

# Active Shooter School Safety Considerations

*By Deputy John Williams*  
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

“It’ll be like the LA Riots, the Oklahoma Bombing, WWII, Vietnam, Duke and Doom all mixed together...I want to leave a lasting impression on the world...if by some weird as shit luck me and V survive...then we will hijack a hell of a lot of bombs and crash a plane into NYC.”

Excerpts from Eric Harris Diary  
Columbine High School Gunman

This presentation deals with how school staff can work with law enforcement to better prevent, prepare, and respond to a active shooter incident.

Lessons learned, key terms, and important definitions will be discussed as well as the crisis response box, lockdown, and evacuation procedures.

# Definitions

**Active Shooter:** A suspect who's activity is immediately causing death and serious bodily injury. The activity is not contained and there is immediate risk of death and serious injury to potential victims.

**Barricaded Suspect:** A suspect who's in a position of advantage, usually barricaded in a room or a building and is armed and has displayed violence. May or may not be holding hostages and there is no indication that the subject's activity is immediately causing death or serious bodily injury.

**Traditional Deployment:** A tactical concept where Officers maintain a secure perimeter around a life threatening armed suspect situation and wait until specially trained units (S.E.B., S.W.A.T., etc.) arrive at the scene to finally intervene.

**Rapid Deployment:** The swift and immediate deployment of law enforcement personnel to **on-going**, life threatening situations where delayed deployment could otherwise result in death or great bodily injury to innocent persons.

**Dynamic Situation:** The situation is evolving very rapidly along with the suspect's action. **Example: The shooter is moving and shooting.**

**Static Situation:** The situation is not evolving or in motion. The suspect appears to be contained. **Example: The suspect is barricaded in a room.**



# The ACTIVE SHOOTER

## Commonalities & Lessons Learned

- Active shooter incidents are often spontaneous
- Suspects behavior was unpredictable
- Pre-incident signs existed in school incidents
- Incidents occur in a target rich environment
- A tactical intervention was too late
- Multi-jurisdictional response issues were present
- Incidents occurred in a “target rich” environment
- Suspects usually do not have a escape plan
- 9 out of 10 active shooters are suicidal
- Average age for a school shooter is 14.5 years old
- Suspects are mentally deranged or acting in a diminished mental capacity
- Mass murder is most often the goal rather than other criminal conduct, such as robbery
- Most active shooter incidents are over within 10 minutes or less
- Multiple weapons and ammunition are often involved
- First responders often are outgunned and ill-equipped
- Police officers often did not have proper training
- Expect carnage and complete chaos, noise, confusion, alarms with frightened people running and hiding and unwilling to respond to your directions
- A “traditional” police contain and negotiate tactic does not work...tactical intervention is needed



# The Post Shooting Event

## *Incident Management (NIMS)*

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a nationally recognized emergency operations plan that is adapted for large critical incidents where multi-agency response is required. NIMS facilitates priority-setting, interagency cooperation and the efficient flow of resources and information. NIMS allows law enforcement and school staff to respond to any critical incident with better communication and coordination with other responding agencies and organizations.

### Incident Command Post:

Needs to be located in a secure area out of sight & hearing of the incident with staging areas located nearby.

### Staging Areas:

- Tactical Staging Area: Police/SWAT Coordination
- Landing Zone: Police/Fire/Medical Helicopters
- Fire Department Staging Area
- Triage / Medical Staging Area
- News Media Staging Area
- Interview Area – Witness Identification & Interview area.
- Evacuation Site / Relocation Site: Acts as parent and student reunification and release area.
- Psychological services should be offered at this area if available along with any school resources, announcements, and student/victim information.



# Local School Procedures

# A School and Sheriff Partnership

- ✿ Schools and Law Enforcement need to work together and develop realistic school safety plans in response to various threats.
- ✿ They need to conduct joint training sessions and test procedures in a realistic environment.
- ✿ These exercises should be conducted in a realistic environment with maximum sensory overload.
- ✿ A Memorandum of Understanding between local law enforcement and the Schools should be in place to establish procedures to be followed when an incident involving an act of violence takes place so the School Administration will know the plans and tactics the law enforcement will use to resolve the situation.

## Should a School evacuate or lockdown in a Active Shooter Incident?

- ✿ Absent exigent circumstances such as a fire in the immediate area, Schools should call 911 and lockdown. This ultimately will result in less targets for the shooter(s), reduce confusion for arriving officers, help contain the situation, and minimize the chance of an accidental shooting by responding officers.

