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FALL 2024

Exclusive Officer eHandbook on

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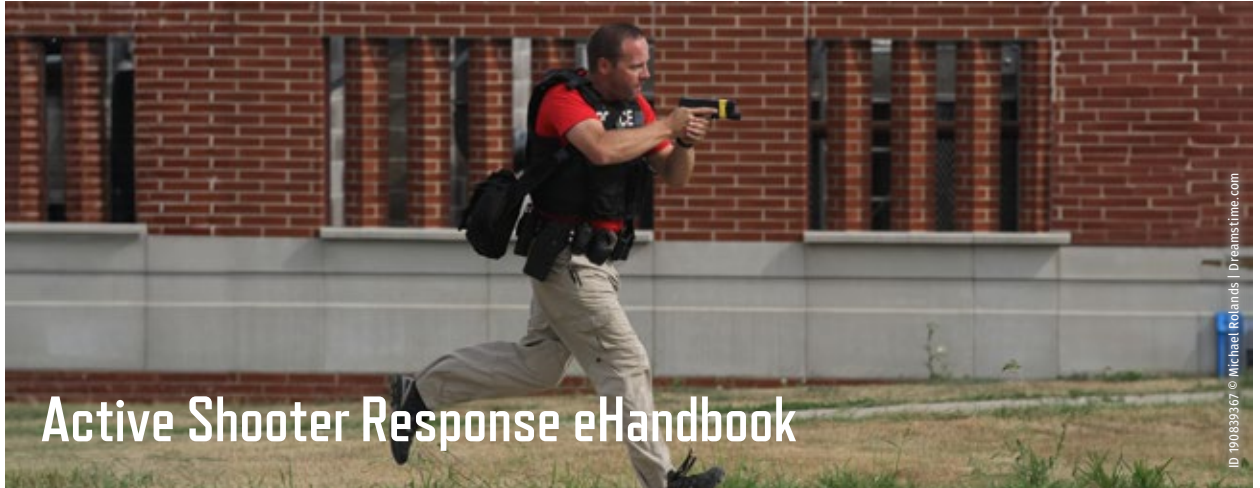
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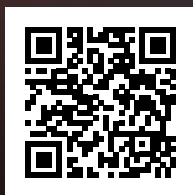
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Exploring Active Shooter Response



Lt. Frank Borelli (ret) is the Editorial Director for the Officer Media Group. Frank brings 20-plus years of writing and editing experience in addition to 40 years of law enforcement operations, administration and training experience to the team.

If you have any comments or questions, you can contact him via email at Frank@Officer.com.

Welcome to our second eHandbook, this one focusing on Active Shooter events and response. With Active Shooter events dating back well over 150 years in our country, and with the aggressive evolution of response that had its roots in the “Texas Tower” event in 1966, the changes that have occurred since the Columbine attack in 1999 have been significant and quick. When it was obvious that contemporary tactics (in 1999) weren’t working, we adapted. When the early protocol of “four-man diamond” was recognized as not applicable enough for many agencies, we adapted. When it became obvious that many of our protocols simply can’t be applied universally, we adapted.

In today’s world, a single-officer response is becoming almost universally accepted and trained. Is it dangerous? It carries some risk. Is it most time efficient at removing the on-going

threat to innocents? Yes. Is there a way to empower law enforcement professionals to act as efficiently as possible to protect innocents? Every agency is doing their best to work toward that goal in both training and policy.

In this eHandbook you’ll find several articles regarding the Active Shooter topic. From the role of medics in response to how our response keeps evolving to the use of technology in school safety, we’ve tried to offer a holistic view of Active Shooter Immediate Response and Prevention as it exists today. We appreciate your input and feedback so please don’t hesitate to send such via email to editors@officer.com.

Stay safe; stay professional; stay courteous; stay efficient.

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Medics in the Line of Fire



OFFICER Magazine spoke to three agencies about the roles of their tactical medic teams. **By Joe Vince**

Kristopher Gent has been a tactical medic long enough to remember when tourniquets were considered taboo and he couldn't carry a gun on the job. Now he's trained to use both in the field. He's also been a tactical medic long enough that other agencies seek him out for advice on how to create those positions.

"I was joking not too long ago, if I was smarter, I probably would have got out of this a long time ago," he says. "I'm sure my wife would probably appreciate it if I didn't keep doing it. I know every time I go out the door on one of these calls, there's always a little bit of worry of what could happen."

The Green, Ohio, Fire Department battalion chief is part of a growing position in SWAT units that bridges law enforcement and the EMS and fire service. *OFFICER Magazine* spoke to officials from three agencies about their tactical medic teams, from the roles they serve to allowing members to carry guns.

▲ **Green, Ohio, tactical medics practice an officer down drill, applying tourniquets and extricating a patient.** Green, Ohio, Fire Department

Green, Ohio

Gent was at the ground floor when the Green Fire Department created its tactical medic unit. In 1998, the Green County Sheriff's Office—which contracts law enforcement service with the city—was restarting its SWAT unit, and it was thought a medical component would be needed, "which, at the time, was kind of forward-thinking," says Gent.

"The original thought was just send one of the deputies to EMT training, and that would be their medical support," he says. "The fire chief was a part-time deputy. He realized that if you took a deputy, trained him on the medical side, it might be kind of hard to maintain the proficiency on the medical side if you're not doing it every day. But also if you have a small team and now you take one of those operators, and they have to treat another operator,

ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

you're down a minimum of two. So he said, 'Hey, I've got paramedics. Why don't we let the paramedics be paramedics? We'll let the deputies be operators, and we'll kind of form this team together. And that's how we all started.'

Since that time, Gent has seen the program evolve into the 10-member team it is today. Medics train eight hours a month with the SWAT team. Applicants are chosen not only for their particular skills as a paramedic, but the ability to thrive in different kinds of high-pressure situations.

"We're also looking for that paramedic that can think outside the box and kind of react under pressure," says Gent. "We have one paramedic that years and years ago applied. He's a very good medic, back of the ambulance. And if you're supposed to do A, B then C, he'll get that done. But he's a type of guy that if you have to go from A to D, you might get a little hung up, because our medical protocol says we have to do this, then this and this.

"That's in the back of an ambulance. That's not in a front room of a house where a deputy just got shot coming through the front door. We might have to go from A to D and then get out of there."

That shift in thinking extends to how tactical medics treat those injured in the field. As a paramedic, Gent would assess patients to possibly have them transported for further treatment. As a tactical medic, he tries to find the best way to keep a deputy in the fight if possible.

"Probably one of the (incidents) that jumps into my mind, not a significant injury, but it showed to me the value of having immediate medical care ... I was assigned to deputies on



Green Fire Department



the backside of a building that were breaching an upper door off of like almost like a deck, and the deputy that was breaching, ... he followed through with the ram and ended up hitting his hand on the door frame and busted open his hand and started bleeding," says Gent. "For a brief second, he's out of the fight. He's bleeding. He's injured. I was able to pull him aside, wrap his hand quickly and send him back in to finish the mission."

It was an example that because the medics were so closely embedded with them, instead of him having to drop out of the fight, we were able to quickly patch him up, let him finish his job, support the other deputies on the scene, and then we could get him proper medical care," he adds.

Ohio is one of the states that allows tactical medics to carry a gun for self-defense during SWAT assignments. Gent admits it's a big responsibility, but the 40 hours



Green, Ohio, tactical medics participate in a drill during the basic firearms class. Students had to bandage a "patient," then address threats as they were presented. Green, Ohio, Fire Department



Green, Ohio, tactical medics don gas masks for a training exercise. Green, Ohio, Fire Department



Gaston County, North Carolina, tactical medics are deployed during a call. Gaston County, North Carolina, EMS

of state-mandated firearms training helps prepare the paramedics with the proper skills and mindset.

“It’s not a matter of being cool or, hey, look at me. I can carry a gun now. I’m a fireman, and I can carry a gun,” he says. “It’s recognizing what that really means, that if you’re in a situation where you have to draw that weapon, that there’s a chance you may have to take someone’s life. ... You want to make sure you have the training, that you can recognize a threat properly and address that threat as needed.”

Pasco County, Florida

Pasco County Fire Rescue hasn’t had nearly the history with tactical medics that the Green Fire Department has. The fire service agency in the county just north of Tampa initially set the wheels in motion for a group of tactical medics to work with the Pasco County Sheriff’s Office’s SWAT unit in early 2023. By December, the first members



Gaston County, North Carolina, EMS

attended a mini-SWAT training school, and in February, Deputy Chief Shawn Whited received the first call in which tactical medics were needed.

“This was a high-risk search warrant that was going to be served at three in the morning, so we had prior acknowledgement of the SWAT call out,” Whited tells *OFFICER*. “For our first time going out and putting our paramedics in body armor and armored vehicles with their issued agency weapons and stuff, to be able to put them out in somewhat of a controlled call out was really reassuring.”

