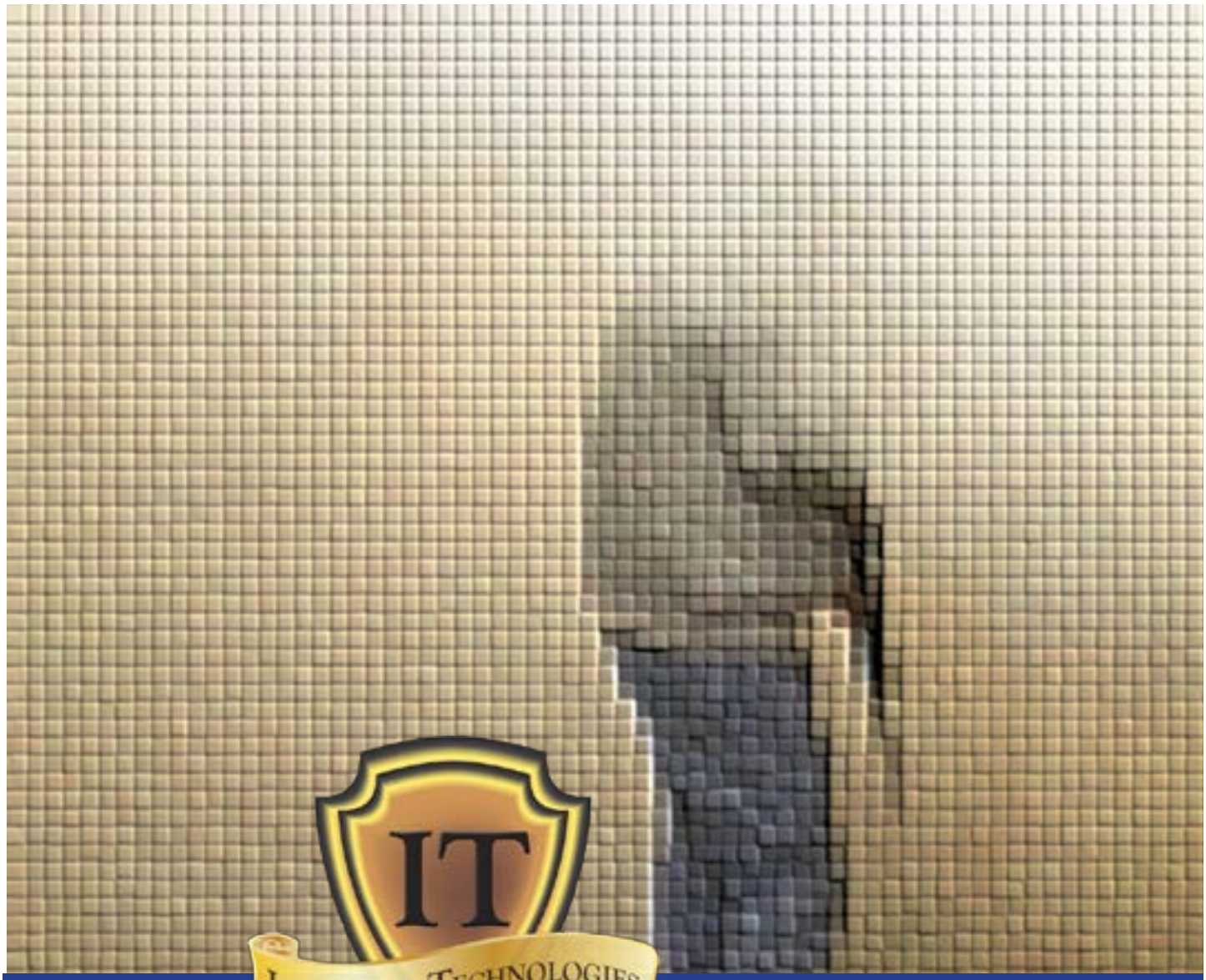
ACTIVE SHOOTER MITIGATION

A ROADMAP TO SUCCESS



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Introduction

Over the past 15 years, we have seen an ever-increasing frequency of violent intrusions into occupied buildings that are either unprotected or under protected and ill-prepared to deal with the violent incident. These events have been characterized as active shooter events since the Columbine High School attack in 1999. (Fox, 2014) The term active shooter, as described by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), is an individual or individuals that actively engage in killing, by firearm, people in a confined and populated area. (Michael E. Buerger Ph.D., 2010)

