

Active Attack

July 2024



The IACP Policy Center creates four types of documents: Model Policies, Considerations Documents, Concepts & Issues Papers, and Need to Know one-page summaries. Typically, for each topic, either a Model Policy or a Considerations Document is created, supplemented with a Concepts & Issues Paper. This file contains the following documents:

- **Model Policy**: Provides police agencies with concrete guidance and directives by describing in sequential format the manner in which actions, tasks, and operations are to be performed.
- **Concepts & Issues Paper**: Designed to provide context and background information to support a Model Policy or Considerations Document for a deeper understanding of the topic.
- **Need to Know...**: Synthesizes the key points of the topic into a brief, one-page overview. This document is developed by Policy Center staff following the final approval of the policy and paper.



Glossary

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DEFINITIONS¹

Active Attack: An incident in which one or more armed persons have used, or are reasonably likely to use, or are using deadly force in an ongoing manner, and where persons have been injured, killed, or are under imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm by such persons.² The incident's duration starts upon confirmation of an active attacker and continues until the threat has been stopped.

Active Attacker: An individual(s) who is actively using or is reasonably likely to use deadly force and where persons within their presence have been injured, killed, or are under imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm by the individual(s). (May also be referred to as *Active Assailant*, *Active Threat*, *Active Shooter*, and *Active Killer*.)

Casualty Collection Point (CCP): A location where victims can be assembled for movement from areas of risk. Based upon incident dynamics, such as the number and location of victims, multiple CCPs may be required.

Cold Zone: A geographic area where first responders can operate with minimal threat to personal safety or health.

Contact Officer or Team: The first officer(s) at the scene of an active attack tasked with locating the active attacker(s) and stopping the threat.

Hot Zone: A geographic area consisting of the immediate incident location where there is a direct and immediate threat to personal safety or health. The area(s) where all violent incidents occur are considered hot until police determine otherwise.

Immediate Action: Rapid response by one or more officers to an active attack based on reasonable belief that failure to swiftly seek out and address the threat would result in death or serious bodily injury.

Incident Command Post (ICP): The field location where the primary functions of incident command are performed. The ICP may be co-located with the incident base or other incident facilities.

Incident Commander (IC): The individual, typically the first responder until properly relieved, who is responsible for all incident activities, including the development of strategies and tactics and the ordering and release of resources. The IC has overall authority and responsibility for conducting incident operations and is responsible for the management of all operations at the incident site.³

Inner Perimeter: An area established to keep the threat contained to a specified location.

Outer Perimeter: An area established to keep the inner perimeter secured and to prevent outside elements from entering the incident.

¹ The definitions provided herein are for the purposes of understanding the terms within the context of the guidance that follows.

² Additional terms that may be used to describe these incidents include *active killing*, *active shooter*, *active threat*, and *mass casualty attack*.

³ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Incident Command](#).

Public Information Officer (PIO): This officer prepares and dispenses all public information regarding the incident, with approval from the appropriate parties, as defined by agency policy.

Rescue Task Force (RTF): A team consisting of fire/emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, paired with police officers. Fire/EMS personnel are tasked with initial treatment and triage of victims in the warm zone. Police officers are assigned as the protection for this team and should not separate from fire/EMS personnel.

Secondary Threats: A threat(s) that follows an initial incident. Secondary threats may take various forms, such as an accomplice of the active attacker, improvised explosive devices, hidden weapons, etc.

Staging Area: An area or location near the incident where outside resources respond and are quickly inventoried for utilization and assignment at the incident. There may be more than one staging area per incident.

Unified Command (UC): An incident command system used when there is more than one agency with incident jurisdiction, or when incidents cross political jurisdictions. Agencies work together through designated members of the UC, often the senior partner(s) from agencies and/or disciplines participating in the UC, to establish a common set of objectives and strategies.

Warm Zone: A geographic area where police have either cleared or isolated the threat to a level of minimal or mitigated risk; can be considered clear, but not secure.



Model Policy

Updated: July 2024

Active Attack

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide protocols for assessing the threat and immediately responding during an active attack to limit serious injury or loss of life and follow-up procedures for after an active attack. Preservation of human life is the ultimate priority. While the term “active attack” is used throughout, this policy applies to all situations where there is an active assailant or assailants posing an ongoing deadly threat, to include but not limited to those from firearms, vehicles, explosives, and knives.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of this agency that during an active attack, immediate action be taken by responding officers, necessary to prevent further injuries or loss of life.

III. PROCEDURES

The response to an active attack is not a sequential process. New information and resources constantly influence police priority and course of action when responding to an active attack. The actions taken during an initial response may not be linear and may be done simultaneously, dependent on agency resources and the specific details of the incident. Thus, all teams, actions, analysis, and commands outlined below do not have a defined sequence.

A. TRAINING

This agency shall provide training for active attacks on a regular basis.

1. Training shall be provided to all sworn and relevant civilian employees.
2. Training shall include simulation exercises conducted in schools and other facilities, and with partnering first response agencies, where appropriate.
3. Training should incorporate realistic scenarios and shall include the following elements at a minimum:
 - Initial response
 - Off-duty response
 - Operation of both incident and unified command
 - Creating emergency action plans
 - Rendering aid
 - Reunification plans
 - After-action assessment

4. All training shall be documented.
5. Exercises and coordinated response training shall be debriefed.

B. SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The situation shall be immediately assessed as follows:

1. When dispatched to an attack, officers responding to or at the scene shall verify that an active attack exists based on available information. This may include information provided by communications personnel; from persons confined within or exiting the target location; from witnesses; by reports of, or sounds of, gunfire or violence; or through related means.⁴
2. As soon as practical, officer(s) shall verify and notify communications that an active attack exists. The officer(s) should provide the following information and updates as available:
 - a. the identity, location, manner of dress,⁵ and proposed actions of the officer(s) at the scene;
 - b. information about the attacker to include a physical description, weapons, equipment such as body armor, and current location and actions; and
 - c. available information on persons injured or under threat, their locations, emergency resources required, and recommended points of entry.
3. After an initial assessment, the first responding officer(s) shall:
 - a. advise communications of location, condition, action, needs, and request resources as deemed necessary,
 - b. determine how to take immediate action,
 - c. ensure that fire/EMS resources are immediately dispatched to the scene, and
 - d. establish incident command in accordance with agency policy.⁶
4. When available and as time permits, witnesses or others should be asked about the location and number of attackers, the active attackers' weapons, persons injured, the number and location of persons in possible danger, and secondary threats such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

C. CONTACT OFFICER OR TEAM RESPONSE

The primary mission of the contact officer or team response is to locate and stop the threat(s).