## Recommended School Lockdown Procedure:

- ✿ **Have a Signal/Code.**
- ✿ **Lock Doors.**
- ✿ **Establish Safe Area.**
- ✿ **Account for Students.**
- ✿ **Do Not Open Door Until Deputies Arrive.**
- ✿ **Communicate.**



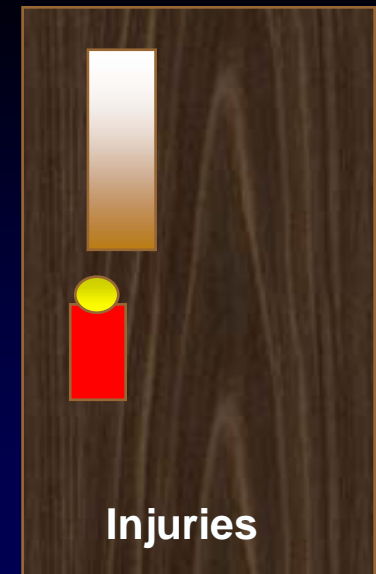


## Classroom Safety Tips:

Once the School is lock down, minus exigent circumstances, no one should leave there position of safety. Classrooms should be locked and students should be instructed to stay quiet, get down low, and sit out of view of the windows. A door or window placard system can be used to help identify your location as being either occupied by non-hostiles (**Green Color**) or in need of medical treatment (**Red Color**). No color indicated would result in law enforcement treating the location as a potential suspect location.

## Rule of thumb for School Staff:

- Call 911 and stay on the phone.
- Meet law enforcement if possible.
- Isolate and evacuate as soon as possible.
- Collect as much information as possible.
- **Don't try to be a hero.**
- Allow police first responders to make contact.



“During a crisis you cannot be guaranteed of communications between a classroom and emergency personnel. Port Huron schools came up with a novel idea to alert SWAT Team members of an injured person in a classroom when communications have been cut off: In every teacher’s closet, there are two sets of three posters, each of a different color. In a life-threatening emergency, all school personnel and students know that they are to tape the red card in the window to alert people on the outside that they need help immediately. A yellow card informs paramedics that there are injuries in the room, but not life threatening. A blue card notifies them that there are no injuries. These cards are also placed under the classroom door into the hallway to notify the SWAT team of the same information.”

**Captain James Carmody**  
Port Huron City Police  
Port Huron, Michigan

# School Safety Tips:

## Crisis Response Box

The purpose of the Crisis Response Box is to quickly locate and provide relevant information to the right people so they may begin responding.

The Crisis Response Box has one simple goal: school administrators will immediately have the information essential for effective management of a major critical incident. A crisis is not the time to collect information – it is the time to act upon information. Precious minutes need not be lost gathering life-saving intelligence. Knowing what information to collect ahead of time, how to organize it and how to use it during a crisis are all addressed through assembling the contents of the box.



**Crisis Response Box**

**“We found that organizing a box . . . that contains crucial information we would need to respond to a critical incident was a great way for both the schools and the police to think through how they would work together in an actual crisis. The principal, local police and local fire department have the same kit. Every summer we meet and review the contents and update them.”**

**Captain Terry Rammell**  
La Habra Police Department  
La Habra, California

# Crisis Response Box

The Crisis Response Box contains more than directions to use in the event of an emergency. The following components make possible a thorough school and community response to a crisis:

## Aerial Photos of Campus

An aerial perspective of the campus and the surrounding area is very helpful to all agencies involved in a critical incident, including police, fire and paramedic personnel.

## Map

Crisis response planners need to review the traffic patterns and intersections that will be affected in a major crisis. Through this process, you can identify locations where parents or guardians can retrieve their children after an incident and determine traffic safety issues your school and law enforcement will have to consider when directing youth to safe areas. Keep as many as 20 copies of the map available, preferably laminated, for emergency personnel. Establish an emergency traffic plan capable of protecting emergency response routes and accommodating traffic and parking needs for parents, students and the media. The map should illustrate these planned routes as well as: The streets surrounding the school, Intersections near the school, Vacant lots near the school, and Location of major utilities.

