

# Chemical Facility Security

## Best Practices Guide for an Active Shooter Incident

Lessons learned from tabletop exercises help chemical facilities prepare for an active shooter incident



# Homeland Security

The tragedies at Columbine High School in 1999 and Virginia Tech in 2007 made the phrase “active shooter” part of the lexicon of organizational safety and security. Active shooter incidents have occurred in shopping malls, schools, government buildings, and a wide range of business facilities, including factories, warehouses, and company offices. Unlike a barricaded suspect, an active shooter is on the move with an unknown destination and is difficult to isolate. In the event of an active shooter incident, chemical facilities have unique and specific considerations that must shape preparedness and response protocols.

DHS has worked with its partners and security experts within the Chemical Sector to develop this booklet. The booklet draws upon best practices and findings from participants in active shooter tabletop exercises. It presents key guidance for chemical facility planning and training, and poses specific questions that an effective active shooter response and recovery plan will answer. It is designed to help both chemical facility management and employees prepare and respond by designating roles and needed actions. Employees and management who understand their respective roles during an incident can positively influence response.

Readiness requires effective planning and role reinforcement through training. Effective communication is important, not only within the facility, but also with local law enforcement agencies and emergency response personnel. This booklet uses broad considerations and scenario-driven questions to guide planning and training for incident response and recovery. Facility managers can use it to guide preparedness efforts and begin educating management and employees on their role in preventing and responding to an active shooter incident. A quick and coordinated response is an important factor in addressing and eliminating security threats.

The information included in this booklet is not exhaustive, but meant as an introduction applicable for both regulated and non-regulated facilities. The material does not constitute a regulatory requirement, nor is it intended to conflict, replace, or supersede existing regulatory requirements or create any enforcement standard.

# Chemical Facility Security

## Preparing for an Active Shooter Incident

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## Recognize the Warning Signs

An active shooter in the workplace may be a current or former employee, or an acquaintance of a current or former employee. Managers and co-workers may notice characteristics or behaviors that generate concern about potential violent behavior. Employees can help prevent workplace violence by recognizing the warning signs and using appropriate channels to report them.



## What is an Active Shooter?

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

People rarely “just snap.” Active shooters often have a history of violent behavior, and they usually plan for violent actions following a trigger. This can include being fired, laid off, or demoted; a negative evaluation; or personal events.

## Red Flags of Potential Violence

While no single profile exists to predict violent behavior, potentially violent persons may exhibit certain noticeable activities. The following list is not comprehensive, nor is it intended to diagnose or predict violent actions:

### Thoughts

- Talk of previous violent incidents
- Unsolicited focus on dangerous weapons
- Paranoid thinking
- Overreaction to workplace changes

### Feelings

- Depression or withdrawal
- Unstable, emotional responses
- Feeling either arrogant and supreme or powerless
- Intense anger or hostility

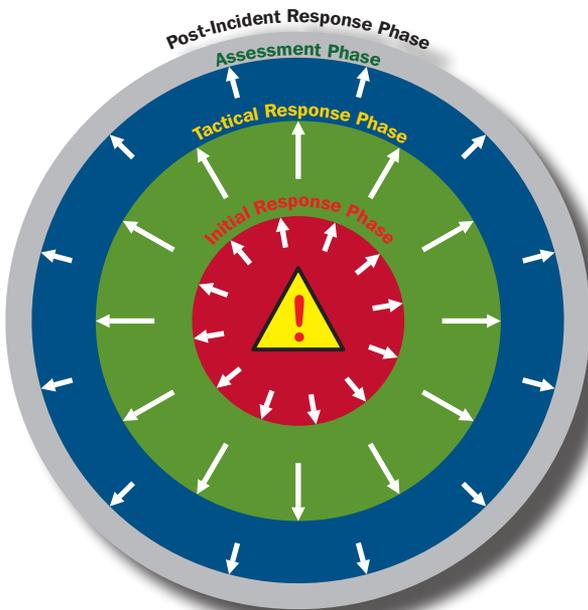
### Behaviors

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Violations of company policies
- Increased absenteeism
- Exploiting or blaming others

If others recognize and report these behaviors, the employee may be managed, supported, and treated. It is important for employers to establish communication procedures for reporting these concerns. Depending on company policy, employees should alert the Human Resources Department or Safety/Security Department.

# Know Your Role: Facility Management

Facility management, security, site safety, and human resources play a significant role in every stage of an active shooter incident. Protecting employees and the community in which the facility operates is the primary concern of incident response and recovery. The following sections can help to guide the development of robust response plans and procedures.



**Four Phases of an Active Shooter Incident**

## Incident Pre-Planning Guidance

Active shooter incidents often begin and conclude quickly, leaving facility management and security officers no time to coordinate response procedures with law enforcement and employees. Facility readiness requires that managers develop and exercise response plans that apply general preparedness and response protocols to specific types of emergencies and facility capabilities (including security resources). Practicing the plan was a key finding of experts and facility managers who participated in active shooter exercises.

