how many other individuals are in the same location. This information will be extremely useful to first responders and the emergency evacuation assembly area who is attempting to account for all individuals that were inside the business.

Persons with a Disability

From preservation of life and safety initiatives to damage limitation and reconstitution, a business is charged with an awesome responsibility when facing a kaleidoscope of perceived risks, threats and hazards that may befall employees, guests, vendors or volunteers at the business. Unfortunately for many businesses the active shooter or emergency plans do not take into consideration guests who are international travelers, individuals who fall under Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and visitors with special needs, physical condition limitations or senior citizens and minors.

When a message is broadcast concerning an active shooter, the message will automatically generate panic, fear and a sense of urgency for guests and employees alike. During an active shooter emergency

consider that for even the physically fit and sound of mind the sheer message will be a challenge when considering their options and potential actions. For the ADA employees and guests, the sheer thought of an active shooter takes on a monumental and menacing scenario that they know cannot be accomplished alone. How the business anticipates, mitigates, responds to and supports ADA employees and guests is a foundational element of planning. Regardless of the intent and expectations of the active shooter plan the actions and choices for consideration will be left to the discretion of each ADA employee or guest once the active shooter message was broadcast. Undeniably for persons with disabilities their options are reduced based on their needs, assistance and equipment requirements. Secondly, unless the disabled individual is an employee, businesses do not know where or how many ADA guests are on property at the time of the active shooting.

It is also important to understand options available to ADA guests and employees based on the active shooting emergency that may not require the immediate evacuation of the building. The ADA guest and employee may be safer within the building as opposed to a complete evacuation of the building thereby theoretically forcing individuals to fend for themselves outside confines of the business. For an employee or guest with a disability or an individual in a less than normal state, the entire active shooting emergency experience can be a marketing and social media nightmare if they were completely discounted and ignored.

An individual with a disability is defined by the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, in the Guide to Disability Rights Law, July 2009 as, “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment”. ADA does not specifically name all the impairments that may be encountered during the active shooter emergency, but the ADA ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities to be afforded the same protections as those without disabilities.

Many businesses believe ADA guests and employees will be easily to spot a person with a disability during an active shooter emergency, but in reality, this is not the case. Will an individual with mental retardation or deaf be obvious by physical appearance? Will an individual with a respiratory condition or a recent operation be visible the casual observer? Approximately 85% of ADA employees and guests have non-obvious disabilities, and in many cases will not be known until the emergency occurs. Initial, updated and post communication messages should consider the categories of disabilities impairments which include:

Categories of Disability Impairment

Type	Description
Communicative	Inability to speak, slurred and stuttering speech or difficulty in forming sentences or words, and Tourette syndrome
Cognitive	A learning disability that affects communication and remembering which can be a development delay
Hearing	A sensory disability which can result in a complete loss of hearing (deafness) or result in various stages of hearing levels below
Mobility	Ambulatory ability to move, but may require the assistance of special equipment, e.g. canes, walkers, doesn't specify the speed of the person walking or distances that must be walked, nor the ability to walk down stairs or over obstacles, or the speed or rate the person can walk. Non-

	ambulatory will not be able to move from one location to another without assistance of another and without a motorized wheelchair
Multiple	Disabilities are not limited to only one type or form, but a person may possess more than one, such as a person who is Deaf-blind or resulting from an accident
Physical	From missing limbs, obesity, dwarf or little people, and accident related to internal disorders or conditions such as cardiac, respiratory, internal organs and chemical dependency. Cerebral palsy, Epilepsy or seizure disorders, orthopedic impairment and general weakness and fatigue, plus equipment assistance dependency
Psychological Psychiatric	Emotional or mental illness, which could be identified in autism, Alzheimer, an emotional disturbance, and a brain injury due to accidents
Visual	A sensory disability which can result in complete blindness or limited vision