That first call ended up being the best kind of calls: uneventful. Medics weren’t needed, but deployment went smoothly. In fact, Whited was impressed with how seamlessly the agency’s medics meshed with the SWAT unit. Not only did the medics post at the SWAT unit’s command center and keep track of warrant execution via a live drone feed, but they also were brought in at the planning stage.

“Our guys that were with them were just like part of their team, like just integrated perfectly with them,” he says. “So to have that type of a first call out was really nice.”

The cooperation Whited saw on that first mission illustrates the “really great relationship” the fire agency and the sheriff’s office have, something that hasn’t always been the case. Although tactical medics are a recent addition, the two agencies had talks on and off over the years of creating the positions, but nothing could get hammered out until last year. The agencies’ increased closeness has bled through in other areas, too.

“They called us at the very onset and gave us a heads up and said, ‘Hey, we might have a barricaded subject, and he’s threatening to blow his house up, and he’s dumping gasoline all



Gaston County, North Carolina, tactical medic team. Gaston County, North Carolina, EMS

ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

over his house, and he's got propane tanks set up. ... Can you send someone over to help in our planning cell?" says Whited.

"They called us early, (and we) were able to get in there early," he adds. "The sheriff's office doesn't know what the fire rescue capabilities are, and when you get a bunch of police officers in a room, they think up some crazy stuff. And one of their ideas was to attach a fire hose to the end of a battering ram and drive it through the wall of a house. I told them, that's not a good idea. We're not going to do that. So we came up with a different game plan that we have the expertise in, and they were like, 'Oh, well, that actually makes more sense.' And I'm like, 'Right, you guys shoot the bad guys. We'll put the fire out.' ... It's really kind of united the two agencies to be on a better playing field."

Like Ohio, Florida allows tactical medics to carry guns in self-defense, and it's a privilege given to those in Pasco County. Whited says that officials did have initial talks about not arming tactical medics, but it was ultimately determined to allow them to carry guns to protect themselves. And just as important was making sure medics were legally protected, he adds.



Gaston County, North Carolina, EMS

"That was our biggest thing, we wanted to protect our members of the fire service, because ultimately, at the end of the day, they're still they still work for the fire department. We wanted to make sure that they were well-protected. And like I said, through our agreement with the sheriff's office and working with their attorneys and the county's attorneys, we were able to come to a really good, solid understanding of how, God forbid, something should happen, whose responsibilities are where. And we've laid all that out, so we're all on the same page."

Currently, Pasco County has 16 tactical medics, but Whited says the goal is 22. When he thinks about the program's future, Whited envisions more buy in and interest from those within the agency. That's something he knows takes time, but now that the program is underway, he's already seeing it grabbing the attention of a few of his colleagues.

"We had our first actual call out the other night, and since that call out, I've had three firefighter/paramedics that called me and said, 'Hey, I didn't know this was really going to happen.' Well, we've sent out emails. It's happening. We told you it's happening. So now we have three more guys that are going to start going through the process."



Gaston County, North Carolina, tactical medics run through a training drill. Gaston County, North Carolina, EMS

Gaston County, North Carolina

Between the two of them, Gaston County EMS Deputy Chief Jamie McConnell and Capt. Bill Mitchell have roughly 55 years of EMT experience. Their agency created a tactical medic program in 2000, and Mitchell was in one of the first groups to go through training in 2002, while McConnell joined in 2004. The job even lured Mitchell out of briefly retiring after 30 years of service to serve part time and oversee the team.

"It's like my way to come back and still be able to do something and take things off of other people's plates, because we're not so busy that it's a full-time position. ... It's a good part-time position," he says. "Sometimes it pushes the envelope of being a little more than part time. But we seem to manage. We work well together."



Gaston County, North Carolina, tactical medics respond to a call. Gaston County, North Carolina, EMS

Along with the on-scene support during high-risk warrants and other SWAT calls, Mitchell and McConnell see the role of the tactical medic as a “medical conscience” for team commanders. While SWAT members are focused on devising the best way to breach a house, the tactical medical team creates a plan to keep everyone involved alive.

“We bridge the gap for all the other emergency services because they have a tough job,” says McConnell. “They’re trying to address a threat, so we kind of have to step back and think about everything else, think about the well-being of not only the officers, but whatever victims we may have in the house or even the neighborhood, the surrounding neighbors and everybody else that could be involved.”



Green County, Ohio, sheriff's deputies provide security, while tactical medics treat an officer behind the vehicle during an officer down training drill. Green, Ohio, Fire Department

Keeping team members safe also includes keeping the medics protected. North Carolina is not a state that allows its tactical medics to carry guns (a bill passed the House but died in the Senate). The agency, however, is exploring other avenues to arm its tactical medics, says McConnell. County lawyers are exploring a North Carolina Office of Emergency Medical Services administrative rule that allows medics to carry a weapon on a truck specifically for tactical medic call outs as long as it's locked and in a safe out of the patient compartment. Another option could be to swear in medics as volunteer deputies.

“I would hope within the next three months we would have all the policies done and approved and be able to start walking through the initial steps for (arming) one or two medics and doing the proof of concept,” says McConnell.

Although it comes with its own unique stresses and dangers, the job of a tactical medic can share the same sense of satisfaction and disappointment as that of a non-SWAT paramedic. McConnell and Mitchell have both responded to calls that have ended with everyone going home, as well as those in which everyone wasn't that fortunate.

“We had a fairly high-profile case that we ended up losing a child,” says Mitchell. “The team ended up saving a child, but they also lost a child. That one, it's still kind of fresh. I was glad I was there to help some officers that were injured. I was glad I was there to help one of the children that survived. ... So even in that one call there, there's things I'm glad I was there for, and things I wish I could forget.”

Active Shooter Response Continues to Evolve



Over 20 years old, it's easy to see the timeline of response evolution and policy adjustment.

By Frank Borelli

There are some decisions in life that are just so clear-cut we consider them “no brainers.” Should I jump off this cliff to my certain death? NO. Should I get my mother a birthday card and get it in the mail to her? YES. Should I pay attention when my spouse is telling me what I did the other day that set her off so badly? YES. For some reason, though, some of us just never learn. With active shooter response, however, the decisions aren't always so clear-cut and, unfortunately, making the wrong decision can cost lives.

If you take a look back at the active shooter response movement—now over twenty years old—it's easy to see the timeline of response evolution, policy adjustment, etc. Some agencies seem to have a hard time keeping up with the times. The unconscionably slow response at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is an example of how an agency's training and policies fell behind the times. The single officer (school resource officer)

response at Great Mills High School is an example of a more contemporary response.

The challenge we have in law enforcement is that we sometimes get so caught up in the evolution of tactics development that we don't slow down enough to ask ourselves a couple of very valid questions. Is this change necessary? Is this change beneficial? Is this change universal or are there mitigating circumstances?

Very seldom will we develop a specific response protocol that has universal application with no impacting circumstance(s). It's rare that we develop a tactic that is used “100% of the time without fail.” Too much is unknown. Too much is unexpected. Too often we have to improvise, adapt and overcome unforeseen challenges. And none of that takes into consideration the fact that circumstances change as the situation develops. Nothing stays as it was at the onset, and our own response can impact how a dynamic situation flows.



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Some things about active shooter response are non-specific enough to never change:

- We should get on scene as fast as is safely possible (if you don't get there, you can't do any good, so responding in an unsafe manner is just stupid).
- We should arm/equip ourselves as best we can with what we have available.
- We should respond to the sound of shots/scene of the ongoing threat; engage and neutralize the threat in the most time efficient manner possible.

Where some things have changed for response protocol is in manpower where it's an option. (We'll explain "where it's an option" farther down). In the beginning of Active Shooter Response (ASR), the most common response protocol was to arrive quickly, team up to form the four-man diamond, move to the shots and neutralize the threat. The concept of a four-man diamond didn't fly in some places because they simply didn't have the manpower or the response distance was potentially so great that by the time four officers got on scene, the shooter would have died of old age. OK...that's an exaggeration, but not by much. Some jurisdictions simply don't have the density of manpower to provide such response.

As an adjustment to that reality, many agencies started training buddy teams: two officer response teams. That improved things some, but didn't resolve all challenges; and it didn't answer one question that was frequently asked:

If I'm the first officer there and I can go in to engage the one shooter, thereby saving lives and minimizing injuries,

how can I morally, professionally and ethically justify waiting for another officer?

Since there was no good answer to that and since risk is inherent to the job, the single officer response couldn't really be denied as a potential response protocol. The reality is that not every officer has the courage to do it. The large majority do. Where an agency felt it was a viable option, the protocol was developed and trained. The faster an officer got on scene to engage the gunman (or gunmen), the faster the threat to innocents could be either redirected to the officer or neutralized outright.