### Develop Response Plans and Procedures

- Implement a comprehensive Emergency Response Plan that includes incidents beyond an environmental emergency, such as active shooter or suspicious package.
- Review and update the facility's Emergency Response Plan with assistance from law enforcement and emergency responders.
- Establish communication procedures for employees to report signs, flags, and threats of workplace violence.
- Establish alternative methods of communication with employees during an incident—including e-mail, phone, cell phone, text message, and loudspeaker announcements.
- Determine how to estimate the impact of an incident on facility operations and communicate that to customers, the public, and law enforcement.
- Communicate with emergency responders to manage facility expectations of response capabilities.

#### Key Plans and Procedures

- Continuity of operations
- Emergency communications
- Lockdown procedures
- Evacuation and shelter-in-place
- Facility search protocols
- Facility/operations shutdown
- Remote facility operations
- Media relations
- Employee counseling services

### Exercise Emergency Response Plans Regularly and Repeatedly

- Train all employees on general emergency plans and those designed for specific scenarios.
- Train security personnel in providing guidance to employees in each scenario.
- Assess gaps in plans, exercises, and trainings.

### Establish a Relationship with Emergency Responders

- Involve emergency services responders from multiple agencies in facility training and exercises.

#### Emergency Services Responders

- Law Enforcement
- Fire and Emergency Services
- Emergency Medical Services
- Emergency Management
- Public Works

- Jointly map out incident management procedures and pre-identify a common, secure radio communication channel.
- Invite all emergency services responders to tour your site and provide details about the facility that will help responders to adjust their protocols if necessary.
- Gain a better understanding and awareness of the complexities involved in an integrated response to an incident, including law enforcement procedures and capabilities and the steps to preserving a crime scene.
- Educate law enforcement on the impact of a crime scene on business operations and restoration.

## Emergency Services Responders Site Orientation

Facility managers may provide emergency services responders with the following:

- Simple, updated facility map
- Numbers and names of buildings, including nicknames/slang
- Access routes
- Escape routes
- Safe harbors
- Possible hiding places
- Location of chemicals and hazardous materials

## Incident Response Considerations

### Controlling Access and Accounting for Personnel

- Do personnel have the ability to remotely lock buildings or deactivate card readers? How does that impact the need to account for employees?
- How will management notify employees of the situation and its location?
- How will personnel allow site and building access to emergency responders?
- What procedures are in place to account for full-time, part-time, and contract employees? Is the visitor log correct? Who is onsite? Where are they located?

### Assisting Emergency Responders

- Is security technology, such as closed circuit television, in place to assist law enforcement in locating the victims and shooter(s)?
- What procedures are in place to provide site and building maps?
- Are critical phone calls getting through to security personnel?
- Where are incoming emergency response personnel staged?
- Are there any safety concerns as emergency responders enter process areas?

### Possible Extended Scenarios

Facilities may consider the following scenarios when developing plans:

- Additional shooters
- Hostage situation
- Chemical release
- Explosive device
- Suspicious package
- Panic
- Self-evacuations

### Managing the Perimeter

- Are an adequate number of law enforcement officers onsite to handle the situation and establish a secure perimeter?
- How does management control or prevent the entrance of the media? Is there a safe location to stage evacuees and the media?

## Identifying Secondary Impacts

- Are there additional shooters or other threats?
- Does the shooter have knowledge of the facility or its operations?
- What are the personnel procedures for safely securing operations that include hazardous materials?
- At what point do site emergency procedures dictate process shutdown?

## Incident Recovery Considerations

### Addressing Victims and Families

- What is the process to assist with victim identification?
- Who is responsible for gathering information related to victim identities, extent of injuries, and what hospitals are being utilized?
- What is the procedure for notifying employees and family members? Who performs the notification and are they trained for this responsibility?
- Will facility personnel procure counselors for employees and families?
- What actions must be taken to handle concerns about returning to work?

### Operational Impacts

- Length of time closed
- Business restoration
- Customers and suppliers
- Union requirements

### Communicating Externally

- What instructions will management give to employees and how will it be communicated? Should they return to their homes, remain onsite at a specified location, go to another site, etc.?
- How will facility personnel communicate with families?
- Who is the designated official for responding to media inquiries?
- What information and details will facility personnel provide to the media that will ease community concerns without inciting panic or hindering the investigation?

### Continuing Business Operations

- What are the business recovery/continuity plans?
- Who will make re-entry decisions?
- Who will provide safety and security debriefings?
- When and how will managers fill the positions of deceased and injured employees?
- What actions are needed to ensure employees feel safe?
- How will the facility continue operating with limited production or with certain areas of the facility designated as a crime scene?
- How does the stage of the facility—shutdown, idle, restoration—affect protocols?