Communications Considerations for Persons with a Disability

- Employee or guests with a disability who will need assistance during an active shooter emergency should be encouraged to notify the business operator of their location. Knowing their location will allow emergency personnel situational awareness for an effective evacuation.
- Employee who might occupy the building after regular work hours, or at other times when staff are not usually present, should be encouraged to notify department/building manager of their location, and provide the building, floor, room and time of their arrival and departure. Knowing their location will allow emergency personnel situational awareness for an effective communication and real time assistance.
- A business may establish ADA hotlines during an emergency. If so, a hotline should include TTY/TDD (text telephone, also known as telecommunication device for the deaf) numbers, when available, and instructions on how to use the TTY caller relay.
- For those employees and guests with cognitive disabilities frequently repeat the most essential active shooter emergency information in a simple message format so they can understand and follow.
- When multiple methods of communications are broadcast each will compete for an individual's attention. For many individuals, including a person with a disability this can also be a distraction and problematic especially in a fast-moving active shooter emergency.
- A misconception has circulated for years that emergency communication messages must be short because it is difficult to hold a person's attention, but in actuality the reverse is true. People are information junkies and want more and more information, rather than less. Active shooter emergency messages resemble an ongoing dialogue with individuals caught up on the emergency. Persons with a disability need a lot of information, and they need to have it communicated to them often.
- When a person with a disability is positioned in the Area of Refuge or Assistance communications should be in fifteen-minute intervals or less for repeated or update messages in an active shooter emergency.
- No single factor impacts what the person with a disability thinks and does in response to an active shooter emergency more than what one says in the emergency evacuation message.

International Guests

A business cannot automatically assume that international guests understand the nature of the emergency, such as an active shooter just because a message was broadcast in English. Consequently, just because the guest is in an English-speaking country does not mean they speak or understand English. To an international guest there is no difference in a message that is mundane, autocratic, harsh, mediocre or inspirational if they do not know the language. The words are only chatter. The international guest's interpretation of the message is based on the actions of people observed, the sounds of panic and shock, and a sense of danger. The fastest method to alleviate the challenges of international guests who do not understand English is to consider using a multi-communication platform that broadcasts several common languages across the previously identified business's communication systems.

Many businesses have a marketing strategy that attract international guest's; thus the sales and marketing department already are versed in the most common languages whom, may be on property during the time period of the active shooting. Depending upon the business model of the property, such as a mall, restaurant, hotel, casino, theme park, sports arena or convention space, each model may contain dozens of individuals who communicate in different languages. One business cannot be expected to verbally communicate in every language, but there are technical communication systems that can broadcast pre-scripted message across several languages. This innovation definitely envisions and concentrates on a gap in the communication framework that is completely overlooked as a general rule.

International guests are experiencing challenges each day that we take for granted, such as difference languages, signage, currency, traffic patterns, customs, and beliefs and perceptions based on movies, television, and music. Now add to the stress equation an active shooter, life for the international guest is distorted and overwhelming. To compensate the compendium for security and safety, the individual searches for non-verbal communication clues, such as facial expression, eye contact, hand gestures and the intensity of any word spoken. The guest may not understand the meaning of what is being communicated, but they can certainly sense anger, hostility, or urgency in a person's voice. A quote that has been attributed to Anais Nin and several others, "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are". An employee is familiar with the business's internal dynamics, shortcuts to specific locations and discerning an emergency message, but for the international guest frustration and indecision hinder a meaningful response to an active shooter message without the assistance of the business's employees. Thus, for a business who deals with international guests effective communications, understanding of differences, diplomacy, and response expectations cannot be an afterthought, but a carefully coordinated strategy based on safety and security.

Communication Gaps

When considering what communication platform that will be used there are two certainties, first, regardless of the sophistication of the system and deliberate effort to contact all individuals in the business, people will still never hear the message because the system cannot effectively reach all areas of the property, which translates into a gap. This gap could be the result of the building design, construction materials and the size of the structure. Secondly, gaps do not automatically and miraculously fix themselves at the exact time needed. If the business has a known dead zone or black

hole, regardless of the emergency and the limitations of the communications platform, these areas will still be significant impediment for employees and first responders. The business can either convert black holes into a zone of coverage through capital expenditures and a collaborative effort of potential users, or immediately communicate the black holes and dead zones to first responders as they are entering the property. Do not deprive first responders of valuable information that may affect their response in neutralizing the active shooter. If the business has special radios that optimize communications within the building this radio should be provided to first responders either in a “Go bag of Go kit” or directly handed to the first responder. Another excellent option to determine black holes and dead zones for first responders is to invite them to tour the business or conduct a training exercise. Either option is an enormous learning experience that can transform a chronic problem into a lesson learned in an emergency response.

Primary and secondary communication platforms should be considered for all areas of the property. By operating parallel communication systems this action encompasses the concepts of redundancy and survivability, not of disruption and alienation. During an emergency there is no assurance the primary platform will operate for the entire duration of the emergency or will be overloaded and freeze. If communication conflicts are rationalized and chartered prior, then the likelihood of inoperable communication becomes a reality. This amendment to the communication platform is based on foresight and demonstrating a concerted effort in eradicating these cancerous black holes, all under the hallmark of safeguarding people.