Since the tragic events of Columbine High School, more attention has been paid to these and similar events as the death and casualty tolls increase. From 2000 to 2010, there have been approximately 84 events in various structures -- including educational facilities, businesses and government facilities -- that meet the definition. (J. Peter Blair, 2013) Business locations were the most frequently attacked (37%), followed closely by educational facilities (34%). (J. Peter Blair, 2013) In nearly half (49%) of these events, the attack ended prior to law enforcement's arrival. That number seems to have increased in the last three years. Although the focus of most media attention and public interest appears to be on the events involving firearms, several violent intrusions in recent years have involved knife attacks. Our focus, as public safety professionals, needs to be broader than the events garnering the most media attention.

As a result of many factors, statistics and reports have shown that pre-event prevention has had a minimal impact to date. The lack of effective prevention stems from many societal factors including Constitutional constraints, patient privacy laws and regulations, and fear of civil litigation, among others. Because of such complexities and societal divide over proposed solutions, the goal of preventing violent intrusions seems to be less and less obtainable.

As we view the violent intrusion incidents event closer, we find that the vulnerable timeframes associated with these events is from event initiation (zero minutes) to 11 minutes. (Hubbard, 2012) In the overwhelming amount of cases studied, the most fatalities and injuries occurred in this timeframe. (Hubbard, 2012) In these cases, armed response arrival occurred from 4 minutes to 20 minutes from the initiation of the 911 system. (Hubbard, 2012) Not only is it difficult to find workable prevention strategies for these events, but, when they do happen, there is little time to act where lives could be saved and injuries be prevented.

These factors, coupled with a perceived notion that adolescent and young adult violence is on the increase (CDC, 2013), show that we must focus more intently on event mitigation in the critical first minutes of the event. This is not to say that we should abandon prevention effort – they remain important to this effort – but a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the staggering loss of life from violent intrusions calls for both prevention and mitigation efforts.

Many experts have advocated many opinions on how to stop these events including:

- Allowing friends and relatives of at-risk individuals to provide confidential tips to law enforcement without consequences.
- Arming teachers and/or administrators in educational facilities.
- Placing armed guards at the entry points of schools, government facilities, and businesses.
- Psychological profiling performed by trained teachers or employees to identify individuals at risk for violence.
- Locating metal detectors at entry points of at-risk structures.

Total and complete prevention of mass killing in high occupancy facilities is, for many reasons, an unrealistic approach. In recent history, there has been a great deal of success in preventing drunk driving, for example, and those efforts are to be lauded and continued as lifesaving measures. Yet, the fact remains, innocent people are continuing to die on our roads every day at the hands of drunk drivers. While preventing violent intrusion

events will work in some cases, total or near total prevention is not a viable option. Several cases have been written about that prove our inability to identify the perpetrators of these mass killing before their deadly actions. Identifying them before they committed the offense was hindered by the perception that speaking out to someone would have been viewed as hurtful to the individual or individuals. (Danbury, 2013)

In order for us to be better prepared, and even begin to lower the death toll from violent intrusion events, we must take a similar approach to mass killings as we have to reporting child abuse. Just a few decades ago, child abuse was never reported until it was too late. As events of fatal child abuse escalated, laws were enacted to mandate reporting by caregivers, medical professionals, and others. This allowed communities and stakeholder groups to continue their prevention efforts, but it also mitigated the damage from unreported child abuse by allowing those encountering the child to report the abuse without negative consequences. If we intend to make a dent in these events, we must change our approach to this problem. In this article we will provide some insight into comprehensive protective strategies to mitigate most if not all of the damage associated with active shooter and violent intrusion events in those critical first minutes of the incident.