There is no arguing that this single officer response protocol is in the best interest of protecting innocent life. There is also no arguing that it creates a greater risk for the responding officer. With all that in mind, let's look at a hypothetical situation and then discuss it.

Situation: An active shooter call goes out. Officers respond. The first officer on the scene is at his trunk pulling on his plate carrier/kit and grabbing his rifle. As he is doing so, a second officer pulls up and exits his vehicle. The first officer is kitted up and ready to go and shouts, "Catch up to me when you can!" and sprints into the school/location. The second officer is behind him... by about five to ten seconds. Just as the second officer is going in, the third and fourth officer pull up with more not far behind them.

Discussion: Should the first officer have waited the brief period of time...that five to ten seconds...for the second officer to be ready so that they could make entry as a buddy team rather than two single officers?



Single officer response protocols say go when ready; no waiting. Officer survival protocols say to always have backup when you can/if it's available. The question then becomes whether or not the five- to 10-second delay is acceptable. Understand as you read the rest of this that there is no fixed/correct yes or no answer.

Five to 10 seconds...it seems such a brief period of time. Everyone can hold their breath that long. Most NFL players can run half to a full football field length in that time. On the range, five to ten seconds means three to five well aimed shots.

Now think about those three sentences. One indicates how short that time frame is. The other two indicate how much can be accomplished in that "brief" period of time. If you've ever been in a fight for your life, you know just how long five to ten seconds can be. The unfortunate reality is that an active shooter can easily engage two, three, four or more victims in that five to ten seconds. It's just a matter of how fast he can shoot and how accurate he is (thankfully, most of them aren't). So while the first officer on scene waits five to ten seconds for the second officer to be ready, even though he's already there and kitting up as fast as he can, that small passage of time can mean increased victims; increased casualties.

That's the balance and trade off we always need to keep in mind as we make the decision. And rest assured: NO ONE can make that decision except the officer who has


▲ If you take a look back at the active shooter response movement, now over twenty years old, it's easy to see the timeline of response evolution, policy adjustment, etc.

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to make it. It will be different, or can be, at every active shooter scene and there will be a myriad of circumstances the officer has to consider before he makes that decision. Many people will second guess him and, no matter which way he goes with that decision, there's always the chance someone will file a civil suit against him for having made the wrong decision.

At the end of the day, whether or not it was the right decision will be determined by how at peace the officer is in his soul and how easily he sleeps at night. Almost every officer knows what it feels like to regret a decision and, much to the media's disbelief, the decisions involving innocent life are always the ones that haunt us most.

The decision won't be easy when you have to make it. Make it easier by maintaining your training, maintaining your equipment and making sure the simple repetitive stuff is as it always should be: ready to go. That will free up your mind to make the tougher decisions you will face. Do the best you can do because that's all anyone can ever ask of you, but more importantly, it's what will bring you peace of mind after the fact. If you did your best, the regrets are minimized and the self-criticism can go away. 🏠



No Joke: Searching for Serious Solutions to ‘Swatting’

To combat and prevent “swatting” threats, law enforcement fights a two-front battle. *By Joe Vince*

The man accused of shooting and possibly killing his girlfriend wasn’t answering his cellphone.

Police in Columbus, Ohio, had formed a perimeter around the house the suspect was allegedly in, possibly with a woman who may or may not have been alive. Streets were barricaded, roughly 15 patrol units responded to the scene, and a SWAT unit was called in.

When attempts at phone contact proved futile, police turned to an old school device: the public address system. A negotiator told the suspect that if he won’t answer his phone, he can call the command bus. The approach proved successful. The command bus line rang, and an angry suspect threatened to kill anyone who entered the house, vowing not to be taken alive.

Except it wasn’t the suspect. It was a resident in the neighborhood who heard the command bus phone number

and, as a prank, called it pretending to be the suspect.

Except the original suspect shouldn’t have even been a suspect. Like the Columbus Police Department, the man in the house was the victim of a deadly prank: “swatting.” Frequently tied to the online gaming community, swatting is when a person—possibly an irate gamer or someone looking to intimidate an elected official—calls 911 to falsely accuse a victim of a crime that initiates a SWAT response. In many cases, the victims and the perpetrators don’t even live in the same geographic areas, a crime abetted by the connectivity of 21st century technology.

“You got the original swatting call, now you’ve got this other character who just happens to be listening and seeing all the commotion and hears the phone number, decides he’s going to play a prank, so these things can sprout,” Jason Pappas, vice president of the Fraternal Order of Police for Ohio, tells *OFFICER Magazine*. “It



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created a real tense situation for the officers, which, thank God, they were able to get somebody in the house to acknowledge that they were there for that house.

“Then it was, ‘Hey, you know, I’ll come out with my hands up. I don’t know what the hell is going on.’ And so eventually they were able to work through it,” adds Pappas, a Columbus police officer. The incident illustrates how potentially explosive and deadly an act intended as a malicious prank can be. Swatting’s cautionary tale, though, happened in Wichita, Kansas, in 2017, when a 28-year-old father was shot and killed by an officer who was called to the home as part of a SWAT response set off by an upset gamer in California. The prank landed the gamer a 20-year prison sentence, and it led the Wichita Police Department to create an alert system for people concerned that they might be the target of a swatting call. In July, an appeals court ruled that the officer who fired the fatal shot can be tried in an excessive force civil case.

Even when a swatting call doesn’t end in tragedy, it still extracts a heavy toll on the victims and law enforcement.

“You’re talking about 20-plus officers for two or three hours on this standoff that didn’t exist,” says Pappas of the Columbus incident. “So it took valuable resources from the community. It was very costly to operate, and at the end of the day, it was very traumatic for the people who were involved and didn’t know that they were even involved. When they figured out that a SWAT team was there to search their house and make sure everybody’s

OK, of course, then they were frightened and didn’t know what was going on.

“So this is not just a misuse of 911. These are elevated risk situations that create panic, that create a tremendous waste of resources,” he adds.

Seattle’s anti-swatting registry

One of the first law enforcement agencies to address the swatting problem head on was the Seattle Police Department. The idea was straightforward: Develop a voluntary database of people who fear or might be vulnerable to a swatting call. Using Rave Mobile Safety’s Rave Facility module, part of the of the Rave 911 Suite, alerts are provided concerning calls involving individuals who had requested to be in the registry.

“In the aftermath of the tragedy in Wichita, Kansas, I received a request from a community member asking for a way to register their address as a potential swatting target,” says Sean Whitcomb, the retired Seattle police public affairs director who launched the department’s anti-swatting registry. “This person had a network of other contacts who were asking for the same thing. These types of requests aren’t always easy to make, but this person was comfortable reaching out to me directly since we knew some of the same people. Confidentiality was very important, and this person knew I would respect that.”

At the time, the community request also dovetailed nicely into a department priority.

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“Separately, the Seattle Police Department was positioning itself as a national leader in de-escalation training, so having a program in place to de-escalate swatting incidents was a very good fit,” says Whitcomb.

That confluence of events couldn't have been timelier, something that “highlighted the urgency of my work,” he says. The registry was brought online Oct. 1, 2018. Two months earlier in August, the department was involved in an incident in which officers rushed into a home and cuffed a swatting victim.

“Life safety is the paramount concern when responding to any high-priority incident. When lives are at stake, seconds and minutes matter,” says Whitcomb. “Since high-priority incidents are less common, established training and processes can be helpful to ensure successful outcomes. Police have to treat these events as if they are real until they are confident that they are not. So the trick becomes to determine the validity of the event as quickly as possible, preferably before police even arrive.”

As a preventive measure, much of the success of Seattle's registry lies with its appeal to residents who might feel vulnerable and threatened.

“First of all, it's a community-driven solution to a very serious problem,” says Whitcomb. “Second, it can be completed online without any police contact. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the information in the registry is completely confidential, and exempt from Washington State Public Disclosure laws... This is especially important since those who might be at risk for swatting would also likely be at risk for doxxing.”

From a law enforcement perspective, the registry's effectiveness is built on three pillars, according to Whitcomb:

- Enhanced screening and detection in the 911 Center
- An emphasis on de-escalation by first responders
- Anti-swatting registry

“All three pillars complement each other, creating a success loop,” he says. “If one of the pillars is missing, there is still a good likelihood that a malicious swatting attempt will fail.”

Harsher penalties

Combatting swatting means swinging with a double-edged sword: one edge is law enforcement response, the other is legislative measures.

“This is much more complicated than just the misuse of 911, which is a misdemeanor. Because of the elevated



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risk and the elevated consequences, I think an elevated penalty is appropriate,” says Pappas. “These things are extremely dangerous for both the officers involved and for the public at large.”

In Ohio, lawmakers are proposing legislation that would create harsher penalties for the perpetrators of swatting calls. Under the nearly identical twin bills going through the state legislature, swatting would become a third-degree felony, and it could rise to a first-degree felony if someone is harmed in the incident. Offenders could be ordered to reimburse departments for the call's response, as well.

