

GUIDE



ACTIVE SHOOTER EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

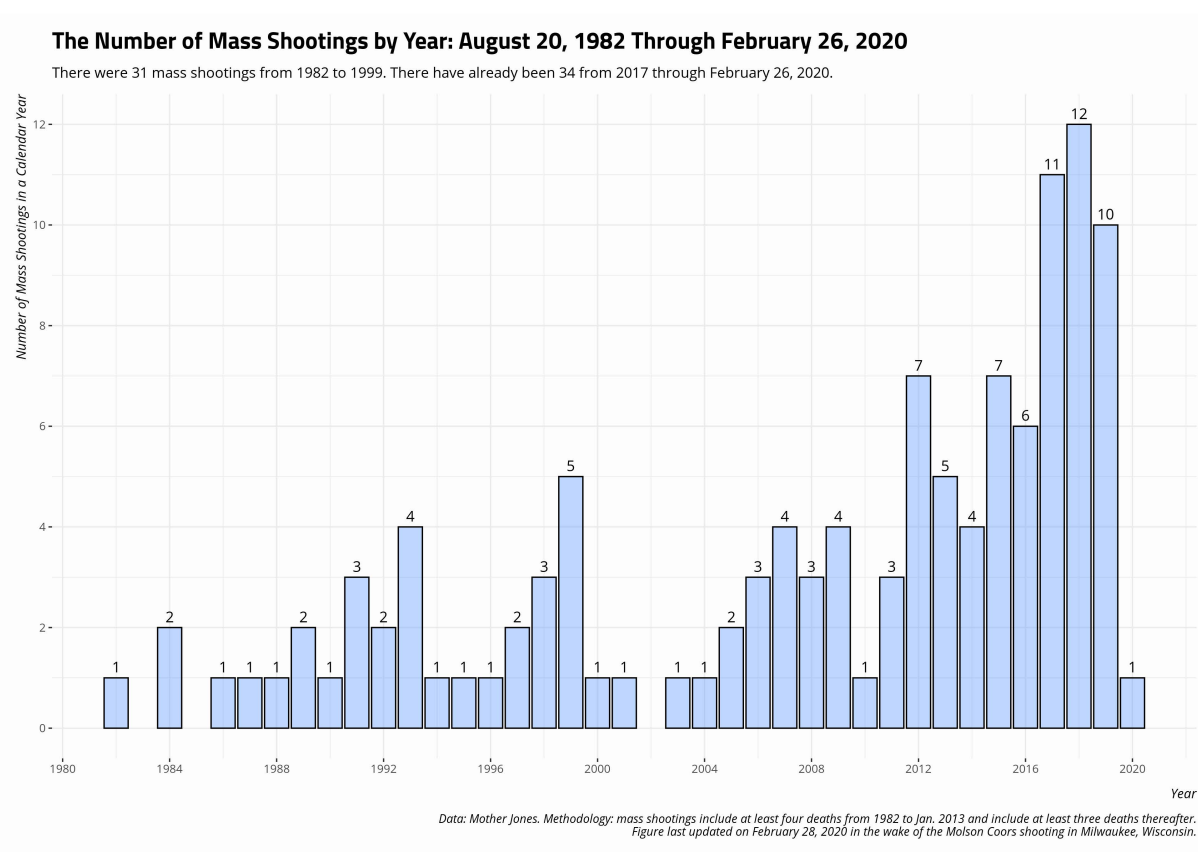
Mindless violence is best counteracted
by mindful planning



PROTECT WHAT MATTERS

Violence has always been a threat to human life, but the rise of mass shootings in America really began in the nineties with Columbine. After the tragedy at Virginia Tech in 2007, campus safety became top of mind for administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and students. Colleges and corporations alike began to realize there was a need for pre-planning and real-time notification during emergencies. They were right — how authorities respond during crises and how prepared they are for a specific kind of crisis, have a significant effect on the outcome.