## Know Your Role: Employees

Active shooter events are unpredictable, evolve quickly, and are often over within 10–15 minutes. Employees likely will not have time to refer to written materials and protocols during an incident. Employees can best prepare by reviewing response protocols prior to an incident and actively participating in emergency response training. Educated employees who know how to best react can positively affect the outcome of a situation. The following sections are designed to help employees understand their role and recognize potential violence.



## Prepare for an Incident

- Learn how to recognize and report potential workplace violence and suspicious behavior.
- Identify the location of the two nearest exits, emergency call boxes, potential safe harbors, emergency response kits, and decontamination sites.
- Familiarize yourself with emergency procedures and regularly review checklists or materials provided to your work station.
- Identify who to call to report an incident and what information to provide about the situation.

## Learn How to React During an Incident

Once you become aware of an active shooter situation, quickly determine the best way to protect your own life. If there is an accessible path, attempt to evacuate the premises. Recognize that the situation may change quickly during the incident, and employees should be prepared to amend their strategy. If evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide where the shooter is less likely to find you. Possible strategies in each situation include:

### Evacuate

- Determine an escape route based on where an active shooter may be located.
- Leave your belongings behind. Keep your hands empty and visible at all times.
- Help others evacuate, if possible, but do not attempt to move the wounded. Evacuate even if others do not agree to follow.
- Move quickly to a safe place far from the shooter and take cover. Remain there until police arrive and give instructions.
- Remain calm. Avoid screaming or yelling as you evacuate.
- Follow all instructions of law enforcement.

### Reporting Workplace Violence

Depending on company policy, employees should alert the Human Resources Department or Safety/ Security Department to suspicious behavior.

### Critical Information to Report to Authorities

- Location of the active shooter
- Number of shooters
- Physical description of the shooter(s), including clothing, height, hair color, gender
- Number and type of weapon(s)
- Direction the shooter is headed
- Number of potential victims

## **Shelter in Place**

- Go to the nearest room or office and lock the door(s). If the door does not lock, wedge the door shut or use heavy furniture to barricade it.
- Identify an escape route in the event you are directed to evacuate.
- Close blinds, turn off lights, and cover windows.
- Silence all noise, including cell phones, radios, and computers.
- Stay out of sight and take cover behind large, heavy items or furniture.
- Do not open the door until the person can provide an identification badge.
- If possible, place signs in exterior windows identifying the location of trapped or injured persons.
- Remain under cover until law enforcement advises it is safe to evacuate.

## **Respond Appropriately When Law Enforcement Arrives**

The first officers to arrive aim to identify and stop the active shooter as soon as possible. They may be armed with rifles, shotguns, or handguns and be wearing patrol uniforms or protective equipment, such as vests and helmets. They may shout commands, push individuals to the ground for their safety, and use pepper spray or tear gas to control the situation. Employees are responsible for following directions and not detracting from the responding officers' mission. Take the following steps when first responders arrive:

- Remain calm and follow officers' instructions exactly.
- Raise your hands, spread your fingers, and keep hands visible at all times.
- Do not run when police enter the vicinity. Drop to the floor, if you are told to do so, or move calmly out of the area or building.
- Do not make quick moves toward officers or hold on to them for safety.
- Avoid pointing, screaming, or yelling.
- Do not stop officers to ask for help or directions. Evacuate the building in the direction the officers arrived while keeping your hands above your head.
- For your own safety, do not get upset or argue if an officer questions whether you are a shooter or a victim. Do not resist, even if you are handcuffed and searched.



## Schedule Tabletop Exercises

Proactive chemical facility managers and emergency responders use facilitated tabletop exercises to simulate security incidents or natural disasters and engage in interactive discussions on how to prepare for, respond to, and recover from such events. Interactive tabletop exercises allow participants to test critical thinking skills, learn how the public and private sectors will react to a security breach, and identify areas for improvement.



## Schedule Tabletop Exercises

Exercises are designed to improve the protection and resilience of the Chemical Sector by allowing security partners to test their critical thinking, discuss how to coordinate procedures and communication, and strengthen security plans.

DHS has partnered with State chemical industry councils to develop the voluntary Security Seminar and Exercise Series. Through this series, numerous chemical facilities have already evaluated and improved their response plans and capabilities through tabletop exercises performed throughout the country. Every state and region has its own set of requirements, and as such, DHS will work closely with each State chemical industry council to tailor the event. To learn more or to schedule a tabletop exercise, contact the Chemical Sector-Specific Agency at [chemicalsector@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:chemicalsector@hq.dhs.gov).

### **Participant feedback:**

“Excellent speakers with excellent knowledge. The event was very informative.”

“The workshop gave me a better understanding of the roles that DHS, State Police, FBI, and others play in the security and safety of the Chemical Sector.”

## Acknowledgements:

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For additional information on the content of this booklet, or to schedule a Security Seminar and Exercise for your State or region, please contact the Chemical Sector-Specific Agency at [chemicalsector@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:chemicalsector@hq.dhs.gov).



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