Pappas says the state's FOP supports both pieces of legislation in their current forms. The bills also show that swatting is a prevalent enough that state legislature needed to step in, he adds.

“I think (lawmakers) heard from their local agencies about the elevated risk, the enormous response and then the complications that come from it, and then pretty much the lack of any penalty thereof,” says Pappas. “In previous times, we would just charge somebody with misuse of the 911 or telecommunication system and pretty much be done with it. But that seems really insufficient for the elevated risk and response here.”

Whitcomb knows the importance of swatting being recognized as its own specific and unique offense. He helped in the successful effort to include swatting in Washington State's criminal code. But the ultimate goal is for national crime recognition.

“Having swatting tracked as a unique event in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) would provide greater visibility to this swatting crime trends,” he says.

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Active Shooter or Hostage Barricade Situation?

The circumstance can change in a moment. **By Frank Borelli**

Following the May 24, 2022, Uvalde school shooting, there was a great deal of conversation about the police response to the tragedy at Robb Elementary School in Texas. While the mainstream media was hyper-critical of every police action taken, true law enforcement tactics experts have offered observations about what could have been done differently and better.

The largest criticism from any quarter has been about the officers waiting outside a classroom door and not making immediate entry; a lack of action that is believed by many to have permitted the killer to act at his leisure; a lack of action that's been seen as unnecessarily risking the lives of the children in that classroom. Additionally, the suspect was observed outside the school prior to the attack, and many have been critical that any officer who saw him didn't immediately engage him to prevent the attack.

Let me be clear: this author was not on the scene. This author has no firsthand knowledge of the circumstances, officer observations, officer perceptions, etc. An investigation of every minute detail—in fact several of them probably—will be completed in time. Even such an investigation cannot properly document what the involved officers perceived and how they interpreted what they saw/heard. For the purposes of this article, we're going to

▲ **The transition from a perceived hostage barricade situation back to an active shooter situation happens, literally, with the sound of a gunshot.** ID 29991319 © Modfos | Dreamstime.com

focus on contemporary best practices, tactics and another active killer event that happened in 2006, the Nickel Mines school attack. Let's briefly review the two events

Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, Oct. 2, 2006: Charles Carl Roberts IV took hostages in a one-room Amish schoolhouse, eventually shooting 10 of them, killing five. It's estimated that he entered the school at about 10:30 a.m. and ordered the 15 boys in the class along with several women who had infants to leave the school. The first emergency call was made to 911 at approximately 10:35 a.m. that morning, and police were dispatched. The first officer reportedly arrived six minutes later at 10:41 a.m. It's important to note that what he found on his arrival was a hostage barricade situation. No shots were being fired. No one was being killed at the time of his arrival. More officers responded and communications were established with Roberts inside the school. Roberts tied up the hostages and barricaded the doors. At approximately 11 a.m., Roberts told a 911 dispatcher to have all police immediately leave the property and surrounding area or he would kill

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his hostages. The dispatcher tried to hold onto the conversation and buy time, but Roberts disconnected the call and shot his 10 hostages. Within seconds of the first shots, police stormed the building and Roberts committed suicide as the police made entry. It's been observed that the only way to have prevented the shooting of the hostages is if a precision marksman had been able to shoot Roberts from a distance, through some small observable area, immediately disabling Roberts and not harming any of the hostages with the shot(s). Historically speaking, police "snipers" don't engage hostage takers unless there is an immediate and demonstrated threat to the lives of the hostages. A threat hasn't been met with lethal force

Uvalde, Texas, May 24, 2022: Suspect 18-year-old Salvador Ramos allegedly attacked Robb Elementary School after having attacked his grandmother at her home and taking her truck. At the school he fired shots outside before making entry, then shutting himself inside two adjoining classrooms. Reportedly, Ramos fired over 100 shots in under four minutes inside the classrooms, starting at approximately 11:33 a.m. At 11:37 a.m. he engaged officers in the hallway, injuring two. At 11:41 a.m. one Uvalde police officer reportedly said, "...there's still shooting," apparently meaning inside the classroom and notably eight minutes after the attack started inside the school. However, it's worth noting that there is no report of shooting after that time until 12:21 p.m. when shots are heard (per the surveillance footage). Repeated calls are made by students to 911 asking them to send in the police immediately. At 12:50 p.m., off-duty Border Patrol officers make entry into the classroom. Ramos reportedly was hiding in a closet but exited quickly upon entry of the officers and fired at them. The officers returned fire and neutralized Ramos. The important thing to note here: No shots fired between 11:41 a.m. and 12:21 p.m.—a span of 40 minutes—and no shots fired/ heard between 12:21 p.m. and 12:50 p.m. when the room was breached (a span of 29 minutes).

Now let's step back to the year 2000 when today's active shooter response protocols were developed, began to evolve and were trained at least annually by most agencies. After the attack at Columbine High School in Colorado came the realization that we had to change how we responded to immediate and ongoing threats. Originally the four-man diamond response was developed, but that soon evolved into buddy-team responses and then single-officer response. Everyone agrees that the foremost concern in any ongoing attack scenario is the time-efficient neutralization of the threat. That said, another protocol that has been taught throughout that time frame (since 2000) is how an active shooter event can transition into a hostage barricade situation and that officers have to be alert for that and transition to the proper tactics on demand—or as the circumstances change to demand such. The difference to remember is that response to active shooter is immediate, aggressive and ends with suspect neutralization/arrest. The response to a



Unfortunately, the actions of a shooter change in milliseconds and our responses simply can't be as fast; no human's can.

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hostage barricade situation is creating a secure perimeter and holding it while SWAT/Tactical teams plan and execute a solution in conjunction with hostage negotiators.

IN THE MOMENT, with adrenaline running over the top, risk and threat high but rated individually based on the perception of circumstances by each officer, it can be difficult to slow down or stop short to transition from active shooter response to hostage barricade response protocols. Unfortunately, the actions of a shooter change in milliseconds, and our responses simply can't be as fast; no human can. Recognize that the transition from a perceived hostage barricade situation BACK to an active shooter situation happens, literally, with the sound of a gunshot. But if it's only one... or 2, 3, 4... it's still potentially a matter of one or two seconds. If the officers aren't moving within that one to two-second window, and then the shots stop, is it an active shooter? Or a hostage barricade? Many hostage barricade situations have happened wherein shots were fired but the situation stayed stable and was ended peacefully

Considering all of that, we also have to add on this huge caveat: law enforcement professionals aren't legally (or morally) allowed to shoot a person who doesn't present an immediate threat. We don't do preemptive executions—or post-action executions. Our job is to stop the ongoing immediate threat to life. If such doesn't exist, we can't use lethal force. Given the current societal optics being viewed of the Uvalde shooting incident, it seems that's what is being demanded—stop the shooters before they become shooters. Read their mind. Read their heart. Read their intent. We need to control that message in reply: We can't use lethal force in response to what we think a suspect might do. For us to act with lethal force we have to be preventing an immediate threat and there is a slew of conditions surrounding that use that we have to be able to articulate clearly after the fact

Be clear in your communications to the community you serve and make sure they understand what your officers can and can't do and why. We have to fight the louder message that we aren't killing fast enough—and that's what seems to be the loudest voice out there. 🗣️

Improving School Response Through Technology

Technology companies have been hard at work on new software to help prevent incidents at schools, while also mitigating common issues in the aftermath. **By Paul Peluso**

Responding to large-scale incidents at schools is something law enforcement has grappled with for decades. Columbine in 1999, to Parkland in 2018, to Uvalde in 2022, and the Covenant School shooting in 2023; these tragic occurrences are only becoming more common.

Agencies throughout the country have been working to develop new tactics and policies to respond to such events. At the same time, public safety-focused technology companies have been hard at work on new software to help prevent them, and mitigate common issues in the aftermath.

RapidSOS held a roundtable with representatives from ZeroEyes, Raptor Technologies and Pikmykid, where the challenges faced when it comes to finding ways to keep students, teachers and first responders safe, while also keeping parents informed were discussed.