1. Officers shall verbally identify themselves as police officers and conspicuously display their badges and/or other police identification to alert security personnel, arriving officers, or community members who may be armed.
2. The contact officer or team shall be provided a clear communications channel to supply the following types of information:
 - a. the officer or team's progress and location;
 - b. the location, number of victims, and their medical needs;
 - c. the estimated number of attacker(s) involved;

⁴ In some instances, an officer may be present within or near the active attack location, such as a mall or school, prior to reports of the incident. In such cases, whether on or off duty, in uniform or in civilian clothing, the officer may determine that immediate action is necessary and reasonable to stop the threat. That decision should take into consideration the officer's capability to effectively intervene, based on this agency's active attack response training.

⁵ If an arriving officer or team are operating in plain clothes, they shall announce their arrival and note that they are operating in plain clothes through the communications channel. This is to avoid being confused by other arriving officers as suspects.

⁶ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Incident Command](#).

- d. the attacker's description and weapons, if known;
- e. the attacker's known or suspected location(s), which may need to be frequently updated; and
- f. the location of any secondary threats.
 - i. If such a threat is discovered, the contact officer or team leader shall determine whether to post an officer near it, report it, or mark it for later action.
 - ii. The contact officer or team should use appropriate tactical techniques to mitigate any secondary threats.
3. Once the location of the attacker(s) is known and any immediate threat has been eliminated, the contact officer or team should secure the attacker as directed by agency policy, to include remaining with the attacker, whether deceased or alive. The contact officer or team should then proceed to clear the location and render the area safe.
 - a. If other sounds (such as gunfire or verbal threats) indicate an elevated threat may still be present, officers shall reassess the situation and prioritize response to the most imminent threat.
 - b. Officers should be called upon to help clear the location of potential suspects, locate and evacuate persons in hiding, and render safe any dangerous munitions or armament.
4. Even if the threat seemingly has been terminated, contact officers or teams must:
 - a. render the location safe,
 - b. assist in screening and the orderly evacuation of persons to a designated area,
 - c. locate any other persons still in hiding, and
 - d. render aid to victims as soon as it is safe and reasonable.

D. OFF-DUTY OFFICER INTERVENTION

Immediate intervention is necessary to prevent likely injury or death. In instances where an off-duty officer is in close proximity to the incident, they should take the appropriate actions.

1. Officers, whether arriving in uniform or plain clothes, shall verbally identify themselves as police officers and conspicuously display their badges and/or other police identification to alert security personnel, arriving officers, or community members who may be armed.
2. If officers are unarmed, although they will not be a part of the tactical response, they can still play a critical role in the response to an attack through the following actions:
 - a. updating communication centers as the incident changes and ensuring the communication centers are receiving appropriate, timely, and streamlined information on locations, conditions, actions, and needs.
 - b. facilitating evacuation by
 - i. locating points of egress and directing people to those evacuation points if reasonably safe for them to do so; and
 - ii. locating and directing persons hiding in unsecure locations (e.g., under desks, inside unlocked rooms) to evacuation points.
 - c. if evacuation is not possible, helping locate and direct persons to safer locations, preferably with thick walls and solid doors with locks; or, in the absence of such locations, rooms that can be barricaded with heavy furniture or objects.
 - d. in the instance where the attack is not located in a building, or where rooms or furniture are not available, persons should be positioned or directed behind objects that provide substantial cover or concealment and:

- i. directing individuals to silence all personal electronic devices, take cover, and remain silent; and
 - ii. possibly taking action to distract, disrupt, divert, or incapacitate the attacker using any aggressive force possible.
- e. when possible, assisting with injured persons and directing incoming teams to injured persons.

E. RESCUE TASK FORCE (RTF)

RTFs shall be deployed according to agency policy and at the discretion of the IC.⁷ An RTF shall perform the following actions:

1. Once the contact officer or team has been deployed, and as officers and resources arrive at the incident scene, the IC should ensure that RTFs are formed to provide trauma care and to help evacuate victims.
2. RTFs shall be organized under a team leader, deployed in tactical formations consistent with agency training, and be prepared to respond to hostile action as rapidly changing circumstances may place them in contact with the attacker(s). In such instances, the RTF shall be prepared and equipped to serve as the contact team.
3. Wounded and injured persons shall be quickly searched, if reasonable, for weapons, quickly treated for obvious life-threatening injuries, and removed to a casualty collection point (CCP) with cover and movement of such persons provided by RTF members. If emergency medical personnel are not yet in place, basic trauma care shall be the responsibility of RTF members until they are relieved by medical personnel.
4. Rescue operations shall continue until the IC has declared the scene clear and safe.