## Campus Layout

It is important to maintain current, accurate blueprints, classroom layouts and floor plans of the building and grounds, including information about main leads for water, gas, electricity, cable, telephone, alarm and sprinkler systems, hazardous materials location, elevators and entrances. This information is extremely helpful, especially during a “shelter-in-place” situation when students are safely locked in a classroom. Information should be available on the layout of the building, including room numbers and whether or not there is a phone, cable television, e-mail, computers or cell phones in the classroom. On the campus layout diagram, it is also helpful to highlight areas that could pose a possible threat, e.g., the chemistry lab, biology lab or any welding and wood shop areas that could also become a haven for weapons. It is also helpful to show the location of the fire alarm turn-off, sprinkler system turn-off, utility shut-off valves, cable television shut-off and first aid supply boxes. These items can be color-coded on the campus layout.



# Crisis Response Box

## Fire Alarm Turn-off Procedures

One of the lessons learned from Columbine was to make it easier to turn off the alarm. The loud alarm made it very difficult for responders to hear directions. It took considerable time before someone who knew how to turn it off was able to do so. School officials learned that you can't assume that the person who knows how to turn off the alarm will be logistically able to do so. If that person is inside the building he or she might not be able to get to the shut-off valve; if that person is outside, it is possible that he or she might not be able to safely re-enter the school. As a result, a number of people need to know how to shut off the alarm. Providing such information on where shut-off valves are located in the building and the procedures for shut-off in the box could prove vital. In addition, though somewhat costly, some schools have installed a secure alarm shut-off system outside the school that can control the fire alarm and sprinklers.

## Sprinkler System Turn-off Procedures

Sprinkler systems may go on during an emergency. During the incident at Columbine, no one was readily available who knew how to immediately turn off the sprinkler system. As a result, hallways quickly filled with water, making it difficult to escape. In some places, the water reached dangerous levels in proximity to the electrical outlets – water reaching such outlets could have caused many more injuries and possibly additional deaths. At least two people need to be trained and assigned responsibility for turning off the sprinkler system. As backup, the Crisis Response Box needs to provide information on where shut-off valves are located in the building and the necessary procedures for shut-off.

## Utility Shut-off Valves

Shut-off and access points of all utilities – gas, electric and water – need to be clearly identified and their locations listed so they can be quickly shut off in a crisis. If there is not a fire, the water should be shut off immediately to prevent flooding from the sprinkler system. Unless open electric or gas lines pose an immediate threat to life, the decision on whether to shut off these lines should be made by the Incident Command Officer.

**“Open-ended communication with school administrators and law enforcement officials must take place while planning. Each must know what his or her individual responsibility is and be comfortable with it. A tragedy is not the place to start debating assignments or responsibilities or whose turf it is”.**

**Bill Slade, Chief of Police**  
Pearl Police Department  
Pearl, Mississippi

# **Crisis Response Box**

## **Gas Line and Utility Line Layout**

Include a diagram that shows where gas and other utility lines are located throughout the campus.

## **Cable Television Satellite Feed Shut-off**

If your school has a satellite feed for a cable television system, you should also provide directions on how to shut down that feed. Several of the police officers involved in nationally televised shootings recommend that the cable television feed be shut off so that perpetrators on the inside will not be able to view the whereabouts of the SWAT team by tuning into live coverage of the scene on the outside. On the other hand, in a natural disaster, the television system can be helpful (if working) to provide those who are sheltered in- place with up-to-date information.

## **Student Photos**

Photos can help in the essential task of identifying students injured, missing or killed. In addition, in those instances where the perpetrators' identities are known while the crisis is still in progress, photos can be of great assistance to law enforcement and SWAT teams who must enter the building and make split-second decisions amidst a sea of student faces. If you do not have access to copies of student photo IDs, the most recent school yearbook will suffice. Be sure to include photos of teachers and staff, as well. You might want to consider asking vendors who take pictures for your school to digitalize them and make them available on a CD, which you can then include in the box.

## **Incident Command System (ICS) Key Responders' Phone Numbers**

Names and phone numbers for all team participants involved in coordinating with your local emergency response system should be in the box. These people would include the coordinators for the Incident Command System (ICS), Public Information, First Aid, Traffic Safety, Student Assembly and Release and Grounds and Maintenance. Also, include the names and phone numbers of other key staff members, such as the Food, Water and Supplies Coordinator; the bi-lingual translator (if appropriate for your school); and any additional numbers for potential additional positions you have identified. Be sure to place these phone numbers on several cards so that more than one person can begin calling them.