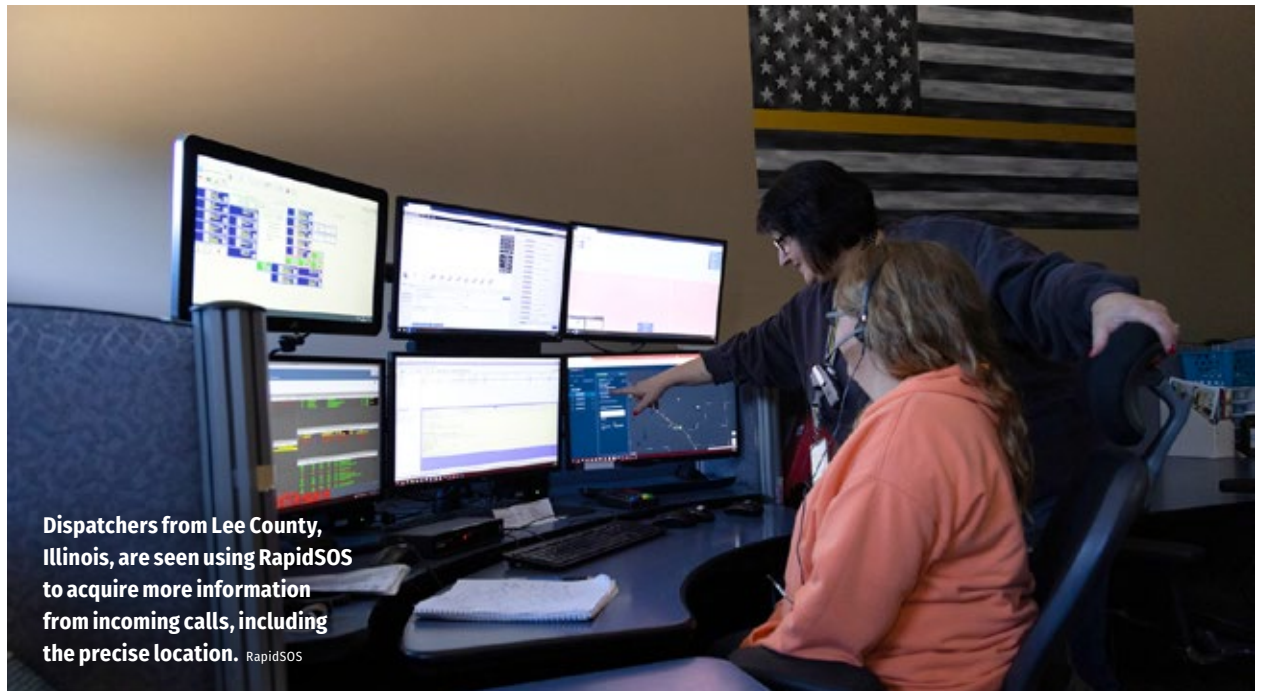
Identifying challenges

Motorola Solutions released the findings of its 2023 K-12 School Safety Report in August prior to the current school year. The survey captured the sentiments from 1,000 K-12 parents and 1,000 K-12 educators across the U.S. The data shows that 67% of parents and teachers are much more concerned about school safety now than they were five years ago, even as 73% of parents and 80% of teachers expressed confidence in their school's emergency response plans.

Parents and teachers both rank school safety as a critical factor (66% for parents, 72% for teachers). Student mental health also continues to be a top concern: Sixty-four percent of parents and 68% of teachers are very or extremely concerned about students' mental health. Additionally, parents and teachers are worried about the mental health of community members who may perpetrate acts of violence on a school campus and teachers' mental health.

While 71% percent of teachers say that their school has adopted new safety technology in the last two years, 54% of parents say they haven't seen new technologies implemented. Close to half of parents say panic button applications allowing teachers and school staff to quickly notify 911 would increase their confidence in their school's safety.

Karin Marquez, Chief Public Safety Brand Officer with RapidSOS, says the attention to school safety is as high as it's ever been, with state legislators across the country introducing new funding and policies to advance security and safety. "From enhancing situational awareness to facilitating rapid response, school safety technology covers an array of crucial aspects, starting with situational awareness. Modern safety solutions offer real time situational awareness, allowing schools to monitor their premises and respond promptly to any potential threats," she says. "This awareness is powered by a combination



Dispatchers from Lee County, Illinois, are seen using RapidSOS to acquire more information from incoming calls, including the precise location. RapidSOS

of sensors, cameras and AI driven analytics that detect unusual activities or anomalies. Panic buttons and mobile safety applications empower students and staff alike to initiate instant alerts, notifying school administrators and first responders.”

According to Marquez, artificial intelligence and gun or weapon detection can play a pivotal role in early threat detection. “AI algorithms can identify sounds like gunshots or even detect the presence of firearms through security camera feeds, enabling an immediate alert and response. Sophisticated indoor mapping solutions provide emergency responders with a clear understanding of the school’s layout. This aids in efficient navigation during crisis and helps responders make informed decisions. Various sensors from motion detectors to environmental monitors contribute to a comprehensive safety network. These sensors provide data that helps schools respond to emergencies.”

Following an emergency, she says reuniting students with their parents or guardians is a critical process. Reunification applications can help streamline this process, ensuring a secure and efficient way to account for every student and maintain order during a potentially chaotic time. “It’s really important that we break down, not only the silos that are present at the school itself, but ensure the communication and data can flow into the 911 center because that is going to be the first point of contact to get those resources right,” she says. “Then that data has to flow also to our first responders in the field, ensuring that they have the best picture so we can focus on what needs to get done and get through the emotional response we’re going to have when we respond to these types of incidents.”

Marquez stressed the importance of training and practice sessions. “Bringing it all together to make sure from activation to reunification that we know exactly what to do, that we’re trained and everybody is speaking the same language,” she says. “What we’ve also seen since Columbine is that interoperability has been such a challenge. Not only do our solutions have to communicate, but the way that we’re training and testing and drilling. We have to do that also together, so that when that emergency does occur, we have the best textbook with as improved outcomes as possible.”

Detecting threats early

Dustin Brooks, the Chief Customer Officer and co-founder of ZeroEyes, which focuses on AI gun detection, says that analytics can help bring together the existing infrastructure camera systems that already exist in order to alert users to certain events.

“We need to be able to create a force-multiplier; take one person and be able to give them resources everywhere to be able to connect with their school district,” he says. “For preemptive security measures, the Parkland shooting is the reason why our company was founded. There was an individual that was in a stairwell prepping before the shooting and was in plain sight of a camera system. Our question was ‘If there had been a proactive position at this building, could we have identified something and had been able to provide more resources that could potentially have benefited responders there in a situation like that?’”

He added that companies developing new technologies for school safety are constantly trying to figure out the best practices and that there’s no turnkey solution for

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any organization, whether it be a K-12 environment or a corporate center. “It’s all different across the landscape,” he says. “When you look at technology to support first responders, you really have to build a relationship with those individuals, see what they’re already doing, how they’re already communicating and where can you best position yourself to effectively enable those positions.”

Whenever artificial intelligence and object identification software is involved, there will be privacy concerns. Brooks believes that education is key to getting public buyin. “Our analytic is based specifically on object detection,” he says. “We have an operation center that is working for our customers, filtering through alerts that come in, and they don’t get an alert unless there is one that is triggered by an object. We’ve had gun detections of the Matrix movie playing in the background on a movie screen. That is obviously not a threat, but we’ve got a human in a loop who determines that. We’re specifically looking for guns. We’re not identifying faces. We’re not identifying clothing. We’re not identifying body positioning. We’re looking for one particular thing.”

He adds that technology can help sift through the vast collection of data that would be difficult for humans to do on their own. “There’s a strength to understanding where a threat is, but there is also a strength in understanding where the threat is not as well.”

Developing best practices

David Rogers, the Chief Marketing Officer for Raptor Technologies, says technology is just one piece of the puzzle, and that school safety and security should be looked at as layers. “There are physical layers, there’s technology, but then there’s also the people who make it work. A lot of times, quite frankly, that’s the part that doesn’t always function correctly because they haven’t practiced, or haven’t followed procedures,” he says, adding that another layer is the speed at which information is delivered. “When you’re dealing with an active shooter event, getting as much information as possible as fast as possible to first responders is really going to help save lives. Every second counts.”

He also stresses that there are a lot of different applications involved and that another layer in school safety is having those applications communicate with each other. “Gone are the days of silos for technology and school districts, where companies could just kind of put a barrier around the access to the information,” he says. “We are all actively trying to knock down those data barriers that exist between safety applications and technologies. I think those three things are really key when you look at how technology plays a part in school safety.”

According to Rogers, it’s the rich data collected that gives law enforcement the context of the emergency and that simply activating a button doesn’t necessarily provide the context. They need to know that kind of information,”


he says. “I think knocking down those silos really helps to expedite the response to these types of emergencies.”

He also says it’s important companies need to make sure the technologies that are deployed utilize a lot of the hardware and resources that schools already use every day. “Trying to introduce something new to the equation that they’re not used to utilizing usually throws it off,” he says. “I think technology companies need to make it affordable. They need to leverage the technology that’s already in place; particularly the hardware at these school districts.”

Fixing reunification

Pat Bhava, founder and CEO of Pikmykid has a personal connection to the challenges of reunification. His daughter went missing during school dismissal, leaving him to create Pikmykid to provide technology that enhances school safety from the time a student arrives until they return safely home. Before Pikmykid, Bhava says there were not a lot of applications available for coordinating reunification. “We have a plethora of tools to manage and handle emergencies, but what happens with the recovery? Usually, after any incident, this is played out on live TV for hours on end when reunification takes place painfully slow and much to the detriment of the mental and physical well-being of our children and the entire community.”