Total Prevention Unrealistic

A law passed in 1996 known as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) has had a profound effect on our ability to obtain critical pre-event information from the healthcare community. I am not completely sure of some of the reasons given for failing to provide law enforcement or administrators with credible pertinent threat information about an individual's community threat. Let us just say some of the reasons for withholding information are legitimate and some are not. Either way the perceived or real understanding of HIPPA as it relates to critical threats on life is a fundamental flaw in our ability to address the growing crisis.

An additional obstacle to our ability to receive pre-event warning and therefore address the prevention matrix is the Constitutional rights issue. Although most of us agree this is a legitimate protection afforded everyone, it is none-the-less an obstacle in obtaining information to further our ability to prevent these events. It is one obstacle we will not change for good reason. Although some may advocate for mass collection of data on individuals that *may* present a threat, doing so is just not in the cards. We must understand that this obstacle is real and make the necessary adjustments that we cannot and probably will not be able to prevent these events to, dare I say, 50%.

Many people that have information about a potential threat just won't say anything for a host of reasons -- some are family loyalty or stigmas that may be in play and others are friends unwilling to make a friend look bad. Either way, it has a profound effect on prevention. In the Adam Lanza case (Sandy Hook Shooter), the custodial parent provided the means to carry out the attack even though she knew the perpetrator had potential for carrying out such an event. No pre-event information was received. Failure to provide information is critical in our understanding why prevention to a certain degree is unachievable.

Committing to Incident Mitigation

Three fundamental issues that are critical to a commitment to mitigation strategies for violent intrusions in occupied facilities:

1. Obtaining effective and regular training and conducting semi-annual drills to demonstrate learned concepts;
2. Exploiting technology through engineering/technology systems in at-risk facilities; and
3. Providing adequate safety/security budgeting.

How did we basically eliminate school fire fatalities in the 1950s and 1960s? Fire drills, evacuation plans, and fire alarms were mandated! Did that combination of training, exercises reinforcing training, and engineering controls work? Yes it did, to 100% effectiveness. As Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman (US Army Ret.) wrote after the Sandy Hook Elementary School attack, why aren't we applying the same approach to active shooter events that we did to school fires? (Grossman 2012)

If we have any hope at effective mitigation, there must be elimination of the mentality that drills are a waste of time or that they scare people. The benefit for the at-risk population is to great to avoid these activities based on these types of arguments. Two drills a year, one with employees/students present and one with law enforcement response with staff and managers is essential to a mitigation strategy. The at-risk and administrative personnel must be convinced that if you want to survive and event you must practice, as uncomfortable as it may be.

Training has increased and shown some tangible results. On the big scale it is still lacking in scope, time, and commitment. The Federal Government has provided some training programs and practices (DHS Active Shooter Training and the DOJ Run, Hide Fight programs). Many private companies and individuals provide great training opportunities. The one thing we hear often is, "where am I supposed to find the time to re-certify at my vocation and take training on something that will probably not happen here?" Additionally, we have heard from educators that this type of training and realistic drills scare our personnel. While that thought process may be true and a factor, it does create an obstacle to event mitigation. The question we as public safety professionals must address, how can we make the training more time efficient and effective to mitigation. When we get past the "it won't happen here" mentality, the interest in the training will increase, we must be prepared to offer quality, effective mitigation training.

Engineering Controls

The second line of defense against the mass killings is engineering controls. In order to provide real-time protection to the occupants, there must be adequate systems and barriers in place that make access to victims by an attacker as difficult as the engineering will allow within appropriate financial and logistical boundaries. Does that mean an armed lock-down impenetrable facility? No. It means the design and installation of systems and controls that meet the needs of the facility and at-risk occupants. Access control, limited low-level window access, an immediate alarm system activation station throughout the facility, an immediate saferoom lockdown system, immediate automated notification to responders and some sort of access limiting medium that stops the attacker(s) from advancing or identifying potential targets. To accomplish this, we start with new construction as we did with fire safety systems. The engineering and architectural communities must work together. Cost effective systems exist. Administrators of businesses and schools must be open-minded and forward-thinking to emerging technologies in the field of violent intrusion mitigation. If we begin to outfit facilities now with these protective systems, at some point we will provide an environment in which an attacker is unable to succeed.