# Crisis Response Box

## Designated Command Post and Staging Areas

Police chiefs involved in several of the recent school shootings recommend that schools and law enforcement plan for three distinct staging areas, in addition to the Command Post for the Incident Command Officer. Among other things, separate staging areas will prevent the press from converging upon parents or parents from converging upon police. The areas should be:

- A Staging Area for law enforcement and emergency personnel
- A Media Staging Area away from the school, that can accommodate a large number of vehicles
- A Parent Center, located away from the Command Post, where parents can retrieve their children

Maps of all command posts, listing each corresponding main phone number, should be included in the Crisis Response Box. Be aware that these command posts may change based upon the circumstances. It is also recommended that the command posts have telecommunications capability wherever possible.

## Student Attendance Roster

One of the most difficult challenges you'll face in such a crisis is accounting for all of your students. Teachers should have readily accessible, when on duty, a listing of all pupils in their charge. Teachers should also be instructed to take their classroom attendance list with them during an evacuation. A system should be developed to retrieve these lists from teachers when it is safe and feasible. Someone should be assigned to place that day's attendance roster into the box each morning. This information is shared with the Search and Rescue Coordinator who, in turn, coordinates with the Student Assembly, Shelter and Release Coordinator and the School Incident Command Coordinator.

**“One of the major problems we faced at Columbine was the gridlock. With the crisis being covered live on CNN and local television, parents, relatives and news crews rushed to the scene. The roads couldn't handle the traffic. Even the ambulances had a hard time getting through.”**

**Officer Joe Schallmoser**  
Director of Security Services  
Jefferson County Public Schools  
Littleton, Colorado

# Crisis Response Box

## Emergency Resource List

A list of individuals and organizations who assist in an emergency should be prepared on a separate sheet of paper and placed in the box so that the person assigned can immediately begin to make phone calls to those on the list. Your local emergency management agency can recommend agencies you should call during an emergency. Please note that any volunteers you enlist for a critical incident response should be pre-screened and that the volunteers on your list must receive training prior to becoming a responsible member of your emergency response team. Some agency phone numbers to have on hand include:

- American Red Cross
- Clergy, including Law Enforcement Chaplaincy • Counselors (A cadre of trained crisis intervention counselors should be identified to provide mental health “first aid” during and following the crisis.)
- County District Attorney’s Victim/Witness Assistance Center
- Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) (local office)
- Local emergency radio channels
- National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)
- Parent representative(s) (The parent representatives should be trained to help fellow parents receive information, answer questions and maintain calm at the Parent Center. Fellow parents can be an excellent source of support.)

**“Something most schools would never think of is to call the local Federal Aviation Authority. Yet, as soon as the news media learn of a disaster they send their helicopters and it’s the last thing you’ll need to gain control of the situation. The noise factor alone makes it difficult for people to hear on the ground. Only the FAA can restrict the airspace. A call should be made immediately.**

**Captain James Carmody**  
Port Huron City Police  
Port Huron, Michigan



# Crisis Response Box

## Evacuation Sites

Maps with evacuation and alternate evacuation routes should be stored in the Crisis Response Box and should also be posted on classroom doors. It is where students will likely be headed (following the route) in order to identify them, or, if they are missing, to determine where along the route they might be found. Be aware, however, that during a shooting spree the best-laid plans for evacuation are also under siege. All classrooms at Columbine, for example, had evacuation plans – but with two students shooting throughout the entire school, evacuating the building was itself a dangerous venture. In the Jonesboro, Arkansas incident, two boys opened fire after students evacuated the building during a false fire alarm. Other factors may affect an Incident Command Officer to alter the usual evacuation route. In a chemical spill, for instance, how the winds are blowing will determine where to evacuate. Thus, it is important to have at least two predetermined evacuation sites identified.

## Student Disposition Forms and Emergency Data Cards

Imagine hundreds of parents descending upon your school to retrieve their children while you are trying to account for each student's whereabouts. You will need forms to keep track of who has been released and to whom – parents, relatives, emergency personnel or the hospital. It is suggested that a set of release forms (enough to cover the entire school census) be stored in the Crisis Response Box and be given to the student Assembly, Shelter and Release Coordinator of your ICS team. Additionally, if possible, it is helpful to have a set of your student emergency data cards placed in the box. Having all the data stored on a disk is the most convenient way of containing the information. Optimally, the cards and disks should be updated every three months to remain current as possible. Emergency information can also be stored, updated and retrieved electronically either from the school office or a remote site, such as the office.