According to Bhava, technology should be used to handle the task of connecting parents and kids together in order to take that load off teachers and staff who can then focus on more important things associated with recovery after an emergency. He also believes that a big part of reunification is making sure that all of the parties involved, including law enforcement, are familiar and trained in using the software and applications being used. “If you don’t practice on the same platform every single day, when emergency strikes the stakeholders are pretty much lost like you,” he says. “You can’t expect them to use a new platform or something they’re unfamiliar with when things go wrong, so they’ve got to be very conversant with the platforms. The more we practice on a daily basis, the more we are prepared in an emergency.”

Rogers agrees on the challenges of reunification, adding that for a long time, the complexity of reunification has been underestimated. “It’s like throwing a mini concert,” he says. “If you’ve got 500 kids at a school, you’re going to have 1,500 people show up to pick them up. You have to be able to communicate with those guardians. You’ve got to make sure you have a way you’re handing off to the right kid and you’ve got to do it quickly and efficiently. It’s one of those things that people don’t always think about in the event of emergency until you get to a point like you saw at Parkland, where it was just so painful to watch and everybody realized, ‘Oh, we’ve got to do something about this.’” 

The Right Shield for the Job

Manufacturers have worked to create single-handed ballistic shields that can be used during active shooter incidents.

By Paul Peluso



VENGANCE X7
BlueRidge Armor

Traditionally, ballistic shields have been used by SWAT teams and have oftentimes been bulky, with multiple officers needed to operate the shield in order to provide cover during an incident. As active shooter incidents at places like schools, malls and office buildings have become more prevalent, armor manufacturers have begun creating fighting shields that allow a single officer to hold the shield in one hand and a firearm in the other.

In November 2023, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in Florida received its first shipment of Safariland ProTech Assault II VP ballistic shields for its school resource deputies. The shields are compact and weigh 20 pounds.

In order to cater to the needs of officers not normally working in a tactical capacity, manufacturers have gone to great lengths to improve the shape, size and weight of their ballistic shields. OFFICER Magazine recently spoke to representatives from Point Blank Enterprises and BlueRidge Armor about what goes into making a ballistic shield that works for both patrol and school resource officers.

Evolution of ballistic shields

Historically, ballistic shields were commonly referred to as bunkers due to their large size and weight, often larger than 24" x 36" with very large rectangular viewports, heavy batteries for lighting systems and well north of 45 pounds, making them difficult to deploy by hand for any extended period of time. Material compositions used for various types of bunkers may have been ballistic steel, aluminum or heavy resin infused aramid composites and, in some cases, ceramic faced with aramid composite backing. Back in the 70s and 80s, bunkers were typically used in response to a specific call out in high-risk standoff situations and many agencies may have had only one, or a very limited number of bunkers, and even more limited deployment specialists due to their size and weight. In the early 90s, a new Ultra High Molecular Weight Polyethylene (UHMWPE) fiber was introduced into the armor market initially targeted at soft flexible armor promising reductions in weight by as much as 10%, compared to traditional woven aramids. UHMWPE quickly found its way into low- and high-pressure rigid composite

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applications, paving the way to modern day ballistic armor and shield designs. Today, single-hand deployable ballistic shields range in size from 15”x19” without a viewport up to 24”x48” shields with viewports and are typically tested to NIJ 0108.01 threat Level IIIA 9mm/44 Magnum, or threat Level III .308 M80 ball.

Tyrone Minton, Senior Director of Engineering—Hard Armor at The Protective Group (TPG), the hard armor division of Point Blank Enterprises, says that traditionally, a lot of ballistic shields were Kevlar-based. “These shields that SWAT teams were primarily using were bulky, thick and offered limited threat protection,” he says. “They were usually IIIA, so handgun rated. It’s just recently that we’ve started to see more rifle-rated shields being fielded. With the influx of rifle threats and people out there using rifles in their crimes, the need for a large coverage area rifle protection is really kind of what spurred the design and development on these newer rifle-rated shields.”

He stressed that the industry is approaching a kind of apex of material technology with what’s available for these threats. “As we start looking at moving to a new standard for ballistic requirements when the new NIJ 107 Standard comes out eventually, that is going to change how the threat categories are broken down,” he says. “The shield standards—there isn’t really a shield standard today—there is the NIJ 108, basically is just a generic armor panel testing spec. It is very weak in the sense that it doesn’t require much testing in order to say you were testing and in accordance with that requirement.” Point Blank has been heavily involved with ASTM in developing testing for new ballistic shields for law enforcement.

Dale Taylor, the founder of BlueRidge Armor, says his company develops its armored product offerings based on currently issued ballistic test methods and procedures.



Vanguard Level III Point Blank Enterprises



Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office school resource deputies are seen training with Safariland ProTech Assault II VP ballistic shields. Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office

“In the case of our ballistic resistant shield and bunker development, we refer to NIJ 0108.01, Ballistic Resistant Protective Materials. NIJ 0108.01 is an equipment standard developed by the Law Enforcement Standards Laboratory of the National Bureau of Standards. In addition to the baseline performance requirements of specific Standard, we also look at commonly known street threats for an identified protection level in our shield development. For example, threat level IIIA of NIJ 0108.01 calls for baseline performance against two ballistic threats, 9mm 124gr. FMJ and 44 Magnum 240gr. SWC-GC. We may also test additional street threats such as 7.62x25 commonly known as a Tokarev pistol round or even a 12-gauge shotgun slug. In any case, these types of rounds or threats would be identified as ‘Special Threats’ which basically means ‘Additional Calibers and Specific projectiles’ outside the scope of a given standard.”

Taylor said that BlueRidge also has been involved with ASTM International in developing the new testing standard. “This new protocol has been in development over several years and has had a broad range of contributing input from law enforcement, armor manufacturers, independent ballistic test laboratories and ballistic expert statisticians,” he says. “Picking up where NIJ0108.01 left off, the new protocol adds commonly available street threats, formerly known as special threats, such as the 5.56 M193 and 7.62x39 MSC Type 56, along with the traditional heavy hitting 7.62x51 M80 ball.”

Repurposing technology

Michael Archibald, President of The Protective Group (TPG), says that since the Point Blank Enterprises does so much business with the United States Department of Defense, it has the ability to leverage that knowledge and technology when it comes to law enforcement products.

The Vanguard is Point Blank’s latest ballistic shield. “In the past, just over a year ago, our lightest weight

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20"x30" ballistic rifle shield was the ASPIS at about 18 pounds," says Archibald. "We went through an advanced development program with one of our aviation aerospace customers and we leveraged the best available technology." From there, the company considered repurposing the technology used for the aircraft panel for a ballistic shield created for law enforcement. "We ran the numbers and we moved the needle from an 18-pound shield with the same kind of ballistic performance to now a 15-pound shield."

From there, Point Blank invited partners who specialize in ballistic shield training to evaluate the shape. "Effectively, we moved from a shape in the ASPIS shield, which is basically an application for a team approach, to the Vanguard, which enables an officer to individually protect themselves with the ballistic shield and fight with a handheld weapon with improved stability and confidence."

Archibald adds that the shape of the Vanguard was specifically designed for patrol. "It's designed, both weight and shape, to stabilize." He noted that there's a notch included on each side toward the top of the shield, which has been designed for officers—righthanded or lefthanded—to be able to stabilize their weapon in one hand while wielding the shield in the other. "No one really asked for the Vanguard in the market, but when we put this aerospace panel that we tested extensively on a handheld shield at last year's SHOT Show, everyone said 'This is really great.' This year we've refined the design and rolled it out and it's gotten a lot of interest and huge amount of demand. We're building a lot of those now for customers."

Taylor agrees that evolving technology has been a driver for improvements in both ballistic performance and reductions in overall product weight and thickness, which can be seen in the BlueRidge's new VENGEANCE X7. "New technologies in high performance fiber development, from companies such as Honeywell Advanced Materials, make their way into various ballistic fabrics and composite layers leading to reductions in weight that directly improves an officer's ability to deploy armor," he says. "Partnering with companies such as Elzetta Design, LLC, a manufacturer of high-performance LED lighting, introduces advancements in electronic circuitry and lumen output that contributes to improved visibility in low light tactical operations. In addition, the patented Elzetta Tridextrous

grip and integrated shield light improves maneuverability during shield deployment."


Feedback from law enforcement

Taylor says that a high percentage of BlueRidge's product design is developed with direct input from law enforcement personnel. "BlueRidge Armor hosts several training events each year from tactical officer association events to direct agency training," he says. "These tactical training events give potential and current customers hands-on live fire experience with our hard armor ballistic shields. During these events, we strive to listen to the Voice Of the Customer (VOC) for ergonomic and functionality input on existing and newly developed product designs."

