

Active Shooters – Time to Plan, Practice and Prepare

Introduction

On the 13th November 2015, Paris was attacked from, what is currently known, a number of small groups of gunmen at least five locations across the French capital:

- La Belle Equipe, a restaurant on the rue de Charonne (11th arrondissement) – where at least 19 died;
- La Casa Nostra - a restaurant on the rue de la Fontaine au Roi (11th arrondissement) where at least 5 died;
- Bataclan Theatre, a concert venue on the boulevard Voltaire (11th arrondissement) – where at least 89 died;
- La Carillion Bar and Le Petit Cambodge Restaurant on the rue Alibert, (10th arrondissement) where at least 12 died; and
- Stade de France, St Denis, Northern Suburbs of Paris – where France were playing Germany injuring many.

This terror attack was the worst in Europe since the Madrid bombings in 2004 and the worst in France since the Second World War and comes just over 10 months from the Charlie Hebdo killings in Paris.

What happened in Paris is exactly what Europe's security services have long feared, and, have attempted to prevent; coordinated, simultaneous, rolling attacks, with automatic weapons and explosives in the heart of a major city, targeting multiple and crowded public locations.

Whilst the killings and bombings have shocked France and indeed the world, it is not the first time that we have seen marauding gunmen kill large numbers of innocent bystanders and others in offices, public spaces and buildings;

- In 2008, ten gunmen carried out a devastating attack in Mumbai, killing 166, including 17 police officers (where the term “active shooter” was first used).
- In July 2011 Anders Breivik killed 8 people by setting off a bomb around the government buildings in Oslo and then shot dead 69 people at a Workers' Youth League summer camp on the island of Utøya. The death toll inflicted by this one lone gunman on one day was twice as many people as would typically be murdered in the whole of Norway in a whole year.
- In 2013, gunmen attacked the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, Kenya which resulted in at least 67 deaths.

Here in the UK we are not immune to such killings:

- In Hungerford (1987) - Michael Ryan killed 16 before killing himself;
- In Monkseaton (1989) - Robert Sartin killed 1 and left 14 other people injured during a twenty-minute shooting spree;
- In Dunblane (1996) - Thomas Hamilton killed 16 children and 1 teacher before killing himself; and more recently
- In Cumbria (2010) - Derrick Bird killed 12 people and injured 11 others before killing himself.

Even for those who take even the slightest interest in the news, could not help but notice the regularity in which such shootings occur in the USA; indeed the FBI have identified that between 2000 and 2013, 160 active shooter incidents occurred in the United States resulting in the killing of 486 and wounding of 557.

As prepared and well-trained as our Police and Security forces are, the sad fact is that the majority of active shooter incidents will most probably have finished well before the Police arrive or have had an opportunity to have any impact.

Preparing for the inevitable

Following the Charlie Hebdo attack, the head of MI5, Andrew Parker has suggested that while Britain's security services (MI5, MI6, GCHQ and the Police) were uncovering wave after wave of terrorist plots, they could not guarantee this success would continue.

For those who own or manage property, we all have to accept that both "active shooter" incidents will never go away and here in Britain, there will be attacks of this nature at some time, and we have to be realistic that this is most probably in the very near future.

So what realistically can property managers and owners do to counter those who are intent on such a path?

Firstly it is important for those who manage crowded spaces and properties to get rid of the mind-set of "it won't happen here," we can see that it has and can happen anywhere and at any time. Its time therefore to talk to your staff.

The best course of action will of course be to limit the active shooter's access to such crowds but this is clearly not feasible or acceptable within our free society and goes against our way of life which we look to protect, therefore we have to prepare for such any such 'attack'.

Regulation 8 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires that every employer (and subsequently any person in control of premises) should;

"establish and where necessary give effect to appropriate procedures to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger to persons at work in his undertaking."

The risk of an active shooter incident is clearly serious and imminent and it would be reasonable therefore to assume that depending upon both the type of organisation you are or what type of property you manage or own, preparing for such an event has its merits.

It is vitally important to understand that in developing a formal plan or procedure that it is designed does not involve or indeed rely upon being protected by the Police. Of course the Police or Security services will get to your situation as quickly as they can, exercises undertaken by the Security Services in 2015 have been undertaken covering this type of event, but history tells us that most probably, are on your own.

Current guidance from both UK and USA officials varies. Here in the UK the Metropolitan Police advice is based around the traditional four point approach of:

Cover – Stay Safe

- If under immediate gun fire – take cover initially then leave the area as soon as possible; if safe to do so.
- If nearby gunfire – leave the area immediately if safe to do so, do not congregate at evacuation points and if necessary leave belongings behind

- If you can't escape – consider locking yourself and others in a room or cupboard, barricade the door then stay away from it, if possible choose a room where escape or further movement is possible, and importantly silence any sources of noise, such as mobile phones, that may give away your presence.

Confirm – See

- The more information that you can pass to police the better but NEVER risk your own safety or that of others to gain it. Use CCTV and other remote methods where possible to reduce the risk.
- If it is safe to do so, try to determine the following:
 - Is it a firearms / weapons incident?
 - Exact location of the incident.
 - What else are they carrying?
 - Number and description of gunmen
 - Moving in any particular direction?
 - Type of firearm –(long-barrelled or handgun)
 - Are they communicating with others?
 - Number of casualties / people in the area.

