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LESSON LEARNED

Law Enforcement: Responding Immediately to an Active Shooter Situation

SUMMARY

During active shooter situations, law enforcement officers should not wait for Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams to arrive and assemble. The first officers arriving at the incident scene must be prepared to attack at once.

DESCRIPTION

On April 16, 2007, a Virginia Tech student, Seung Hui Cho, killed 32 students and faculty members in two separate incidents on campus. The Virginia Tech Police Department (VTPD) discovered the first attack, a double murder in the West Ambler Johnston dormitory, at 7:24 a.m. VTPD and Blacksburg Police Department (BPD) officers responded to the incident and secured the building while detectives began a criminal investigation into the shootings. Both forces also activated Emergency Response Teams to respond to any developing circumstances.

> The VTPD and BPD Emergency Response Teams are similar to SWAT teams, trained to respond rapidly to an emerging law enforcement situation.

At 9:42 a.m., the VTPD and BPD learned of a second, active shooter situation in Norris Hall. VTPD and BPD officers at the Johnston site responded immediately and entered Norris Hall without waiting for reinforcements. Once inside, one team of officers proceeded up the stairwell toward the sound of gunfire on the second floor, while a second team proceeded to the third floor to begin evacuating students and faculty. Cho's shooting stopped abruptly at 9:51 a.m. as the first team approached the second floor. The Virginia Tech Review Panel believes that the sound of the approaching officers caused Cho to end his attack and to kill himself. Cho killed 30 people during his attack but still had over 200 rounds of ammunition when he committed suicide.

The Review Panel concluded that "there is little question" that the VTPD's and BPD's quick response to Cho's second attack "saved lives" and that the death toll "could have been higher if the police had not arrived when they did." At the time of Cho's death, 75 students and faculty members remained trapped in Norris Hall. Had the officers waited for a SWAT team to arrive and neutralize the incident, Cho would have had a longer opportunity to take more victims.

> Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) is a federally recognized program that provides training to law enforcement officers to help them properly respond to active shooter situations.

During active shooter situations, law enforcement officers should not wait for SWAT teams to arrive and assemble. The first officers arriving at the incident scene must be prepared to attack at once.

CITATION

Virginia Tech Review Panel. *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech, April 16, 2007.* Aug 2007.
https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=26591