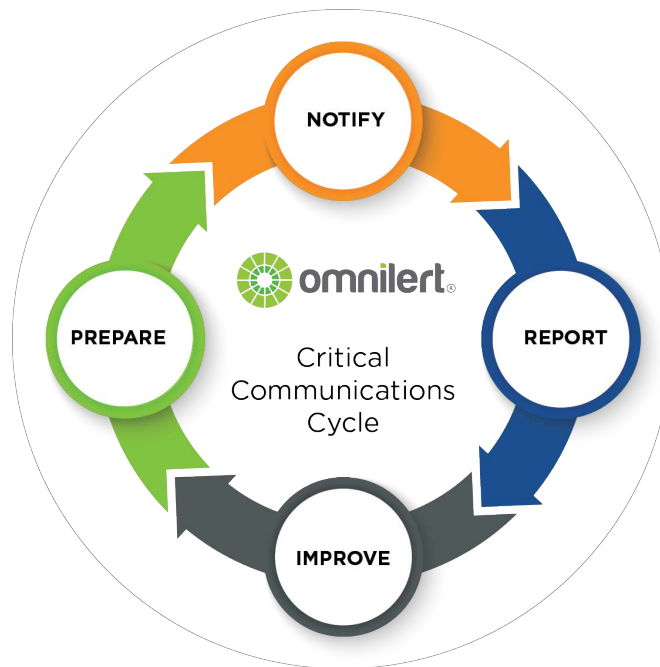
These incidents are not just happening at colleges and schools; they are happening in all types of places of work, play, and worship. The number of people killed in mass shooter attacks has escalated since 2012. Two of the deadliest mass shootings happened in 2017. Over the last decade, there have been 475 people killed and 882 people wounded in America due to mass shootings. Legally, employers must now address the hazard of an aggressive intruder or active shooter who means to do harm to people in work settings.



Although there is usually no way to know when these attacks are coming, or how to prevent them from happening altogether, all organizations can work to better ensure the safety of their employees, students, and visitors through proper preparation, response, and recovery. This is accomplished by developing a broader understanding of the stages of critical incidents and enabling modes of communication that help ensure a more successful outcome.

It's not enough to plan for a potential hazard or crisis; the ability to connect and engage with the impacted community during an incident is paramount. Only through reliable forms of communication can we quickly disperse the critical information that is needed to protect those in our care. This holistic perspective translates to a practical blueprint around which an entire organization can unite, and from which they can deliver a coordinated and well-orchestrated emergency response to an active shooter incident.

The Critical Communications Cycle (CCC) is a blueprint that maps each phase of incident communications to the associated actions required for success in each. In other words, the CCC conveys what actions are needed before, during, and after a crisis.



BEFORE — PREPARE

There are distinct aspects of crisis response that all need to be addressed before an incident. Proper planning and preparation before an active shooter incident occurs ensures a concise response that helps manage the adrenaline and stress that inevitably accompany an emergency of this caliber. Organizations should always look for better ways to prepare for emergencies before they occur. For that reason, they should consider all threats, vulnerabilities, and associated consequences during their active shooter risk assessment.

Conducting an active shooter risk assessment will ensure organizations understand their situation, prioritize their actions, identify and compare options, and effectively allocate their resources. Conducting a thorough assessment is fundamental to protecting lives and avoiding legal liability. While these steps will require investment of time and effort, the payoff in increased preparedness will be well worth it.

When the moment comes and your organization needs to take action, you will know that your team did everything possible to ensure a favorable outcome. By laying the groundwork for emergency response before an emergency ever transpires, the critical moments during an incident can be spent more optimally — in an effort to protect your people.

KNOW WHO'S ON YOUR TEAM

It is important to assemble a Critical Communications Team (CCT) that will take the lead in developing and delivering critical communications when a sudden emergency event occurs. Each CCT should include at least one person from an authoritative level of the organization. The emergency response plan should also include the following important department heads:

- Administration
- Safety Department
- Human Resources and / or Student Affairs
- Public Relations
- Facilities Department
- IT Department
- Legal Representation
- Local Law Enforcement and First Responders

Having the right people participate in the planning is crucial. You'll need members who not only have the confidence and steadiness to help with planning but who are also capable of taking complete charge when quick decisions need to be made. The clarification of the roles and responsibilities of CCT members is an important element during this preparatory stage.

Depending on what makes sense for your organization's unique needs, you should include a range of people from both internal and external communities. It is highly recommended that you develop formalized relationships, or memorandums of understanding, with local law enforcement and first responders, and have them participate in every step of your active shooter planning, response, and recovery.

KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

A well-coordinated response to an emergency involves establishing a plan with clear guidelines. During this step, try to determine all possible active shooter scenarios you might encounter, and have the appropriate communication defined to deliver to employees, the public, students, customers, and other stakeholders. Who on the CCT will be made aware of an active shooter emergency, and how? Choosing someone with a sense of urgency and a calm nature is always better than just picking the highest person on the totem pole to deliver an organization's notification during a crisis. Will the designated team member(s) be reached through an emergency phone number? Will they receive an SMS tip or hear gunshots? Which of these should warrant an emergency notification? Who will their backups be in case they are not available or are off-site? How and where will they meet? Who makes the decision to send out any emergency notifications?