He points out that a prime example of law enforcement feedback is the company's VENGEANCE Series viewport which evolved over several meetings with a highly experienced shield deploying tactical unit. "Those meetings and critical feedback ultimately defined the overall features and performance characteristics of our VENGEANCE Series product line. This is where our tag line 'Mission Driven—Purpose Built' was derived."

Archibald says that of the approximately 800,000 law enforcement officers in the United States, generally, about 100,000 are tactical and SWAT trained and about 700,00 are patrol. "We've moved to the Vanguard to specifically facilitate patrol officers to be able to operate this fighting shield, offensively as well as in a defensive position, on their own. It's perfect for patrol officers in a squad car to be able to pull out of the trunk in an active shooter

situation. It's perfect for school resource officers to be able to respond on an individual basis to an active shooter event. Because it's so much lighter than in the past and it provides so much protection, I think that it's really going to enable patrol officers across the nation to be safer in dealing with these special kind of active shooter events."

He says that the other key feedback Point Blank has received from is that officers are much more diverse than they've ever been. "You've got smaller statured officers. That can be female or people from different parts of the country that might not be as large as typical tactical SWAT people," he says. "We want to be a very helpful and critical safety item for these officers to be able to engage during these kinds of activities than they have been able to in the past." 



BlueRidge Armor's VENGEANCE X7 ballistic shield is seen in action. BlueRidge Armor



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Legally Armed Non-Law Enforcement Citizens

As the number of people legally carrying handguns increases nationwide, we should train to ensure we know how to identify armed “good guys” and don’t treat them like bad guys.

By Frank Borelli

If you’ve been paying attention, you’ve seen the evolution of Active Shooter response from inception in early 2000 with the common “four-man diamond” response to the two-man “buddy team” response to the single-officer response most often taught and used today (if your agency has caught up). It’s a compliment to all law enforcement that the single-officer

response was essentially mandated by all the officers who said, “I’m not waiting around if I hear shots. If children are being hurt or killed, I’m going in as fast as I can get there.”

What is now being called to the forefront in active shooter incidents, most especially at schools, is the number of legally armed non-law enforcement citizens on

the scene or who respond when they hear about it. Many of those citizens are or may be parents of children in the target location, and they are NOT happy to hear, “Stay here. We can’t let you in.” While that’s the position law enforcement has to have, we should understand, especially if we have children of our own, that the parental instinct to protect one’s children is strong, and we’re denying them (necessarily so) the ability to exercise it. But what if the armed parent is already in the school when the event starts? If they choose to take action, how do you identify them when you respond? Before you respond about those legally armed parents, teachers, or other staff, consider the possibility of an off-duty officer in the school for an event involving their child(ren). Such potential realities have to be addressed and trained for. Does your policy even take such into consideration?

Consider a different scenario: What if the active shooter attacks a mall, business building, park area, etc.? In those locations, there’s a greater chance that a legally armed citizen will be in the area and choose to take defensive action. When you get to the scene, have you thought about slowing down just enough to look for armed people who aren’t presenting any aggressive or threatening behaviors?

We recently had a conversation with Rob Pincus, the Executive Vice President of the Second Amendment Organization (2AO), and this was the exact topic: recognizing legally armed citizens (or off-duty officers) who are armed, weapon in hand, but NOT presenting any aggressive behaviors. This eventuality offers the perfect opportunity for agencies to engage the communities they serve in a meaningful way: clear communication and transparency of policy that increases community support while also helping increase community safety.


What is required, though, is a proactive approach to such potential event. The agency first needs to identify/accept the possibility and evolve the existing policy accordingly. Nationwide, recent statistics show an average of one out of every seven adult citizens legally carrying (or able to) a concealed handgun. Consider the last time you were in a shopping mall or out in any public place, such as a restaurant, park, etc. and how many people were there. Now consider that one in seven statistic. If an active shooter event occurred and even 10% of those legally armed decided to act, how many potential legally armed citizens are you going to see? How do you identify the “good guys” from the “bad guys?” It behooves the

law enforcement agency to identify the behaviors that separate the two and then encourage their legally armed citizenry to seek training from organizations that deliver proven training on such behaviors (such as the Second Amendment Organization).

Those behaviors, once identified, need to be included in the agency’s training curricula and tested in carefully choreographed force-on-force training scenarios. The truest test we can experience, without being in a real life situation, is being forced to identify the behaviors and respond accordingly while using proper officer risk management skills and balancing that against protecting the public.

Make no mistake, we are NOT suggesting that any officer ignore proper survival tactics. That said, some officers we’ve interviewed have voiced the outlook that any citizens with a gun in hand at or near the scene of an active shooter event will be neutralized. That’s not an acceptable outlook, especially considering the increase in carry permits, constitutional carry states, and the reality that an armed citizen is almost always first on the scene in such attacks. We should be supporting and leveraging them, rather than perceiving them as potential bad guys.

Keeping all of the above in mind, when you’re developing your training scenarios, or if you’re an officer going through a force on force scenario, before you engage just any subject with a gun in hand, slow down just enough to take a look at their behavioral presentation. You should already have your gun in hand, up in your line of sight and ready to engage threats, so you’re going to win the action versus reaction race. Is their gun also up in their line of sight or is it down in a suppressed position? Are they behind cover or are they moving aggressively? Do you see a badge anywhere? Is there anyone that looks to be hiding behind them? In other words, are they in a protective position? Are they facing the sound of shots? Or are they facing away and appear to be leading people toward an exit? These behaviors may indicate that they are not a threat, are acting legally, and are simply trying to escape or lead others away from the threat.

In the heat of the moment, with adrenaline sky-high, screams, alarms, sirens, and potentially vision inhibitors such as flashing lights, emergency lights, smoke or other impairments, it is difficult at best to slow down enough to see that person with a gun as a non-threat. We all do better if we’ve seen such situations before in training. 

When you get to the scene, have you thought about slowing down just enough to look for armed people who aren’t presenting any aggressive or threatening behaviors?



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Averting Tragedy

EBM Intelligence Active Shooter Prevention Report

By Frank Borelli

Active Shooter events in our nation are, unfortunately, seeming to increase in pace and occurrence. It's an ugly truth, but they are nothing new. Based on historical data we can document the first attack on an elementary school using a firearm back to 1891 in New York state. Active shooter events occurred rarely from then until 1999 when the Columbine School attack was broadcast live via satellite on major television networks. It was then that America saw a school attack "firsthand," and the words "active shooter" became a household term. Since 1999, the incidents of active shooter attacks have evolved and accelerated now having taken place in every venue from schools to colleges to business buildings to shopping malls.

When the attack at Covenant Presbyterian school happened on Monday, March 27th, 2023, it was as shocking as every other attack; horrific, heinous and tragic. For Endeavor Business Media what made the attack different is that it was almost across the street from our corporate headquarters. Our CEO can literally look out his office window and see the Covenant Presbyterian Church steeple across the parking lot. When an active shooter attack occurs that close to home it changes your perspective. The events are no longer something that happened somewhere else, although that makes them no less tragic. Suddenly it's right there, in your face and slamming into your conscience like a sledgehammer.

ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

Unlike many media outlets, Endeavor Business Media (EBM) doesn't have a political agenda. Corporately we feel a duty to report impartially on the variety of items that impact the industries we serve; and that number is vast. What our corporate leadership realized is that one of those industries is law enforcement, and what better group of people to ask about preventing attacks than those who respond to them? With that thought, and high motivation to identify a solution to the reduction or elimination of active shooter events, EBM polled our law enforcement readership.

The survey was distributed to all law enforcement readership. That differs from other organizations who only poll Chiefs, Sheriffs or other agency executives. This survey sought to get the informed opinion of officers at every rank from agencies of every size and in every region of our nation. What follows is a look at the respondents and their recommendations or thoughts on how best to prevent active shooter attacks.

The survey was released on April 13, 2023, about two weeks after the Covenant Presbyterian attack. It stayed available for completion through April 24th and received 559 completions. Our market research division reports a potential margin of error of +/- 4.1%.

65% of the respondents were full time law enforcement officers, 27% retired law enforcement officers with another 9% either serving part time or in a volunteer capacity. There's little doubt that some of the retired officers now serve part time or as volunteers. The drive to serve doesn't just go away when an officer retires. Recognizing that there is a plethora of types of agency, we identified 46% of the respondents as police officers, 16% as Sheriff's agency members, 7% federal officers, 5% state officers with the remainder a mix of campus, private, Department of Corrections and other types of agencies.

41% of the respondents reported working in a suburban area, with 37% in an urban area and 22% in a rural area. That makes a total of 63% not working within a city or urban area. Experienced officers will tell you that the operational protocols, population density and number of on duty officers in a given area is vastly different between an urban area and a rural area. That also means that response times can be vastly different and the number of officers available to respond is different.

