

HR Insights

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Prevention and Response Considerations for Active Shooter Incidents in the Workplace

An active shooter incident entails an individual or group of individuals entering a populated area to kill or attempt to kill their victims, generally through the use of firearms. These incidents—sometimes called active shootings—have become increasingly common in the United States. According to the FBI, the number of active shooter incidents jumped by 96.8% between 2017 (31 incidents) and 2021 (61 incidents). These incidents have also grown in severity, with 3 out of the 5 deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history occurring in the past decade.

Active shooter incidents can carry various consequences. These incidents often result in fatalities, serious injuries and prolonged trauma among those involved. Additionally, such incidents can leave lasting impacts on the locations where they occur, such as workplaces. Organizations that encounter active shooter incidents could face substantial recovery expenses, regulatory penalties and liability concerns, along with lasting effects on the work environment.

With this in mind, it's vital for organizations to better understand active shooter incidents and how to protect against them. This article outlines commonly targeted locations, explains how these incidents impact organizations and highlights workplace considerations for prevention and response measures.

Commonly Targeted Locations

Active shooters usually select soft targets and crowded places (ST-CPs) to conduct their attacks. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines ST-CPs as areas that are easily accessible to the public and have limited security measures in place. ST-CPs may include permanent structures that are frequently crowded (e.g., shopping malls, transportation hubs, schools, entertainment venues, restaurants and hotels) or temporary attractions that only host crowds at certain times (e.g., sporting events and music festivals).

In any case, it's important to note that active shooter incidents often occur at workplaces. According to recent data from the FBI, properties within the following industries are common targets for active shooter incidents:

- Commerce/retail (52.4%)
- Government (4.9%)
- Education (3.3%)
- Religious organizations (1.6%)
- Health care (1.6%)

Apart from these properties, the FBI found that 33.1% of active shooter incidents occur within open spaces, while 4.9% take place at private residences. Regardless of location, however, these incidents can have detrimental effects on impacted parties.

Impact on Organizations

Organizations targeted in active shooter incidents could experience a variety of ramifications. In addition to the considerable

impact on employees and workplace culture an active shooter incident is likely to have, the recovery expenses resulting from such an event can also be significant.

In the aftermath of such incidents, targeted organizations will likely face costs related to medical and funeral bills for victims, workers' compensation claims, on-site counseling services and business interruptions.

Further, organizations may also encounter regulatory penalties. In terms of specific penalties, organizations could be cited for violating the [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)'s general duty clause](#) if they lacked proper safety measures to protect their employees from shooting incidents, as active shooters are considered a "recognized hazard."

In addition, organizations can encounter potential lawsuits in response to active shooter incidents within their spaces. For example, MGM Resorts International and its insurers were ordered to pay an \$800 million settlement to more than 4,400 victims and their families following the 2017 mass shooting that killed 58 individuals and injured more than 850 at the company's Las Vegas resort, Mandalay Bay. The settlement was a collective response to dozens of lawsuits stemming from the incident.

Prevention and Response Measures

Considering the consequences organizations could face from active shooter incidents, it's crucial for them to implement effective prevention and response measures. Key actions for organizations to consider include:

- **Implement proper security protocols.** Conduct a threat assessment to determine possible security vulnerabilities on-site and implement protocols to remedy these concerns (e.g., setting up video surveillance, installing alarm systems and hiring dedicated security personnel).
- **Monitor applicable parties.** Be sure to closely assess employees, customers and other parties that frequent the property for potentially dangerous or violent behaviors on-site. Take any complaints or reports related to these behaviors seriously. Address such behaviors as quickly and safely as possible to prevent escalation.
- **Train employees.** Educate employees on how to respond to workplace violence with routine training. This training should highlight ways employees can protect themselves and others from harm amid active shooter incidents.
- **Establish an emergency action plan (EAP).** OSHA requires employers to have [documented EAPs](#) that outline specific actions amid various workplace emergencies. The goal of any EAP is to mitigate possible losses when dangerous situations occur. Active shootings should be explicitly addressed in an EAP. This portion should be practiced regularly through active shooter drills and updated as needed.
- **Consult law enforcement and legal counsel.** Make sure to reach out to law enforcement for additional guidance on preventing and responding to active shooter incidents. Furthermore, work with legal counsel to discuss any applicable regulatory requirements regarding active shooting preparedness.

As active shooter incidents rise in frequency and severity, organizations need to be prepared. By learning about these incidents, implementing effective prevention and response measures, organizations can help minimize risk for active shooter incidents in the workplace

For more workplace resources, contact us today.

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