Communications After

Businesses value the importance of customer service throughout the entire guest experience. Anticipating the needs and desires of the guest has ramifications well beyond the initial interaction as social networking and media sites can paint an extremely ugly picture of the business’s response to the emergency. What was communicated, how it was communicated, when it was communicated and in what method the message was communicated will set the tone, good or bad, as the corporate response to the emergency will be replayed over-and-over again on news broadcasts and social media sites.

For the business the guest experience doesn’t stop once the guest evacuates the building, as the guest in the hotel environment still has bags or personal belongs on property, such as airplane tickets, passports, personal and business documents inside the building. The guest may be booked for two more days, relatives may still be unaccounted for, and business associates or partners may be missing as well. The person with a disability is no different than anyone else as communication is a vital lifeline to their safety. Various methods of communications should be considered in the active shooter emergency for persons with disabilities to ensure all disability categories are covered.

Appendix C identifies areas of communication across the identified categories of law enforcement, legal, human resources, counseling, security, financial, business continuity, media, and trial. The aftereffects of an active shooting and the communication requirements does not stop when the shooter is neutralized, but should be considered for days, weeks and months after the emergency.

Table x Internal Self-Assessment Process during and Active Shooting may include the following but remember to consider how each area would be processed, understood, questioned or acted upon by a person with a disability and without a disability. Answer the below self-assessment process from the three different perspectives. First, how would you act under any emergency, then follow the entries

below in reaching your conclusions and subsequent actions. Second, consider if the person is alone or in a group? Third, consider if the person in a position of authority such as an employee or is the person perceived to be in authority, such as a contractor or volunteer? Now review your communication platforms and the message contents of each identified in this chapter, then in the working group determine how or if any pre-scripted message should be changed. Lastly, the twelve processing aspects listed below may occur over the course of minutes or even seconds depending upon their own personal situation and the information that is received.

Table 1 – Internal Self-Assessment Process during an Active Shooting

	Process	Questions	Action
1	Warning alarm sounds, message or first responders notify of an active shooter emergency.	What is happening? Is this real or training? Where is the shooter? How severe is threat? How far away is the shooter? Do I see anyone in authority reacting to the alarm or message? If a verbal message will the message be repeated to see if I heard it correctly?	Listen to see if alarm will continue or just an accident or a drill and if the message will be repeated again. See how other people are responding.
2	Identification of the active shooter emergency, attempt to confirm by sight, hearing, or smell.	Is the nature of the emergency and active shooter? What is an active shooter?	Look out the window, down the hall or how other people are reacting. Use all your senses to confirm or negate.
3	Credible and accurate threat, it is real.	Continue to question if the active shooting is real or not? Do I need to evacuation or hide? How far away is the shooter? How far away is safety or am I safe here	Employ all senses while attempting to contain emotions. Think and process options for consideration and protection.
4	Verbal message is broadcast again for a second time.	Do I believe the threat to be so significant that I need to leave my location? Are any details provided? What has changed from the first message, or it is the same?	Listen to the message and listen to see if message is repeated or changed. Any difference may prompt an action to avoid harm.
5	Understanding the contents of the warning message	Did I understand everything that was in the message? Did the second message make the emergency any clearer?	Mentally and physically process the message.
6	Personalizing the warning to oneself	What does the message mean to me and those around me? What affect will message have on my disability?	Mentally and physically process the message

7	Follow up message	Is the message the same or is there new information? What are the new details and will these details change my response to the active shooter emergency?	Mentally and physically process the message
8	Self-assessment and risk	How severe? What can I do to protect myself before considering to move?	Mentally and physically process the message
9	In fashion or method confirming the warning and message is true	Is anyone evacuating? Are people moving? Are people panicking?	Physically observe people evacuating. Continue to evaluate the threat and options
10	Risk and threat reduction	What are my options to reduce the threat on my own? How do I protect myself where I am, or must I move? If I do move will the shooter see me? How far away is a safe location with first responders?	Talk and listen to others. Call for assistance or aid. Collect any specialized equipment and medication needed to evacuate or stay. Mentally prepare.
11	Initiate a protective response	What option will I select? How much time do I have to select? Can I wait until the last moment, or should I evacuate now? Again, processing all sensory clues, does it change my option?	Fight or flight? Make a choice Evacuate or not to evacuate. Initiate the evacuation looking for assistance and confirmation doing the right thing or continue to stay.
12	Follow others during evacuation or remain in place and hide out	Even though evacuating, alarm may turn off at any time. Will another message be broadcast? How are other people acting?	Physical and mental reinforcement, but still cautious to determine if going in the right direction. Continue using all senses for survival.