F. INCIDENT COMMAND (IC)⁸

An initial responding officer, regardless of rank, shall assume IC and announce to all involved personnel, preferably over the radio. The IC shall ensure information is relayed to all responding officers or teams and that responses are effectively coordinated. The IC or their designee shall ensure that the following actions are accomplished:

1. Organize and establish unified interagency communication(s).
2. Establish an inner perimeter to control access to and egress from the area of risk.
3. Establish an outer perimeter.
4. Request mutual aid and/or emergency medical assistance, if necessary.
5. Establish traffic control and management for the ingress and egress of public safety vehicles. Special consideration should be given to maintaining open routes for rapid transport of injured people.
6. Establish staging areas for the following purposes and notify communications of their locations:
 - a. for responding officers and other emergency personnel. An officer should be assigned to this staging area to brief arriving personnel, maintain communication with the contact officer or team, and assign duties as directed by the IC;
 - b. for treatment of the injured and evacuation by EMS or medevac (CCP);

⁷ RTFs may need to be formed and utilized in advance of establishing an IC and additional emergency management processes in order to prevent further injuries and loss of life.

⁸ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Incident Command](#).

- c. where individuals without injuries should be directed for identification and debriefing (evacuation area);
 - d. to accommodate arriving family members of persons at the incident scene (reunification site); and
 - e. for the media. This area should be staffed with appropriate personnel, such as public information officers (PIOs).
7. Ensure that officers assigned to the reunification site maintain custody and control of all persons and document their identities until they can be reunited with family or others. Victims and witnesses suffering from emotional and/or physical trauma or shock should be kept under the observation of medical personnel until they can be safely transported to a hospital or home in the care of family or friends.
8. Summon chaplains,⁹ victim advocates, agency counselors, and peer support officers to provide information to family and friends of victims.
9. Contact appropriate aviation resources to control air space for possible medical evacuation resources and to establish restricted air space for police use only.
10. Initiate intelligence gathering on the possible attacker(s).
11. Coordinate with owners or officials of the target location for floor plans; site layout; and a roster, including emergency contact information as available, of employees, students, residents, visitors, or others believed to be on-site.
12. Assign a recorder to document actions at the command post.
13. Unified command (UC) shall be established as soon as possible.¹⁰
14. When available on the scene, a tactical team(s) may be assigned as appropriate to
 - a. contain the location,
 - b. assist RTFs,
 - c. help locate the attacker(s) or relieve the contact officer or team,
 - d. help locate and safeguard explosives pending removal, and
 - e. provide special weapons and equipment as needed.
15. Additional officers shall be deployed by IC as needed.

G. IMMEDIATE RECOVERY

Once the active threat has been neutralized, immediate recovery strategies should include but are not limited to:

1. Scene security.
2. Information collection. Responding agencies shall conduct continuous joint meetings to discuss procedures, protocols, and lines of communication. All decisions and actions shall be at the discretion of the IC.
3. Assessment of the damage from the incident. This may include:
 - a. property damage to infrastructure and geographical area closures;
 - b. business impacts and effects on bystanders and witnesses of the incident;
 - c. impacts to victims, civilians, or responders; and
 - d. casualties from the incident.

⁹ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Police Chaplains](#).

¹⁰ There may be instances where the incident will be over prior to the formation of the incident command. If multiple jurisdictions are involved and the incident is over prior to the formation of a unified command, the incident command will be in control of the scene.

4. Victim assistance, notification, and reunification.
 - a. An off-site reunification center shall be established, if applicable.
 - b. A check-in system for victim services and volunteers shall be established, if applicable.¹¹
5. Initial evidence collection¹² and evidence preservation¹³ is initiated.
6. Assessment of officer wellness needs and referral to appropriate agency resources.

H. COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION

The PIO or other designated individual(s)¹⁴ shall ensure appropriate and approved information from the IC is distributed in a timely manner to the community.

1. The PIO or other designated individual(s) shall distribute information relevant to the community. Information shall be distributed through means such as
 - a. press conference(s),
 - b. social media, and
 - c. mass notification systems.
2. Information should include details of the incident and ways to increase public safety and reduce harm while the incident is ongoing. Such information may include:
 - a. who is sending the alert,
 - b. why the alert is being sent,
 - c. date and time of alert sent,
 - d. shelter in place warnings for nearby locations during active attack incidents,
 - e. alerts to avoid the area due to heavy police activity and potential road closures,
 - f. specific directions for individuals who must respond to the scene, and
 - g. communications regarding the reunification site.

I. AFTER ACTION EXAMINATION

As soon as reasonably possible after the incident, the agency shall conduct an after-action examination including essential personnel involved in the incident. The examination should identify response operations that worked well in addition to areas of potential improvement to include whether changes in operational protocols, policy, or training may be warranted.

Agencies shall remind officers of the available physical and psychological well-being resources.

¹¹ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Response to Victims of Crime](#).

¹² For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Crime Scene Response](#).

¹³ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Property & Evidence Control](#).

¹⁴ Other designated individual(s) may include an officer who is not the PIO, or in an incident involving a multi-agency response, a Joint Information Center (JIC).

Every effort has been made by the IACP Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, police administrators should be cautioned that no model policy can meet all the needs of any given police agency. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives, and demands; often divergent police strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities, among other factors. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes. Police administrators should be cautioned that each police agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions, and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered and should therefore consult their agency's legal advisor before implementing any policy.

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Concepts & Issues Paper

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Active Attack

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This discussion paper is designed to accompany the Model Policy on an *Active Attack*, established by the IACP Policy Center. While the term “active attack” is used throughout, this document applies to all situations where there is an active, ongoing deadly threat, to include, but not be limited to, those from firearms, explosives, knives, vehicles, and fire.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVE ATTACK RESPONSE CONCEPT

Technological advances have dramatically improved the way calls are received and processed and the way patrol officers travel to the scene, but the basic call-respond-resolve paradigm remained fundamentally unchanged until August 1, 1966. On this date, a former Marine Corps rifleman climbed the tower at the University of Texas and within an hour and a half shot 46 people, killing 15. This was not the first mass murder in history, but it was unique. Rather than responding to this call after the fact to initiate a homicide investigation, patrol officers drove into a prolonged gun battle for which they were ill-prepared to deal with a well-trained, well-equipped, and determined adversary.