Many companies and schools have adopted access control and video surveillance systems to address the threat of violent intrusions. Access control is but one layer of protection. If the building is set up similar to Sandy Hook Elementary School (glass panes on both sides of the door) it can be easily breached as the case in Newton, Connecticut. (Danbury, 2013) Having an armed school security force or resource officer is another layer of defense, but his or her effectiveness will be limited to the access point at which they are stationed unless they have access to a facility-wide surveillance system. Security and resource officers can also be disabled in the attack and even be targeted in planned attacks. While they are a valuable tool in the prevention and mitigation toolbox, they should not be the only mitigation tactic in place.

Victim-initiated Mitigation

Victim-initiated mitigation is an extremely effective means of reducing the harm caused by violent intrusions. (Hubbard, 2012) A comprehensive system consists of initiation stations, facility-wide audible and visual alarms, immediate automated lock-down of all occupied rooms, automated notification and video feed to responding authorities, and an intruder visibility reducing medium to limit the intruders ability to identify targets or move through the facility. Establishing automated saferooms for offices and classrooms offers the most effective means of protecting occupants. If in the initial seconds of the attack, rooms are automatically locked to prevent entry and allow only exit, occupants will have a far greater chance of survival.

Technologies exist to provide effective systems and solutions in addressing these events, in both new construction and existing facilities. Working with engineers, architects, and public safety professionals, viable technical solutions for violent attack mitigation is achievable. (Hubbard, 2012) Failing to use those technologies is an opportunity missed – one where lives could be saved.

Budgeting for Mitigation Efforts

Money to address the mitigation of these events is often the largest obstacle to success. We often hear from school administrators, what do I have to give up to provide this protection? Another response is the risk/benefit matrix. Are the dollars spent on the benefit worth the real risk that exists? What we do know is that failing to address this growing threat does nothing to mitigate that threat/risk. Once again, we are back to, "it won't happen here," until it happens here. The cost in lives and tragedy is difficult to measure when these events strike. In many

cases funding these strategies and programs are less than 3% of the operational and/or capital budget.

In order for there to be a successful effective mitigation strategy, funds must be placed toward victim-initiated mitigation, just as funds were placed for those systems in effectively eliminating educational facility fire fatalities. (Fleming, 1950) Evidence indicates that installing a victim-initiated mitigation system is a far more effective and prudent use of dollars to mitigate deadly attacks in high-occupancy facilities. (Hubbard, 2012) Those systems, when properly engineered and installed, increase the survivability potential exponentially for the targeted victims. (Hubbard, 2012)

A Standardized Approach

There are many opinions on what should be done to mitigate the events, and those opinions are as varied as the people presenting them. Every different solution opinion has its benefits and drawbacks. The frustrating part for the people in at-risk facilities is that they don't know what message is the best message.

Establishing a standard approach matrix of accepted practices and policies would greatly increase our ability to provide a comprehensive mitigation strategy that would run in parallel to any and all prevention efforts. Incorporating early detection strategies, technological engineering systems, occupant training, and event drills is the most comprehensive means to mitigation. A strategy that focuses on mitigation from zero minute to armed response engagement is the most effective, efficient, and realistic protection that can be implemented to protect vulnerable occupants in high volume occupancies.

Establishing consensus standards for occupancies is the new step in achieving large-scale protection in at-risk facilities. A very similar approach was taken with tackling the fire problem in the United States. As large loss fires began to increase, society attacked the problem with legislation, regulations, the exploiting of technology in protective systems, training, and consensus standards – a potent mix of prevention and mitigation that lowered the death toll from fires. This type of roadmap shows us that it is possible to increase the protection of innocent lives from violent intrusions through prevention and mitigation.

Conclusion

In order for us to be successful at addressing this plague, we must understand that preventing these events is not the only approach, we must incorporate mitigation into our strategy. As time and technology moves on, we must exploit emerging technologies to provide protective systems and practices for students, staff, and employees in these high occupancy facilities that are the targets of mass killers.

The problem is far too important to spin our wheels. The longer solutions are talked about, the more these events cost in lives.

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