

CULTURAL PROPERTIES COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREPARING MUSEUMS FOR ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATIONS

None of us likes to think that our museum could experience an active shooter incident; nevertheless, if the museum has ever mounted a controversial exhibit; taken a stand on a controversial issue; had a disgruntled employee, volunteer, or visitor; or if anyone sees the museum as a local, state or national symbol, it could be a target. The reasons why an individual museum might be targeted are limited only by the imagination, perceptions, or fantasies of the potential shooter, and just as the museum's emergency plan should include a well thought out plan for fires or other emergencies, the plan should include how to respond to an active shooter incident. In *Active Shooter How to Respond*, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) points out that, "Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. Typically, the immediate deployment of law enforcement is required to stop the shooting and mitigate harm to victims. Because active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes, before law enforcement arrives on the scene, individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation." DHS advises that the most effective strategy is to evacuate, hide out, and take action, in that order. The challenge for museums is that most visitors, and perhaps some employees and volunteers, are unfamiliar with the physical layout of the building; access control systems and other security arrangements can limit egress options; and taking refuge in rooms or offices behind locked doors may not be an option in exhibit areas that are designed to be open inviting spaces. In large museums, well trained security officers can help coordinate an evacuation, but since most museum security officers are unarmed and not equipped to engage an active shooter, they need to evacuate with other staff and visitors. In small museums, where employees or volunteers often serve double duty as docents and security, employees and volunteers need to be trained to do what they can to coordinate an evacuation without increasing their own risk.

The ASIS International Cultural Properties Council and the American Association of Museum's Museum Association Security Committee (AAM/MASC) believe the key elements museums should have in place to respond effectively to active shooter situations are a staff that is trained to take notice of what is going on around them and to respond proactively to unusual situations or activities combined with an emergency plan that provides for rapid identification of the threat, immediate notification of visitors and employees, and a carefully thought out and well rehearsed evacuation plan to direct occupants away from the threat. All staff members, not just security officers, need to be constantly on alert for suspicious or abnormal activity and need to feel empowered to investigate and to take proactive steps when something seems amiss. Inevitably, after an incident occurs one or more of the survivors tells the investigating officers that they sensed or saw something was wrong, but they were either unsure how to respond or they were reluctant to upset anyone. Therefore, a key element in the museum's training for employees and volunteers should be how to recognize and respond to unusual behaviors, conditions, or situations, and training should emphasize situational awareness, how to spot furtive or aggressive behaviors, and techniques for responding in a controlled non-threatening manner. Finally, the museum's management must be ready to support employees and volunteers who respond to such conditions in accordance with their training.

The Cultural Properties Council and MASC suggest all museums should consider the following points to be prepared for an active shooter incident.

1. Conduct a risk assessment that includes the following:
 - Potential points of entry. [Remember, the assailant could be a former or current employee with a grudge, so include an evaluation of how the institution retrieves keys, access cards,

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ID cards, and uniforms from employees who leave the institution and how the security department or other employees who have access control responsibilities in the museum know when someone leaves the museum's employ, particularly when the parting is contentious.]

- Potential means and methods for the shooter to move around undetected inside the building (e.g., elevators, stairways, etc.).
 - Potential means and methods for isolating the shooter in a section, wing, or area of the museum or, conversely, for isolating museum staff and visitors from the shooter.
 - Exit paths away from each potential point of entry and their exit discharge areas. (Do the potential exits discharge into enclosed areas that could become a trap or that are close enough to the building for the shooter to continue to be a threat?).
 - Methods available to identify and communicate the threat to visitors and staff, including CCTV, radios, fire alarm or mass notification systems, public address systems, short to the point text or email blasts to staff, etc.
 - Potential areas of refuge and any obstacles to their use, such as access control systems, physical barriers, etc.
 - Means and methods to notify law enforcement.
 - Means and methods to create conditions that enable a safe tactical response by law enforcement; including giving them access and information about the building so that when you say the shooter is in a particular gallery they know what you mean.
2. Update the emergency evacuation plan based on the results of the risk assessment.
 3. Conduct training for all employees and volunteers on the museum's emergency evacuation procedures with particular emphasis on making sure every person who works in the museum is thoroughly familiar with every way out of the building, including those that go through normally restricted areas, loading docks, or other limited use exit ways.
 4. Train every employee and volunteer how to activate manual fire alarm pull stations and what the alarm sounds like. Although it may not be the ideal solution, one way to alert visitors and employees that there is a threat, to start the building evacuation, to open delayed egress exit doors, and to alert someone outside of the building that there is a serious problem may be for the first person who recognizes the threat to activate the fire alarm system. This is particularly true in museums that do not have trained security officers, CCTV, panic alarms, public address systems, two way radios, direct communications with law enforcement, or other means for communicating the threat.
 5. Finally, and most important, conduct unscheduled realistic evacuation drills on a regular basis and include scenarios where hazards or conditions cut off one or more of the building's main entrances so staff is forced to use and to direct visitors to alternate exits to avoid a threat.

The blinding speed of an active shooter situation combined with the shock, fear, and confusion that inevitably follow will challenge the most carefully developed and thoroughly rehearsed plan; however, experience shows that planning, training, and practice can make a positive difference.