These are all questions that need to be deeply considered. The more time and effort a team puts into this stage, the more effective their response will be. By meticulously walking through every plausible outcome and viewing the situation through different lenses, you may realize that different groups within your organization require different information. They may also have different communication preferences.

At a school, for instance, staff would likely need information about securing a room, in addition to the general notification that is sent to students about sheltering in place. Considering the emergency from the perspective of groups within your community is the key to reaching them when reaching them matters most. With human life potentially hanging in the balance, the significance of defining and documenting an emergency response plan cannot be overlooked.

KNOW WHAT TO SAY, AND HOW TO SAY IT

Laying the groundwork for an effective emergency response involves knowing what you will say. Emergency notifications should be crafted in advance so that if and when an active shooter incident does occur, the CCT doesn't lose time trying to compose a message under extreme duress. The initial message should be scripted in advance, and in a way that provides just enough detail, awareness, and direction to the community.

When crafting your messages, use language that is calm, clear, and concise. Decide which of your CCT members will be responsible for sending the notifications when a crisis occurs, as well as how the notifications will be deployed. Consider all possible avenues of communication — emails, text messaging, phone calls, social media, and so forth. However, it is important to realize that no single kind of technology has 100 percent reach.

That poses a challenge, but it is still critical to define performance standards to the best of the team's ability. This includes discussing (and re-discussing) what you want the delivery success rate to be, the right time to initiate each notification, and when it's time to engage external parties. No emergency is the same, so you need to have a response plan that can adapt to new situations and circumstances. This means your approach should reflect the always-evolving reality by constantly making improvements to your procedures.

Ensure that messages sent to law enforcement and other first responders have the kind of information — and the right language — to allow them to better understand how to respond.

Once your team agrees on a plan, the execution of the plan can be automated through Scenarios®. This preconfigured series of actions can be initiated with one click from the web, mobile app, or via an external trigger based on each of the possible situations you have defined. Scenarios can also be configured to enable instant unified command for the CCT to collaborate on the emergency response.

Trying to orchestrate all of these actions under duress — once an active shooter incident has been confirmed — is nerve-wracking. On the other hand, if the CCT decides on the correct series of actions prior to the incident, adheres to the well-defined procedures they put in place, and automates those procedures through technology, what once took 20 minutes can happen in less than 2 seconds.

Below is an example of how, for instance, an organization can use predefined communications to initiate an immediate response to an active shooter:



Having all the elements in place before an emergency ever transpires enables a quick response. Putting together a logical set of actions in advance allows you to set them into motion at the touch of a button.

As was said before, it's also important to realize that no single technology has 100 percent reach. The best way to approach touching everyone is to provide redundancy by applying multiple channels in your notification. You can and should use a variety of platforms when communicating your message, but be aware that different platforms have different capabilities and constraints. For instance, making sure the same message can reach both a tablet device and an office phone is essential when using a multimodal approach to notification.

KNOW HOW TO RESPOND

The CCT must apply their knowledge in the form of frequent testing and drills to ensure that they are well-prepared to cope with a real emergency. Training exercises provide a practical way to assess the outcomes of the emergency response plan, discover any gaps in the planning, decide what needs to be done differently, and identify any additional training that is required moving forward. In order to hone the precision and skill of your team, it is recommended that you regularly engage in both table-top and full-scale exercises.

Table-Top Exercises are those in which team members participate in a facilitated execution and analysis of the crisis communications plan and review the process in a stress-free, pressure-free environment. Providing the necessary training for all employees is important to the success of this exercise. Training should include “Run, Hide, Fight” to prepare the entire organization. Individuals involved in the emergency response plan should receive additional training in how to carry out their responsibilities. The organization should also involve neighboring organizations, business affiliates, and first responders in their training.

Full-Scale Exercises incorporate all stakeholders in the crisis communications plan in an “all-hands-on-deck” drill to simulate responding to an incident. Evaluating the effectiveness of plans involves a combination of training events and exercises to determine whether the goals, objectives, decisions, actions, and timing outlined in the plan led to a successful response. Conducting regular exercises helps organizations discover resource gaps, develop individual performance, improve coordination with local, state, and federal partners, and identify opportunities for improvement.

Remember, establishing policies, creating processes, predefining response communications and actions, and providing training on how to deploy the emergency response is of utmost importance. The plan and methods of communication need to be promoted as well so all stakeholders are aware of the plan and what to expect when an alert happens. Only then can you ensure a swift and successful response.