As a result, agencies created specially trained and equipped units designed to handle these crisis situations.¹⁵ This concept has been a proven lifesaver for both officers and community members, as highly trained and equipped personnel have responded to and successfully resolved countless situations involving barricaded gunmen, hostage situations, and snipers. Nevertheless, experience has shown that reliance on specialized tactical units to resolve such high-risk situations sometimes results in delayed action in a crisis.

C. CONCEPT OF IMMEDIATE ACTION

An active attack can result in multiple casualties in a short period of time; approximately half of all casualties in such situations happen before officers or other emergency responders can be summoned.¹⁶ Yet, even one or two armed officers can make a difference in the outcome of an active attack by taking swift but calculated action. For example, during a 2023 Nashville, Tennessee, school shooting, officers near the incident responded to the 911 call and took immediate action that successfully stopped the threat.¹⁷ Accordingly, taking immediate action during active attacks can save lives and prevent serious injuries. Time lost by delayed action is likely to result in additional casualties.

¹⁵ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Specialized Units](#).

¹⁶ See more information from ALERRT at [ALERRT Active Attack Data](#).

¹⁷ At this time, an after-action report has not been completed.

Quick integration and deployment of life-saving measures and personnel into the initial response effort must be accomplished to minimize the impact of an active attack. Early medical intervention and rapid transportation to an appropriate treatment facility¹⁸ are the most important factors to limit loss of life. Agency policy should include adaptable options for evolving threats that make the best use of available personnel to immediately suppress the threat and to treat and transport injured people.

Take the following scenario as an example: A heavily armed person who has reportedly been disconsolate for some time after having lost their job has entered an office building after informing their spouse that they are going to “kill [their] boss and anyone else [they] can find.” Immediate action may be justified based on the facts that

- the individual is armed with a deadly weapon or other weapon suitable for carrying out the threat;
- the individual is in a location where persons are under their control and are readily accessible;
- the individual has—by speech, conduct, or both—provided the basis to reasonably believe that they will use deadly force; and
- immediate action is reasonably likely to result in a successful resolution.

Under these or similar circumstances, an officer would be justified in determining that immediate action is necessary and warranted.

The concept of immediate action reflects a change in operational philosophy as it relates to stopping a deadly force threat. In most critical incidents, patrol officers will determine that requesting tactical assistance is the appropriate decision. In some cases, they will find it reasonable and necessary to use their enhanced skills, training, and equipment to take immediate action to protect lives.

D. ACTIVE SHOOTERS – A COMMON CONCEPTION OF AN ACTIVE ATTACK

Although an active shooter is just one example, it is a well-recognized form of an active attack, typically resulting in mass casualties. While many associate active shootings with schools, such incidents account only for approximately 14 percent of these attacks. Attacks also occur at other locations where numerous potential victims are in a confined area.¹⁹

Active shooting incidents develop quickly into a deadly situation and are often concluded in a relatively short period of time. These incidents are often highly fluid, as the shooters move through the location, searching for victims, and possibly planting secondary threats. A substantial ongoing risk of danger continues to persons accessible to the shooters. However, officers must be prepared to transition from an active shooter response to a barricade incident, such as during the events that occurred at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016.²⁰

Over the past few years, due to the significance of active shooter attacks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the United States Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Center at Texas State University published reports on Active Shooter Incidents in the United States. These yearly reports supplement the previous publication of *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*, outlining some of the most common characteristics of active shooters. Their findings include the following:²¹

¹⁸ An appropriate treatment facility refers to a hospital’s ability to treat traumatic injuries. Not all hospitals have the same capabilities. Regional and community-based hospital systems might not be prepared to handle a large number of injured people or catastrophic injuries like a designated trauma center may. Even those hospitals accredited as trauma centers can have varying degrees of capability and readiness. It is imperative that agencies consider this factor when developing their individualized response plans.

¹⁹ Businesses account for almost 50 percent of attack locations, while outdoor attacks are around 24 percent. See more information from ALERRT at the [Attacks webpage](#).

²⁰ For more information, view the Pulse Tragedy [After Action Report](#).

²¹ Although the following information relays characteristics of active shooters, it is important to note that some shooters will fall outside of these common characteristics.

From investigations and analysis, many active shooters were described as social isolates, harbored feelings of hate and anger, and/or had some reported contact with mental health professionals. Mental illness is commonly referenced as a potential contributing factor, but its causal impact on the attack can be only speculated. Very few active shooters had previous arrests for violent crimes. Common catalysts or triggers observed include: loss of significant relationships, changes in financial status, loss of a job, changes in living arrangements, major adverse changes to life circumstances, and/or feelings of humiliation or rejection on the part of the shooter.²²

Other characteristics commonly associated with active shooters from 2000-2022 compiled by the FBI and the ALERRT Center include the following:

- Nearly all active shooters are males (97%) who act alone (98%). Of the 13 attacks with multiple attackers, only one attack occurred where the attackers were not found together (May 7, 2019, attack at STEM School in Highlands Range, Colorado).
- The age of an active shooter ranges from 12 to 88, with the average age being 35 years old, with no discernible pattern.
- The active shooter shows no identifiable relationship with their victims the majority of the time (61%).
- The active shooter is most likely to utilize a handgun (59%) as their primary weapon. Although, 33 percent of active shooters use multiple weapons during their attack.

II. AGENCY PLANNING FOR ACTIVE ATTACKS

A. INTRA-AGENCY TRAINING

All agency personnel should be provided with training on immediate action for response to an active attack. This training should include simulation exercises in schools and other facilities as well as tabletop training. Training should also include coordinated response training for after-action reporting to include PIOs and administrative roles and responsibilities. Before an agency uses immediate action strategies, all of those involved should have successfully completed training on such strategies. Training should include treatment for victims and fellow emergency responders as well as self-administered wound care and the use of basic life support equipment such as tourniquets, nasopharyngeal airway devices, and coagulant wound packing materials that have proven their value in numerous tactical encounters. Training should focus not solely on shared medical responsibility but also on the roles, expectations, organization, and management of responders.

