

From the Securitas USA Center for Professional Development

# Surviving an Active Shooter Event

## Always Be Alert

The weather was exceptionally fine on a bright February morning. The warm sunshine brightened Officer Jill's post at the front reception desk in a high-rise office building. The day progressed normally, with the usual high volume of business people entering and leaving.

Most of the people she saw were taking advantage of the mild weather and wore light jackets instead of heavy winter coats. That may be why the man in the long, woolen topcoat catches her attention. Jill notices the tense look on his face and how he keeps moving his head from left to right as if looking for something. As he comes closer, she notices a large bulge under the right side of his coat and that he keeps his right hand in his coat pocket.

As soon as the man is close enough, Jill calls out cheerfully, "Good morning, sir. May I help you?" Ignoring Jill, the man continues on toward the elevators. Officer Jill calls out to the man again, "Excuse me sir, but you must sign in when you enter the building." Disregarding Jill, the man pushes the elevator call button. Officer Jill picks up her desk phone and calls her supervisor for assistance.

Following her training, she observes the elevator floor indicator and sees it stop on the second floor. A few seconds later, the peaceful day explodes with the sounds of gunfire.

## Act Quickly

Officer Jill does not hesitate. The gunfire sounds were muffled and she is not sure they were gunfire, but she takes no chances. She immediately and calmly stops all

people in the lobby from entering any elevator and advises them to leave the building at once. She then uses the building's public address system to alert all the occupants. "Attention," she announces, keeping her voice calm and steady, "there is an intruder in the building who may be armed and dangerous. Please evacuate the building or lock down your floor immediately. The intruder was last known to be on the second floor of the building."

Officer Jill ushers any remaining persons out of the building and exits herself while dialing 911 on her cell phone. She gives the dispatcher her name, address, and the reason for the call. Then she finds a safe place from which to observe the building entrance and waits for the police to arrive, as per the directions in her Post Orders. She continues to warn people not to enter the building.

## Training Can Help You Survive

The scene on the second floor of the building is terrifying. The shooter has killed two people and is hunting for more victims. Fortunately, the second floor staff was trained how to respond to workplace violence.

As soon as the shooting begins, the staff takes immediate action. Many of them flee down the two emergency exit stairwells, not stopping to gather up personal belongings. Some are not able to flee. Two groups are in meetings when the shooting begins and carefully peek out of their rooms to see the shooter blocking their escape path. Immediately they lock and/or barricade their doors, and turn out the lights.



As trained, they silence their cell phones, and deactivate the vibrate feature. Silently, they spread out; each person finding a spot in the room to provide concealment or some degree of protection against gunfire. Each of them holds onto some object from the office (lamp, chair, letter opener, scissors, potted plant, etc.) that they can use as an improvised weapon. If the shooter breaks into their office they will fight for their lives, but until then they will stay quiet and hidden.

In the hallway, they hear the shooter entering vacant offices and ranting. The occupants of one office hear the shooter try the doorknob of their office. Finding it locked, the shooter moves down the hall to the next office, looking for easy targets. They breathe a quiet sigh of relief and hope that he will not return.

## 15 Minutes Of Fear

The police arrive on the scene in response to Officer Jill's call. As soon as the police car stops, Officer Jill puts her hands in the air with her fingers spread to show that she is not a threat. A police officer

approaches her and she recounts what has happened and directs the police officers to the elevators and stairwells. The police make sure the elevators are shut down and take the stairs up to the second floor. It has been seven minutes since Officer Jill placed the 911 call.

On the second floor, the police begin a sweep to locate the shooter. They find a man hiding under a desk holding up his hands to show that he is not a threat. He tells the officers that the shooter went down the hallway on the left. They proceed with caution down the hallway while the man escapes down the stairwell that the police used to enter the floor.

It is now 12 minutes since Officer Jill dialed 911 and the police have cornered the shooter in one of the vacant offices. They order the shooter to put down his weapon and exit the office with his hands in the air. The shooter responds with a burst of gunfire, leaving the police no option but to return fire. One minute later, the shooter lies dead and one police officer has a minor wound in his arm.

The police report the situation and the emergency medical responders are advised that it is safe to enter. The EMTs search the offices for wounded persons, while the police alert the building's occupants that the emergency is over.

It has been 15 minutes since Officer Jill dialed 911 and the office workers who were in hiding now open their doors and exit the building. Mercifully, there has been no further loss of life, thanks in part to the training the staff received and the quick actions of the security officer and the police officers.

### The Reality

This story is a fictional account of an active shooter event. The actions depicted are in accord with the recommendations of major law enforcement agencies.

Read the recommendations below and then ask yourself if you would have done anything differently than Officer Jill.

The chances of you ever being involved in an active shooter situation are about the same as being struck by lightning. But, just as you would not stand out in an open field during a lightning storm, you should be prepared to survive in case an active shooter does strike. Train now to survive later.

### Survival Basics

Most active shooter events are over in 10 minutes or less. In order to have the best chance of survival, you must remember the three basics of Run, Hide, Fight as advised by the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

#### Run

If there is an accessible escape path, attempt to evacuate the premises.

Be sure to:

- Warn others not to enter an area where the shooter may be.
- Have an escape route and plan in mind.
- Evacuate regardless of whether others agree to follow.
- Leave your belongings behind.
- Help others escape, if possible.
- Prevent individuals from entering an area where the active shooter may be.
- Keep your hands visible.
- Follow the instructions of any police officers.
- Do not attempt to move wounded people.
- Call 911 when it is safe to do so.

#### Hide

If safe evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide where the active shooter is less likely to find you.

Your hiding place should:

- Be out of the active shooter's view.
- Provide protection if shots are fired in your direction.
- Not trap you or restrict your options for movement.

You should:

- Lock the door and blockade it with heavy furniture.
- Close, cover and move away from windows.
- Silence your cell phone and/or pager. (Even the vibration setting can give away your position.)
- Hide behind large items (i.e., cabinets, desks).
- Remain quiet.

#### Fight

As an absolute last resort, and only when your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter:

- Act as aggressively as possible against him/her.
- Throw items and improvise weapons.
- Yell.
- Commit to your actions.

#### Conclusion

Following the advice in this article is no guarantee of safety, but it can increase your chances of surviving an active shooter event. Securitas USA's Learning Management System (LMS) courses such as "Northeast Region's Shots Fired: When Lightning Strikes" and "Workplace Violence" can help you learn more about active shooter survival and workplace violence. The Federal Emergency Management Administration also offers a free, online course on dealing with an Active Shooter event. You can access this course through this FEMA website address: [www.training.fema.gov](http://www.training.fema.gov) ■