DURING — NOTIFY & REPORT

No one ever wants to experience an active shooter crisis. It is a frightening situation, so it is all too easy to avoid thinking about. However, if we intend to protect human life during a shooting, we have to define and document the necessary procedures. That way, when an incident does occur, your team is prepared to handle it in a calm and collected fashion.

NOTIFY

Once an incident has been reported and the situation has been confirmed, your crisis communications plan is set into motion. It is critical to communicate with people in ways specific to them. For example, while one group of people may be better reached through email, another group is best reached through text message.



The image shows a vertical card with a dark grey top section containing a white line-art icon of a handgun inside a circle. Below this is a green horizontal bar with the text "ACTIVE SHOOTER" in white. The bottom section is light grey and contains a bulleted list of instructions.

ACTIVE SHOOTER

- Run, Hide, or Fight!
- If outdoors, run away from gunshots and find a place of safety.
- If you are in a classroom or office, stay there and secure the doors.
- Turn off the lights and silence your phone.
- Form barricades, if possible, and hide.
- Stay put until police officers give further instructions.
- As a last resort, fight!

There will always be cases in which some individuals are difficult to contact. The best way to ensure maximum reach is to incorporate multiple channels into the emergency response. That is to say, a notification should be sent to a range of different endpoints; it should be receivable by a range of different types of platforms.

The CCT should consider who is on the receiving end of messages and plan accordingly. You can and should use a variety of endpoints when communicating your message, but be aware that different endpoints have different capabilities and constraints. There are two types of endpoints for notifications:

Personal Notifications — messages sent to individuals via their personal devices:

- SMS (text messages)
- Phone calls (voice)
- Email
- Mobile notifications (push messages)

Mass Notifications — information broadcasted to widely accessible communications:

- Website
- Social Media
- PA Systems
- Digital Signs
- Televisions
- LED Boards

As a best practice, initial messages can be initiated through Scenarios. These first messages provide the most fundamental alert information. More detailed, event-specific information may follow.

MOBILIZE

It is critical to have the support of first responders during an incident. Being able to summon them quickly is vital to the outcome of an active shooter emergency. If you incorporate internal and external first responders into your emergency response, they can be included in Scenarios. As a result, they are immediately notified once an incident occurs. Resources to mobilize during the commencement of an active shooter incident include local law enforcement, ambulances and local hospitals, federal law enforcement, internal security or safety teams, and even fire and rescue.

Figure 1 Survey of Emergency Notification Administrators



This is an extremely critical part of an emergency situation, and yet a recent survey of emergency response administrators revealed that it is all too often overlooked. Only slightly more than half of administrators had memorandums of understanding in place with first responders. This is unfortunate because every single second counts in an active shooter incident. An ambulance arriving even one minute sooner can be the difference between life and death.

COLLABORATE

As the incident is confirmed, the CCT will need to determine next steps. It becomes essential that they are able to quickly pull together, collaborate, and assess the situation. As a best practice, it is recommended that a team creates a reservation-less telephone conference bridge and a web conferencing meeting that is recurring or instantly engageable. This virtual hub becomes the unified point of command. The link to the web conference meeting can be included in the outbound message along with the telephone conference information. Most smartphones will allow the recipient to click on the link to initiate the web conference session.

This instant connection allows the sharing of live video feeds, maps, and other relevant data that will help the team make informed decisions. As the active shooter incident unfolds, there will be feedback from the community providing ground-level insights. These may warrant additional decisions, communications, or actions. Being able to monitor feedback as the event happens can be a huge advantage. For instance, inbound messages allow your community to reply to notification messages or generate new direct messages via other means. This information can provide thousands of eyes and ears to help inform key decision-makers.

Social media can serve a similar purpose, although in this more public forum, this can actually pose an issue. It is easy for individuals to create their own, perceived storyline and use social media to share their potentially inaccurate information with the world. For that reason, social media is better geared toward keeping the public informed of an event. If there is an information vacuum regarding what's happening within your organization, you want to be the one to fill it — or someone else will.

When an active shooter emergency occurs, the need to communicate is immediate. The public will seek information. Employees, visitors, and customers will want to know how they will be impacted and what they should do. Local government officials will want to know what is going on in their community. Families will be concerned. Using preplanned and predefined communications will be the key advantage in communicating quickly and accurately during the emergency.

AFTER — IMPROVE

Recovery from an active shooter scenario will likely involve an entire community. It may include hospitals, grief counselors, lawyers, employee assistance, and other assistance. When the incident has been resolved, there will be an abundance of data and practical experiences that need to be reviewed in order to improve the crisis communications plan and response for the future.