Many police agencies have taken steps to address the risk of an active attack in their communities through the development of policy and action plans addressing the agencywide response to active attacks. These plans often have several factors in common, including:

- using specific language that authorizes first responders to seek out and stop active attackers;
- requiring adequate training for all personnel likely to respond to active attacks, to include
 - practical, scenario-based exercises in operational environments such as schools, shopping malls, or office buildings; and
 - special emphasis on the primary mission objective of stopping the active threat and then quickly transitioning focus to rendering trauma aid, extracting victims, and establishing incident command.
- ensuring that resources between emergency responders are coordinated so appropriately trained personnel can gain access to victims as soon as possible;

²² DHS-FBI Joint Intelligence Bulletin, "[\(U//FOUO\) Recent Active Shooter Incidents Highlight Need for Continued Vigilance](#)," December 27, 2012.

- preventing “over-convergence” through the use of designated staging areas and personnel to direct individuals to the appropriate locations; and
- providing necessary equipment and related training for those tasked with immediate action, to include patrol rifles, helmets, enhanced ballistic and load-bearing vests, ballistic shields, window access and forced entry tools, and trauma kits.

B. INTERAGENCY TRAINING

Advanced training with neighboring jurisdictions and other key first responder entities can be crucial in preparing for an active attack. Establishing unified command practices through policy and MOUs in advance of an incident can help all involved with a better understanding of the role they will play if such an incident were to ever happen. Thus, training should include all agencies that would provide emergency response during active attacks, particularly cross-training between fire, EMS, school officers, mall security, college/university campus security, community engagement within the jurisdiction, and police personnel.

Agencies should debrief any exercises and coordinated response training that is provided. The debrief should include steps taken that went right, along with areas that have room for improvement. The purpose is to attempt to identify and address any gaps and/or deficiencies during training, prior to an incident involving an active attack.

C. COMMUNITY TRAINING

The reality of response time challenges underscores the value of reaching out to the community. Police should explain to the community what is known about active attacks, provide information on how police will respond and react, and share what potential victims need to know to protect themselves and others prior to police arrival and intervention. Collaborative training with community members also provides the department with opportunities to enhance public trust through increased transparency of police practices and common expectations.

Any location is susceptible to be the setting of an active attack, and the first responder to these instances in most situations are bystanders. It is important to extend training to the community to ensure they are prepared for an active attack. Types of training that may be beneficial to the community include but are not limited to active attacker training, self-defense courses, and first aid and tourniquet training. Training should highlight how to prepare for an active attack and should include examples of suspicious activities to look out for, how to identify the closest exits, and how to identify potential hiding spaces.

III. RESPONDING TO ACTIVE ATTACKS

A. JUSTIFICATION FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

A decision to initiate immediate action should consider whether

- Reasonable belief exists that immediate action, to include the use of deadly force, is necessary to prevent death or serious bodily injury.
- Sufficient police personnel and equipment are available to effectively respond to the threat.
- A delay in acquiring backup is likely, in which case an individual officer or a single pair of officers may need to take immediate steps to stop a threat.

Many schools and other buildings are implementing enhanced physical security measures and lockdown protocols. Recognizing this, more police agencies are providing and training patrol officers in the use of breaching tools and munitions that heretofore have been available only to tactical units. For example, relatively inexpensive breaching tools such as a sledge, ram, or Halligan bar should be available to as many units as possible. Breaching rounds designed for use in standard issue 12-gauge patrol shotguns are another option, although more extensive training is required prior to field use.

Officers should also consider whether, given available information, intervention could potentially neutralize the opportunity for the active attacker to gain access to hostages or other potential victims or for officers to locate and engage the active attacker. This decision must be based in part on having a general idea of the location of the active attacker and individuals who are in jeopardy. Effective communication with persons reporting at or from within the shooting location can greatly assist this determination and the development of strategies.

In some instances, immediate action by a single officer may not be prudent or possible. For example, an off-duty officer in a mall may not be armed. However, an unarmed officer can take other measures. For example, the officer can contact the communications center, identify themselves as a police officer, and as a trained observer, provide as much information as possible on the situation and needs for assistance. The officer should also provide their own location, a description of themselves, whether they are armed, and request that this information be provided to responding officers to avoid misidentification. Whenever displaying firearms in a crowd in these or other conditions, officers in plainclothes or civilian attire should conspicuously display their shield and announce their presence as a police officer, again, to avoid being confused for the active attacker by responding officers or civilians who may be armed.²³

The officer should also determine whether they may be valuable in assisting in evacuation by locating the closest points of egress and directing persons to those points and away from likely points of danger or by directing persons in unsecured locations to safer areas or points of evacuation.

If safe evacuation is not reasonable (e.g., doors have been locked or barricaded), the officer may assist in the location of shelter, such as rooms or areas with thick walls that can be secured with solid locking doors or barricaded with heavy furniture or other objects. Persons in hiding should be directed to silence all electronic devices and remain completely quiet.

Another option for an unarmed officer is to take any actions designed to distract, disrupt, divert, or incapacitate the attacker using any force options available.

B. INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE INCIDENT

Intervention typically begins the moment the first call is made by witnesses or others to the emergency communications center. Communications personnel need to be provided with training that will allow them to identify potential active attacks and to ask important questions in prioritized order to obtain the most essential information in the least amount of time. Callers who are witnesses to, or in the midst of, an active attack incident are the first and best source of information that will assist responding officers—providing information on whether deadly force has been used; how many attackers are involved; and where in the building or other location the attack is taking place. It is the difficult job of communications personnel in these incidents to calm and focus callers so that they can provide essential information where possible.

