

Active Shooter Incidents – They Can Happen Anywhere!

Active shooter incidents are a fast growing epidemic in the United States. Predicting who the next assailant will be is impossible because there is no one active shooter profile. Recent data confirms that active shooters are primarily (but not exclusively) young men whose ages and races vary. When a woman is involved, she is likely acting in tandem with a man.

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearms and there is no apparent pattern or method to how they choose their victims.

As much as you would like to believe that your veterinary practice is not a target for an active shooter, you cannot be 100 percent certain. The highest percentage of incidence (45.6 percent) happens in commercial settings.

Prepare Your Staff

The odds of an active shooter incident happening in your practice are remote, however, what about the places you and your staff worship, shop, or socialize?

The Department of Homeland Security has issued guidelines for what to do in an active shooter situation: run, hide, and fight. It is important to educate your staff on how to respond to an active shooter. Any delayed reaction on their part can be the difference between life and death. The objective of training is to create awareness, not paranoia.

At a minimum, Cal/OSHA requires employers to provide a safe and healthful workplace for all staff members. Employers who do not take reasonable steps to prevent or abate a recognized violence hazard in the workplace can be cited and fined.

The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) websites provide several active shooter training videos that can be shared with staff. The following links provide training videos and materials to help with staff training:

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

- dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/active-shooter-how-to-respond-2017-508.pdf
- dhs.gov/active-shooter-workshop-participant

Bureau of Investigations (FBI)

- fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources

Doing the Right Thing

In addition to training staff and having drills, there are other actions to take to ensure their safety:

1. Survey your practice for evacuation routes when and if staff need to run.
2. Identify places where the staff can hide. These rooms need to have inside locking doors and preferably no inwardly facing windows.
3. Identify where the staff will congregate once they have exited the building. It may not be the same place as evacuating for a fire or chemical spill. Staff will need to go to a place that is not in the shooter's line of sight.
4. How will the staff be alerted to an active shooter event? The notification alarm needs to be unique because when staff members hear it, they need to recognize that it represents an immediate threat and to act.
5. Include local law enforcement during training exercises. In many municipalities, the Department of Homeland Security or the local police will provide employee training.

When active shooter incidents occur, one consequence that many businesses may not be prepared for is the subsequent law enforcement investigation. In most scenarios, law enforcement advises that investigations can take anywhere from one week to six months. During this time, you and your staff will not be able to access your practice until law enforcement completes their investigation.

Even after the investigation is complete, consider whether your staff will want to return to the practice location. You may need to find another location to re-open your practice.

Prepare your staff for the unexpected. It is more likely they will utilize active shooter training while away from work. However, by training staff, rehearsing your active shooter plan, and readying your practice for immediate action, you can save lives. ■

Information provided by Preferred Employers Insurance, a Berkeley Company.