The largest number of respondents live and work in the Mid-Atlantic and Southern Atlantic states, those including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and farther

south. 47% of the respondents were from those areas. The smallest number of recipients were from East South Central states to include Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee.

As far as time on the job is concerned, 29% of the respondents reported being in law enforcement over 30 years. Of all of the respondents, the average mean time "on the job" was 22.5 years. If you look back from the spring of 2023, subtracting 22.5 years, you end up in the fall of the year 2000 - less than 1.5 years after Columbine and near the beginning of the Active Shooter Response protocol advent. That means that for the average respondent to our survey, Active Shooter Response has been a reality throughout their career behind a badge.

The largest rank group represented as respondents to our survey was that of patrol officers to include any

officer, deputy, trooper, etc. carrying the rank of Corporal or below. That group accounted for 35% of our respondents. If you add in the Sergeants (18%) and Lieutenants (10%) you see that 63% or roughly 2/3 of the respondents are at a rank to be answering calls on the street. That's an important qualifier for the respondents as you weigh their thoughts and opinions on solutions; they are the most likely to have to respond to the events, running toward the threat. They have the most to lose

and can have the greatest potential impact on minimizing casualties once an attack has occurred.

It's easy to understand that the response capabilities, just in pure manpower, is different between large agencies (i.e. NYPD with it's 34K+ officers) and small agencies, some numbering less than five full time officers. We identified agency size in the survey and found that 65% of the respondents work for agencies with 100 sworn officers or less. That is an important agency characteristic to identify as it falls in line with the national representation of agency sizes. The majority of agencies in our nation have fewer than 100 officers and are often overlooked when it comes to grant funding, training opportunities, etc. as the focus remains on larger, more reported on, agencies.

Having identified all of those officer and agency characteristics, our first priority concerning Active Shooter Response was to identify how common, and how up to date, response training is. When asked how recent such training was delivered at their agency, 66% of the respondents said they'd received such within the past year. 16%

65% of the respondents were full time law enforcement officers, 27% retired law enforcement officers with another 9% either serving part time or in a volunteer capacity.

ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

reported having received the training over a year ago with 13% not able to remember when they'd had such training. Sadly, 4% reported never having attended Active Shooter Response training.

When questioned about department policy for response protocol, 56% reported single-officer, first on scene or all available policies. 9% reported a four-officer diamond response still being used and, amazingly, 7% reported only a SWAT response. When an active shooter attack occurs, time equals casualties. The fastest and best way to limit loss of life is to limit the time the shooter has. Waiting for four officers to get on scene, or waiting for SWAT to arrive, gives the attacker(s) more time to injure or kill more victims. This is precisely why the response protocols evolved to single-officer or first-on-scene as the preferred method.

After identifying all that information, EBM's survey got into the true meat of what we wanted to know: Based on the respondent's experience in law enforcement, what was the best way to prevent active shooter events? 44% of the respondents felt that Armed guards/officers/staff was the solution. A further 27% believed that training and education about Active Shooter events was a solution. 20% believed that protocols and equipment within the schools themselves were the answer. This would include access control, weapons detection, reaction protocols, etc. 6% of the respondents felt that gun control was the solution while 2% felt that doing away with gun free zones was the solution.

When asked what proposed ideas they supported or believed would be most effective in preventing active shooter events, the three most supported all revolved around training and education for law enforcement, fire fighters, EMS (97%), schoolteachers (97%) and even the public (94%). Preventing felons from purchasing or possessing a firearm (86%), requiring background checks for all firearm purchases (83%) and prohibiting those with mental health issues from purchasing or possessing a firearm (68%) were all on the list in declining order.

There was support shown for prohibiting those convicted of domestic violence from purchasing or possessing a firearm (64%). Red flag laws that allow weapons to be confiscated from at risk individuals (53%) and requiring those purchasing a firearm to waive their privacy rights pertaining to their mental health records as part of the background investigation (48%) show an almost even division of outlook among the respondents. Allowing

teachers to carry firearms while at school (53%) and arming teachers with firearms while at school (45%) was also listed. (Author's Note: The 8% difference is likely about ownership of the weapon: personal ownership vs. the school providing the firearm.)


Banning the sale of semi-automatic weapons to civilians (non-law enforcement personnel) was opposed or strongly opposed by 83% of the respondents. Banning the possession of the same type weapon was opposed or strongly opposed by 81% of the respondents.

That's a lot of data to sort but it provides valuable insight regarding what our experienced and trained law enforcement officers today feel are the best ways to limit active shooter attacks and, where they occur, the best ways to limit loss of life. Training, for all potentially involved parties, is a priority for reaction training. If the event occurs, the fastest response by armed and trained

personnel is the best response. Historically speaking, very few active shooters surrender. The large majority either commit suicide when faced with an armed response or they are neutralized by an armed "good guy."

Where gun control is concerned, despite some recent high profile legislative attempts to limit access to particular weapons, the data shows greater support from law enforcement toward limiting access for convicted felons, those who have demonstrated violent tendencies and those with mental health challenges.

As Active Shooter Response protocols continue to evolve, we expect to see more attention given to the immediate responder as opposed to the first responders. The immediate responder is the person closest in proximity to the bad actor when the attack starts. If the immediate responder is armed, and/or sufficiently trained and motivated, the number of casualties will be limited as compared to the count if such an immediate responder wasn't there.

Finally, we at EBM would encourage all employers, corporations, business locations, schools, etc. to develop or contract active shooter response training and to make sure it's delivered on a regular schedule. How to avoid being a victim and how to prevent access to a ready pool of targets can go a long way to limiting casualties should an active shooter attack occur at your location. Act responsibly; recognize the potential threat; do what you can to prevent it or lessen its impact. The difference can literally be counted in the number of lives lost... or saved. 

Banning the sale of semi-automatic weapons to civilians (non-law enforcement personnel) was opposed or strongly opposed by 83% of the respondents.

Command Q&A

AI in Law Enforcement **By Paul Peluso**

Securing the nation's schools has become paramount in recent years, and new technology like artificial intelligence is helping assist police officials in school districts sift through troves of data to pinpoint potential threats. Corpus Christi (Texas) Independent School District Police Chief Kirby Warnke spoke with *OFFICER Magazine* about how his agency uses the AI-powered gun detection solution ZeroEyes to keep students and staff safe.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

In what way has your agency invested in new technology?

We've been using technology for as long as the department has existed (1993). We grow as technology grows. We were early adopters of Raptor, silent alert systems and panic systems before they were mandated. It's natural progression to go to something like ZeroEyes. It's a force multiplier. Someone's watching your back when you can't. Technology is integral in keeping our kids safe.

How has the software helped recognize potential threats?

We've had nine incidents in the last 14 months of being "swatted." A false 911 is called in alleging an active shooter. First responders report. ZeroEyes sends me an e-mail off to the side saying: "We were activated or alerted to the presence of firearms in your campus, but we would discern that it wasn't necessary for us to call 911 because 911 was already present." The ability to have a human being look at that, decipher that and decide we do need to send someone, or we don't is really important. There was a big issue right after COVID with kids playing with airsoft guns around schools. There were multiple times where ZeroEyes determined that it was not a threat and let us know offline. They don't need to activate emergency services because they can determine it's a toy. In conjunction with ZeroEyes and just good police work on the ground, the number of airsoft incidents after school hours have diminished.

How was your agency introduced to ZeroEyes?

About three years ago, Darrell Dubuque (Senior Operations Manager/Coordinator—Security/Fire/Life Safety for CCISD) saw it at a trade show, and when he came back he said, "Hey, I want to try this thing out." He showed it to me and I was wowed. I said, "You know what, I think it's something we should have." We found money in the budget and visited with ZeroEyes. We came up with a plan to get us engaged and went from there.


What was the training like for your staff?

ZeroEyes is used kind of behind the scenes by me and my team. It's myself and my security personnel who see it on the backend; so it's really not used day-by-day for the line officers. So, for my command staff, myself, we'll have access to the system. My dispatch core, they have access to it as well. For that small cadre involved, the training wasn't too difficult.

Was it difficult to get public buy-in of AI?

We have a very, very good community down here in Corpus Christi. They support law enforcement because we've earned it. I've had no pushback about it. In fact, people are encouraged to know that we're doing everything we can to keep the students, staff and visitors safe when they come to the Corpus Christi ISD. They like to know that we're keeping our kids safe. We have precious cargo on board, so we do everything we can to keep them safe. We get very strong support from our community.

What advice would you give other agencies?

If you never try anything, you'll never determine whether it's going to work for you or not. For us, we like it. It's a kind of overwatch, our own digital Saint Michael. Always try something, anything that can help give you that edge. If you can work it into your budget, give it a try. If it doesn't work for you, try something else. But don't just sit there and stagnate and not continue to try something. 



Police Chief
Kirby Warnke
Corpus Christi
Independent School
District

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