The process of collecting data and reviewing these reports will help you to assess how the incident unfolded, how effectively the response was executed, and how many of the notifications were received. With this new information you can now go back and refine the crisis communications response accordingly.

Additional insights can be gathered by incorporating information from a post-incident survey that includes feedback from your team, first responders, and the community. You should schedule a meeting with your CCT to review the incident and the actions in detail. The improvements derived from the post-incident analysis should be documented and incorporated into your revised plan. You can also analyze feedback on social media. Don't be afraid to ask for suggestions from those who were active or vocal. They may have input that will help improve your emergency response plan.

With the aggregate data in hand, take a critical look at your plan. Determine which parts worked, which didn't, and what needs to be improved. For example, you may realize that key people were left out when it came to the initial notification, or the delivery success rate wasn't as high as anticipated. Perhaps you will need to expand the number and types of endpoints you are distributing notifications to, in order to extend your reach and ensure redundancy. This post-crisis recovery plan is the opportune time to look for strategies that enhance the organization's ability to respond to crises.

Your plan is never going to fit the actual emergency perfectly, but it's important to have it as close to perfect as possible. Focus on the continuous improvement of your plan as you gain experience and encounter new situations. Regular updates are an essential element of any critical communications planning. Do regular exercises to test your response tools and team so that when a crisis does occur, you'll be ready.

CONCLUSION

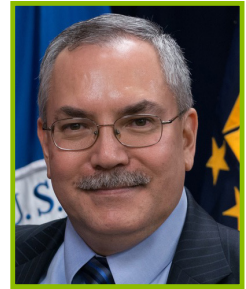
To protect the people that we care about from violence, we must prepare for what we hope never happens. This not only helps to ensure safety, but it will keep everyone on the same page when communication matters most. It starts with having an effective plan. Having an understanding of the Critical Communication Cycle is the key to crafting a plan that works. To better ensure the plan works, it needs a system around it that includes people and technology.

If a team thinks through all plausible incidents and outlines a response to each, they will be much better prepared to handle them. And while it's true that no plan will fit the real situation perfectly, having one in place mitigates the potential for loss of life. The emergency response should be further honed through regular training and testing, as well as post-crisis analysis. Data can be aggregated from numerous sources and used to review how the incident unfolded, how effectively the response was executed, and how well the communications operated. These practical experiences can help create a stronger, revised plan that can be further tested through drills.

But what really determines the success of an emergency response plan is the speed and reliability of communication. For that reason, nothing is faster or more trustworthy than automated technology like Scenarios. With Scenarios, you have your organization's best interest in mind. With Scenarios, you're empowered to protect what matters most.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bob Jensen brings more than 34 years of experience across a broad spectrum of assignments both inside and outside of the U.S. Government, most recently as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, where he ensured U.S. government communication efforts had the effect and outcomes needed to save lives, maintain public confidence, and address complex international situations. He also provided oversight and input to risk assessments and strategy development for U.S. national security issues including cybersecurity, natural disasters, pandemics, counter-proliferation, and counterterrorism.



He led the U.S. government on-the-ground crisis communications efforts after the massive earthquake in Haiti, for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill response, and for 30 major disasters in the U.S. for FEMA including Hurricane Sandy.

Jensen also served as a spokesman for the White House's National Security Council as well as for the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and led on the ground efforts to assess and improve coalition strategic communication effectiveness in Iraq and Afghanistan during four combat zone tours.

A Fulbright Program alumnus and an International Advisory Committee member for the Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety at the University of Melbourne, he has been a keynote speaker at conferences in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.

Frank McCathran has built his career in developing and implementing enterprise solutions, policies, and guidance to help organizations improve safety, enhance operational efficiencies, and mitigate risk.

He has spent the past two decades overseeing business strategies for alerting solutions used by thousands of educational institutions, corporate campuses, public venues, recreational facilities, and professional sports organizations.



Frank's passion for life safety extends into his personal life as he volunteers his time to public and private organizations with the mission of providing life safety, preparedness, and awareness information to the public. Coming from a long family line of law enforcement officials dating back to the Civil War, having the opportunity to help make first responders and safety leaders more successful is an inherited passion.

Frank graduated from Frostburg State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and Justice Studies. He also earned his Master of Education degree in Interdisciplinary Studies at Frostburg.

When the unplanned occurs, launch pre-planned communications.

Contact Omnilert:

T: 800.256.9264 • www.omnilert.com