Patrol response should be initiated as soon as possible. If reasonable, callers should be kept on the line so that additional information can be relayed to responding officers.

²³ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Off-Duty Arrests](#).

- ***Initial Situational Analysis***

Based on observation and all available information, initial responders should determine, as quickly and to the greatest degree possible, whether an active attack exists. Initial assessment of the incident may be aided by comments received by communication from persons at or fleeing the scene, sounds of gunfire, or similar sources. When available, witnesses should be asked for any information related to the number of attackers, their descriptions, their weapons, the place where they were last seen, direction of travel, and an estimate of the number of persons at the location, including their locations, injuries, or deaths.²⁴ As soon as reasonably possible, the first responders should advise communications of the incident status and request that necessary resources respond to a designated staging area.

- ***Contact Officer or Team***

The mission of the contact officer or team is to stop the threat by locating the active attacker in the most expeditious manner possible. If the threat of the active attacker is still actively present, officers should not stop to render aid or assistance to the victims, but may, where reasonably possible, inform them that additional resources (for example RTFs) are forthcoming and direct them to a safe point of egress or hiding if they are ambulatory and it is deemed safe for them to do so. The contact officer or team should wear appropriate ballistic protection and equipment and should be specifically trained in tactics appropriate to respond to active attackers. However, when time is of the essence, entry should not be delayed in order to gather all items of equipment that should ideally be available.

The officer or team should employ tactical advantages to provide an element of surprise and to bypass potential secondary threats or ambush. Contact officers or team members should be given a clear radio channel to provide ongoing communications with the command post, if established; other tactical teams; and RTFs regarding the following:

- The officer or team's progress and location.
- The location and number of victims and their medical needs.
- The estimated number of active attacker(s).
- The active attacker's description and armament, if known.
- The location of any secondary threats.

Once the location of the active attacker(s) is known and any immediate threat is eliminated, the contact officer or team should secure the active attacker as directed by agency policy. A designated officer shall remain in place with the attacker, regardless of whether they are deceased or living. The contact officer or team, or other teams that are present, may then proceed to continue to clear all portions of the location in case more shooters are present.²⁵ The contact officer or team should follow sounds, such as yelling and screaming to locate victims and bystanders. If victims are encountered, the contact officer or team shall render immediate medical care while continuing to clear the location. Arriving tactical or other officers should be called upon to help clear the location of potential active attackers, locate and evacuate persons in hiding, and render safe any dangerous munitions or armament. If other sounds (such as gunfire or verbal threats) indicate an elevated threat may still be present, officers shall reassess the situation and prioritize the most imminent threat.

²⁴ Dependent on resources, agencies may want to keep the lines open for additional callers to provide different points of view and the most up-to-date information.

²⁵ It should be noted that most active shooter incidents include reports of multiple shooters, though the overwhelming majority (97.5%) have only one. See more information from ALERRT at [ALERRT Active Attack Data](#).

- **Rescue Task Forces (RTFs)**

Once the contact officer or team is deployed, and as officers and resources arrive at the incident scene, a requisite number of RTFs should be formed to provide trauma care. Clearing a large building takes time, during which wounded persons may die due to hemorrhage before transportation to a medical facility. RTFs are intended to fill this gap in providing trauma care. They generally consist of police officers providing protection to fire/EMS personnel moving in formation together to treat the injured. However, it is recognized that resources and personnel available for RTFs vary between jurisdictions. Therefore, it is left to the IC to determine the appropriate number of officers for each RTF.

RTFs should be deployed after the contact officer or team has made entrance, provided a status report, notified the command post of the location of victims, and determined that rescue efforts may begin. This can be done in stages as locations are declared warm. The RTFs should be organized under a team leader, deployed in tactical formations consistent with agency training, and be prepared to respond to hostile action as rapidly changing circumstances may place them in contact with the active attacker(s). If necessary, police officers with an RTF should be prepared and equipped to serve as a contact team. In case of contact with the active attacker, officers should move fire/EMS personnel to a point of cover (e.g., within a room with limited entry points) and leave at least one officer to serve as a guard. At no time should fire/EMS personnel operating within a warm zone be left unprotected.

Injured persons should be searched, if reasonable, and then moved to an area with limited physical entry points, referred to as a casualty collection point (CCP),²⁶ with cover provided by police officers. This location should also provide physical cover from a potential threat. If medical personnel are not yet in place at the CCP, trauma care should be the responsibility of police officers until relieved by EMS personnel. The IC, in coordination with RTFs, should identify points of egress as soon as possible to begin extraction of only the most critically wounded from CCPs to exterior locations. RTF members, specifically police officers, should search uninjured persons, for weapons, in the hostile environment before moving them to the designated evacuation area. Rescue and recovery options should continue until the IC has declared the scene cold. Officers assigned to the evacuation center should maintain custody and control of all victims and document their identities. As evacuees arrive at the evacuation center, the IC may direct that they be debriefed for information relating to the identity, location, and armament of the active attacker and such other information as may be deemed important to ongoing contact and rescue operations.

It has been noted here that the contact officer or team should dedicate its attention to finding and neutralizing the threat and wait for RTFs to attend to and evacuate the wounded. In order to provide any useful assistance to the wounded, or to fellow officers who may be wounded or injured, an officer must have trauma care training²⁷ and the means with which to attend to the individual. Agencies should provide officers with basic emergency medical trauma kits to provide such assistance.

- **Incident Command System**

Early coordination of incident activities is critical to mission success. Agency policy should establish provisions for the determination of who will assume the role of incident commander (IC)²⁸ and subsequent ICS roles and responsibilities.

²⁶ Although this method is being used, some agencies are starting to move away from CCPs and having injured individuals immediately transported to hospitals. Refer to agency policy and procedures for guidance on if a CCP will be set up or not.