Active Shooter Emergency ADA Overview

During an active shooter emergency each individual initiates an action and choice process both physically and mentally that begins with the first verbal or non-verbal notification that there is a problem that may impact their safety and security. For an individual with a disability this process is more elaborate and detailed. Before even considering moving from a location, secure or not, the person with a disability may require special equipment, unique needs, reassurance there really is a threat and assistance to move. Unlike a disabled employee who is familiar with the property, alarm notification system, areas of refuge and emergency evacuation assembly area, the disabled guest does not have the same knowledge and experience.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, if a fire alarm sounded, in many instances individuals evacuated buildings prior to listening to the first audio message that provided information on the alarm. It should also be noted that a fire alarm signal may be used for more than one type of emergency. This fact may be known to employees, but not to ADA individuals. It should be noted during an active shooting the fire alarm to an active shooter is commensurate with presenting him or her with additional potential target who are encouraged to evacuate from their secure location or hiding place. The active shooter may push the fire alarm just to continue their relentless suffering on the occupants of the business. Consideration should be given to developing a message over the designed communication platform to clarify there is no fire and nullify the active shooters intentions.

Based on the disability, a person who has a mental disability may not respond to any alarm or desire to leave the comfort of their room or current location within the business. The person with the disability may not be able to proceed to the area of refuge or assistance, the emergency evacuation assembly area, or understand the active shooter emergency in the same manner or even respond in the same actions because of physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), 4.1.3(14), 4.28), provides specifications for emergency alarms so that they are accessible to persons with disabilities, including those with sensory impairments, psychological and psychiatric challenges. Where emergency alarm systems are provided, they must meet criteria and specifications that address audible and visual features. For additional guidance and requirement check each category in the ADAAG. Some examples found in the ADAAG include the below items. In reviewing these bullet points consider how they will be addressed in the active shooter response plan or any business emergency plan.

- Visual strobes serve to notify people who are deaf or hard of hearing that an alarm has sounded.
- Visual alarms are required in hallways, lobbies, restrooms, and any other general usage and common use areas, such as meeting and conference rooms, cafeterias, lobbies, dressing rooms, theaters, bowling alleys, to name few.
- ADAAG specifications for visual appliances address intensity, flash rate, mounting location, and other characteristics.
- It is not sufficient to install visual signals only at audible alarm locations.
- Audible alarms installed in corridors and lobbies can be heard in adjacent rooms or hallways and over long distances, but a visual signal can be observed only within the space it is located due to the configuration of the building.

Signage

Another form of communication is signage. During an emergency situation, each employee, guest and persons with disability look for guidance in the form of signs to aid in their safe evacuation or relation to an area of security. People demand quick and unimpeded paths, if demeaned appropriate, to exit a business during emergency situations. The exit signs are required by law to be illuminated and at a proper height to allow visibility from distance. Emergency exit route signs are posted in conspicuous locations throughout the business and include such signs as primary exit routes, alternate exit routes, fire safety equipment, areas of refuge or assistance, Emergency Evacuation Assembly Areas, or to a particular department or safe room. However, for a person with a disability the illuminated exit sign, regardless of the height or purpose of the sign, will not be seen to aid in a safe evacuation if blind or limited vision, cognitive, psychological, or psychic, and multiple disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are not the only individuals who may have difficulty with emergency signs as international guests rely on a different set of signs. If they cannot interpret the business's emergency signs, the international guest's quick evacuation from the business will fall upon following other people. If the international guest is also a person with a disability the guest challenges are magnified. The following International Organization for Standards (ISO) Signs as found on www.iso.org/iso/graphical-symbols.booklet.pdf include the following. For additional signs please visit their website.



accessible elevator



emergency exit



fire alarm button



Emergency evacuation
assembly point

When an individual, during an active shooting emergency, is provided with a message that people need to consider their options, the individual begins to assess their location, while contemplating the old adage of "Fight or flight". Since it is a predictable human instinct for many people to evacuate, escape or run away from danger regardless of their station of life, the individual will not be tolerant of a business that did not embrace their expected guidance if signage is absent as people run blindly down seemingly neverending corridors. If the shooting is occurring in the human resources department and there are no signs to aid people, then they may be immersed even deeper into disaster as they run directly into human resources department. No business is expected to know which department or location an active shooting emergency will take place, however, giving potential victims and first responders assistance through signage is attainable in the near term.