**“Though cellular phones are an excellent tool, during the shootings at Columbine so many cell phones were being used in the area that the cell site became overloaded and shut down. During that crisis, some students resorted to computers to send e-mail messages. Many schools are equipping themselves with phones that do not require satellite transmission and several nationwide phone companies are offering free phones to schools.**

**Officer Scott Wells**

Critical Incident Management Unit  
Jefferson County Police Department  
Littleton, Colorado

# Crisis Response Box

## Inventory of Staff Resources

Survey your certificated and classified staff to build an inventory of special skills and training they possess. Document your findings and place the list in the box under the ICS heading. For instance, experience can include prior medical and triage experience, bilingual capabilities, grief counseling background, search and rescue training, hostage negotiations, first aid/CPR certification and volunteer firefighter or reserve police officer/deputy. These skills could prove to be very helpful in a critical incident.

## List of Students With Special Needs

A list should also be included in the box that identifies those students who need special assistance (e.g., blind and deaf students and those who need wheelchairs, crutches and braces) and/or with special medical needs (e.g., diabetes) that will require medications during a prolonged period and those with a disability that will require assistance in an evacuation.

## First Aid Supplies Location

Sets of first aid supplies should be located throughout the campus. Storage locations should be included in the box. Include the locations on one of the building layout maps in the box.

## Emergency First Aid Supplies

Though the following list of supplies are not contained in the box, the FBI Academy recommends that schools be aware of information from the Lessons Learned Summit regarding first aid supplies. In the Jonesboro, Arkansas shooting, large bins of first aid supplies were readily accessible on the school grounds and are credited with saving two children's lives and preventing others from going into shock. These supplies were situated in and out of the school building in anticipation of an earthquake because the school property is located on a fault line. The accessibility of these supplies proved to be lifesaving. It will not do anyone any good if these supplies are locked away deep within the confines of the school. Some schools have stationed first aid boxes in every classroom with basic emergency aid instructions to treat various injuries. Although not designed for first aid purposes, duct tape is very useful and versatile and should be available in every classroom. Whichever methods you deem will work best for your school, it is advisable to make sure that ample supplies are readily accessible throughout your complex and that all teachers are aware of their location.

**“The Port Huron School District in Michigan employs a system whereby teachers secure the classroom and immediately take the attendance of all who are in the classroom. They have found that, though daily attendance records are helpful, a roster of student locations at the time of a critical incident is much more accurate and useful, as students could be out of their assigned classroom on a hall pass, visiting a classroom or – in the event of a shooting or other disaster – seeking cover in a classroom to which they were not previously assigned.”**

**Captain James Carmody**  
Port Huron City Police  
Port Huron, Michigan

## Tips for Parents

***Parents can help create safe schools.***



***Here are some ideas that parents can do:***

- Discuss the school's discipline policy with your child. Show your support for the rules, and help your child understand the reasons for them.
- Involve your child in setting rules for appropriate behavior at home.
- Talk with your child about the violence he or she sees on television, in video games, and possibly in the neighborhood. Help your child understand the consequences of violence.
- Teach your child how to solve problems. Praise your child when he or she follows through.
- Help your child find ways to show anger that do not involve verbally or physically hurting others.
- When you get angry, use it as an opportunity to model these appropriate responses for your child and talk about it.
- Help your child understand the value of accepting individual differences.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in your child. For example, frequent angry outbursts, excessive fighting and bullying of other children, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school and in the neighborhood, lack of friends, and alcohol or drug use can be signs of serious problems. Get help for your child. Talk with a trusted professional in your child's school or in the community.
- Keep lines of communication open with your child even when it is tough. Encourage your child always to let you know where and with whom he or she will be. Get to know your child's friends.
- Listen to your child if he or she shares concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional, such as the school psychologist, principal, or teacher.
- Be involved in your child's school life by supporting and reviewing homework, talking with his or her teacher(s), and attending school functions such as parent conferences, open houses, and PTA meetings.
- Encourage your school to offer before- and after-school programs.
- Volunteer to work with school-based groups concerning violence prevention.
- Talk with the parents of your child's friends. Discuss how you can team up to ensure your children's safety.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Deputy John Williams at (213) 893-5171 or by email at [jdwillia@lasd.org](mailto:jdwillia@lasd.org), thank you