²⁷ This may include tactical emergency casualty care (TECC) and tactical combat casualty care (TCCC). All officers should receive emergency first aid training for traumatic injuries.

²⁸ Agencies will have their own protocol to address if an incident commander should enter the building at any time to eliminate the active threat.

- ***Incident Commander***

Pursuant to Incident Command, all active teams should be identified and accounted for before deploying additional units or officers. Additional officers or teams may be deployed at the direction of the IC and should be informed of all officers and teams already deployed and their location and movement. Also, officers and teams already deployed should be notified of new personnel entering the scene, their location and movement plans. For example, if the incident is taking place in a multilevel building, it is critical that IC or their designee account for all personnel on each level and communicates this information clearly to officers within the building, ensuring personnel within the building are aware of other officers moving to their level or leaving their level. This is particularly important when plainclothes officers are on-site.

The IC or their designee should manage arriving partner agencies and their resources. Depending on agency policy, an officer who has assumed the role of incident commander will continue to serve in this role, regardless of other officers with higher rankings arriving on scene, until properly relieved. The IC serves as the primary point of contact between public safety communications centers; responding officers, including those who compose the contact team(s); fire/EMS personnel; and other entities that may arrive on the scene. The IC should establish communication with the contact officer(s) or team(s) and begin to coordinate their activity. Additionally, they should work with the ranking fire/EMS command officer(s) to form the unified command (UC).

The IC or designee should coordinate all operations including that of securing perimeters, establishing staging areas, and coordinating with the media (further detailed below). In addition, the IC should ensure that the following actions are accomplished based on their urgency and importance to the operation.

- Request assistance, as necessary. This may include mutual aid, medical evaluation resources, chaplains, and/or officers trained in field support. If appropriate based on the number of casualties, identify a field expedient heliport near the incident to allow for balanced distribution of patients to appropriate facilities.
 - Gather information. Initiate intelligence gathering on possible active attackers and establish communication with regional fusion or intelligence centers. Coordinate with owners or officials from the target location to obtain floor plans; site layout; and a roster, including emergency contact information as available, of employees, students, residents, visitors, or others believed to be on-site.
 - Consider coordinating to obtain pre-plans. Many jurisdictions have the identified information readily available onboard responding units.²⁹
 - Ensure clear communication. Organize unified interagency telecommunications. Assign a recorder to document actions at the command post.
 - Deploy tactical response. When available on scene, the IC may assign tactical officers as appropriate to contain the location, assist RTFs, help locate active attackers or relieve the contact officer or team, help locate and safeguard explosives pending removal, and provide special weapons and equipment as needed.
- ***Unified Command (UC)***

A UC should be established as soon as possible. A UC system is used when there is more than one agency with incident jurisdiction, or when incidents cross political jurisdictions. The UC should be located in an area

²⁹ Many fire departments have a building access system, commonly referred to as Knox keys or Supra keys. Other than some federal installations, this system grants near full access to an entire building or facility minimizing the need for advanced breaching efforts.

that is out of sight and out of the line of fire of the active attacker. It should be located within the convergence of the inner and outer perimeters for easy access by authorized individuals.

- ***Perimeters***

Secure the location by establishing:

- an inner perimeter to control access to and egress from the area of risk.
- an outer perimeter.
- traffic control and management to ensure egress of medical transport. Contact appropriate aviation resources to control air space for possible medical evacuation resources to establish restricted air space for police use only.
- assigned security to ensure only authorized personnel can gain access to the command post.

The IC should designate an initial inner perimeter to contain the active attacker and control access to and egress from the target location, when such containment is logical and appropriate. Escaping victims and witnesses should be directed out of the inner perimeter to the evacuation center for search, identification, and debriefing. Particular care must be taken to ensure that persons evacuating the facility do not include the active attacker(s), who may be attempting to flee. Additional officers should be deployed to control access to the target location and monitor the inner perimeter. An outer perimeter should also be designated for the primary purposes of diverting traffic and securing the scene from spectators, media members, and others. This outer perimeter should take into account the areas at risk of danger not only from the active attacker, but also from the contact officers or teams that may be engaging the shooter from different locations.

- ***Staging Areas***

The IC should ensure that suitable staging areas are selected for several purposes. The exact location of all staging areas must be provided to communications for relay to responding units. The designated officer should remain at the staging area at all times to brief arriving personnel and maintain communication with the emergency communications center and the IC.

Establish the following areas in the cold zone and provide security for each:

- A staging area for first responders to be directed to assignments.
- An evacuation area to move victims and witnesses not requiring medical attention.
- A CCP for treatment of the injured and evacuation by EMS or medevac.
- In consultation with EMS, an area that affords safe egress from the CCP and uninhibited egress of transport units from the scene.
- A reunification site at a suitable, nearby location to provide information to the loved ones of victims (patients or otherwise). The IC should consider utilizing social media to announce the location to prevent civilians from overwhelming the scene. Some jurisdictions elect to establish two reunification sites – one for individuals whose loved ones are deceased and another for those who are alive.
- A media staging area separate from the reunification site. This should afford desired video capability to satisfy media needs. The IC should consider activating involved agencies' PIOs early to coordinate media communication and direction. In many larger communities, different first response agencies have separate PIOs. Once a UC is established, there will be a joint information center (JIC) as well.

The staging area for family members, referred to as the reunification site, is particularly important at incidents in schools, and similar locations as word spreads through the community and distraught parents or

friends converge to the scene. Victim assistance, notification, and reunification should take place at this site with a check-in system for victim services and volunteers.