Contact -Tell

- Contact the Police immediately by dialling 999 or via your control room, giving them as much information you have available.
- Use all the available channels of communication available to you to inform tenants, staff, visitors, neighbouring premises, etc. of the danger.

Control –Act

- Secure (lock down) your immediate environment and other vulnerable areas such as the security control room.
- Inform the tenants to keep people out of public areas by closing their units if it is safe to do so and keep customers within the unit.
- Instruct staff to, where it is safe to do so, keep customers out of the public areas such as the malls, car parks, public corridors and foyers.
- Where appropriate - move customers, tenants and others away from the doors and remain quiet until told otherwise by appropriate authorities or if you need to move for safety reasons, such as a fire.

Advice coming from the Department of Homeland Security USA suggests a similar approach of “evacuation” and “hide out,” but also suggests “taking action against an active shooter” – proposing that **as a last resort**, and only when your life is in imminent danger, should you attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter. Whilst we are not suggesting that staff or others should engage in such a way – the advice from the USA has merits when considering the need to develop very quickly a survival mindset.

Those with responsibilities for others should be very aware of what to do should an active shooter incident occur, not least because staff, tenants and others will be looking to them for guidance and information. Planning

and testing for such an incident could be the one thing that determines, and hopefully limits the number of casualties.

It is essential therefore that in developing any plans or procedures that you consider;

- all the “what if” scenarios should such an active shooter event occur,
- what action you actually can and need to take, and
- the most reasonable responses applicable to your property and to the available resources you have.

It is always better to develop such a plan or procedure for dealing with an emergency with input from several stakeholders including your security teams.

An effective plan or procedure could also include:

- A preferred method for reporting such emergencies;
- Details of the evacuation policy and procedure, including emergency escape procedures and routes (i.e., floor plans, safe areas) –this should include any assistance required in dealing with those with mobility problems or special needs;
- A method of securing key areas including security control rooms;
- A method of limiting access in and around your property – without adversely affecting evacuation routes – activating access control systems for example;
- Contact information for, and responsibilities of key individuals and others during an incident;
- Details of how you intend to alert various parties of an emergency including:-
- Staff;
- Tenants;
- Customers,
- Individuals at remote locations within premises;
- The Police; and
- Other Emergency Services (medical assistance)

Training

A popular misconception is that you can't train for these types of incidents. By implementing your plans and procedures, communicating them to staff and conducting mock “active shooter” training exercises, as most would do with other emergencies, you will help to ensure that key people know what to do instinctively. We all know what to do when the fire alarm is activated, if you have an active shooter risk, you should know what to do.

When training security and other key staff it is advisable that they should be able to:

- Recognise the sound of gunshots;
- React quickly when gunshots are heard and/or when a shooting is witnessed:
- Cover;
- Confirm;
- Contact; and
- Control.
- Know when and how to call the Police;
- React appropriately when the Police arrive; and
- Adopt a survival mind set during such times of incidents – someone once said that your mind affects your ability.

Ensuring that all key staff have attended both Project Argus and Project Griffin courses will go some way in providing such training, but you need to consider what else your team need to know.

Dealing with Armed Police

Whilst we have stated that the Police will most likely not be there during the initial stages of an active shooter incident, they will get there and it is most likely that they themselves will be armed.

In the event of an attack involving firearms or weapons, a Police Officer's priority is firstly to protect and save lives. Initially they may not be able to distinguish you or anyone else from the gunmen. It is important therefore that you and your staff know how to deal with armed police.

You have to understand that armed officers may point guns at you, your tenants, staff and customers and they may have to treat you and the public firmly. It is essential therefore that you follow their instructions implicitly;

- put down any items in your hands (i.e. bags, jackets),
- keep hands in the air / in view with your fingers spread,
- remain calm,
- avoid making quick movements toward officers, and
- avoid pointing, screaming or shouting.

Once you have reached a safe location or an assembly point, it is most likely that you should expect to be held in that area until the situation is under control, and all witnesses have been identified and most probably questioned.

Managing the consequences of an active shooter situation

Active shooter incidents, indeed any major or critical incidents, may have serious psychological and health related impacts on those involved.

After the active shooter has been incapacitated and is no longer a threat, those responsible for the wellbeing of staff, tenants, and customers should, if they are in a position to do so, engage in post-event assessments and activities, including:

- providing support and comfort for staff and others;
- accounting of all individuals to determine who, if anyone, is missing and potentially injured;
- determining a method for notifying families of individuals affected by the active shooter;
- assessing the psychological state of individuals under your care and supervision and providing them appropriate access to health care specialists accordingly; and
- identifying and filling any critical personnel or operational gaps left in the organisation as a result of the active shooter incident.

Conclusions

For those who manage property, especially where there can be large numbers of people, we have to accept that "active shooter" incidents will occur. There will be attacks of this nature at some time here in the UK; it is important therefore that those who manage such spaces to get rid of the mind-set of "it won't happen here"; it's time to plan, practice and prepare.

About the author

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