- ***Immediate Recovery***

Once the active threat is neutralized, immediate recovery strategies should be followed to efficiently recover information, security, and victims. The immediate recovery will help with after-action reports (AARs) and has the potential to help demonstrate or answer some questions as to how and why this incident occurred. These strategies include but are not limited to maintaining scene security, summoning additional agencies and resources, collecting information, conducting an assessment managing the damage as a result of the incident, providing victim assistance,³⁰ and making notification and reunification efforts, and ensuring that initial evidence collection and evidence preservation are initiated.

Maintaining scene security is crucial to ensure evidence collection and preservation are accurately accomplished. Responding agencies shall conduct continuous joint meetings to discuss procedures, protocols, and lines of communication. Conduct an assessment managing the damage as a result of the incident to include the infrastructure and geographical area closures; business impacts; effects on bystanders and witnesses of the active attacker; and impacts to victims, civilians, or responders—and assess any casualties as a result of the active attacker.

- ***Media***

Media attention will inevitably be drawn to active attack incident scenes. Activate involved agencies' PIOs early to initiate release of appropriate information and direction of individuals to appropriate locations. This information may include such items as shelter in place warnings for nearby locations during active attack situations; alerts to avoid the area due to heavy police activity and potential road closures; and specific directions for individuals who must respond to the scene. Social media should be considered as an avenue for quickly and effectively distributing appropriate information related to the active attack incident. Designation of a staging area for the media may help to ensure the release of accurate information, as well as to contain the movement of media personnel.³¹

The PIO or other designated individual(s) shall be responsible for ensuring the appropriate information from the IC is distributed in a timely manner to the community. To minimize confusion and ensure a consistent message, the PIO should release information only once it has been verified for accuracy and approved by the IC and/or appropriate officials according to agency policy. During the incident, news conferences for the media should be held and, if possible, specialists and other agency representatives should be asked to be present to answer questions specific to their areas of expertise.

The PIO or other designated individuals shall distribute information that community members can utilize to receive updated information on the incident. Information shall be distributed through means such as press conference(s), social media, and mass notification systems. Information distributed should include details of the official communication pathways community members can utilize to receive updated information on the incident, as well as actions and methods to increase public safety and reduce harm while the incident is ongoing. This may include who is sending the alert, why the alert is being sent, date and time of alert sent, shelter-in-place warnings for nearby locations during active attacks, alerts to avoid the area due to heavy police activity and potential road closures, and specific directions for individuals who must respond to the scene.

³⁰ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Response to Victims of Crime](#).

³¹ However, no special accommodations are required. “[T]he First Amendment does not guarantee the press a constitutional right of special access to information not available to the public generally.” Furthermore, “newsmen have no constitutional right of access to the scenes of crime or disaster when the general public is excluded.” See *Branzburg v. Hayes*, 408 U.S. 665 (1972).

C. AFTER-ACTION EXAMINATION

After the incident, the agency shall conduct an after-action examination including essential personnel involved in the incident. The examination should identify response operations that worked well as well as areas of potential improvement to include whether changes in operational protocols, policy, or training may be warranted.

Agencies should remind officers of the available physical and psychological well-being resources. Although the exact resources available will be agency dependent, some programs to consider may include:³²

- *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)* – This is a formal group or one-on-one discussion held after a traumatic event, designed to help participants understand the emotional reactions they may be feeling to mitigate further compounded stress reactions.
- *Agency Peer Support Programs* – A program designed to provide one-on-one emotional, social, or practical support and referrals to additional professional services, when needed. The program comprises specifically trained sworn or civilian colleagues, referred to as peer support persons, who are not counselors or therapists.
- *Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)* – Confidential mental health services provided by a third party and sponsored by the employer.
- *Psychological Services/Behavioral Health and Wellness Program* – Confidential mental health services provided outside of insurance by a private company with culturally competent mental health professionals.

³² For more information, see the IACP Policy Center guidance on [Employee Mental Health and Wellness](#).

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Need to Know...

Updated: July 2024

Active Attack

An active attack can result in multiple casualties in a short period of time; approximately half of all casualties in such situations happen before officers or other emergency responders can be summoned. However, even one or two officers can make a difference in the outcome of an active attack by taking swift but calculated action.

- An **active attack** is defined as an incident in which one or more armed persons have used, or are reasonably likely to use, or are using deadly force in an ongoing manner, and where persons have been injured, killed, or are under imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm by such persons. Additional terms that may be used to describe these incidents include *active killing*, *active shooter*, *active threat*, and *mass casualty attack*.
- Police agencies should adopt policies that allow for **immediate action** to be taken by responding officers to prevent further injuries or loss of life.
- If officers are unarmed, although they will not be a part of the tactical response, they can still play a critical role in the response to an attack by updating **communication centers**, **facilitating evacuations**, or **assisting with injured persons**.
- A **contact officer or team** comprises the first officer(s) at the scene of an active attack tasked with locating the active attacker(s) and stopping the threat.
- Once sufficient resources are available, **rescue task forces** (RTFs) should be formed. These teams consist of fire/EMS personnel, paired with police officers. The goal of RTFs is to provide trauma care and fill the gap in providing care to wounded persons before transportation to a medical facility.
- **Unified command** should be established as soon as possible and should include representatives from all involved agencies.
- Establish **staging areas** in cold zone(s) for responding officers and other emergency personnel, for treatment of the injured and evacuation by EMS or medevac (CCP), where individuals without injuries should be directed for identification and debriefing (evacuation area), to accommodate arriving family members of persons at the incident scene (reunification site), and for the media.
- Police agencies should conduct **interagency training** with neighboring jurisdictions and other key first responder entities. Establishing unified command practices through policy and MOUs in advance of an incident can help all involved with a better understanding of the role they will play if such an incident were to ever happen.
- Police should explain to the **community** what is known about active attacks, provide information on how police will respond and react, and share what potential victims need to know to protect themselves and others prior to police arrival and intervention.
- **Collaborative training** with community members also provides the agency with opportunities to enhance public trust through increased transparency of police practices and common expectations.



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