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TREND ANALYSIS

School Safety: Ensuring Emergency Response Personnel Are Familiar with School Facilities

TREND

Ensuring that emergency personnel are familiar with campus layout and facilities can contribute to effective responses to active shooter incidents at schools. Exercise and incident after action reports (AARs) indicate that jurisdictions employ a variety of methods for building and maintaining familiarity with school facilities, including training, exercises, site visits, sharing building schematics, and assigning knowledgeable personnel to assist mutual aid personnel

DESCRIPTION

The Columbine High School Shootings

On April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado, began an armed assault that resulted in 15 deaths and 24 injuries. More than 1,000 law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel responded to the incident. Many Jefferson County and mutual aid responders had never visited the high school prior to this incident. Further, recent major renovations and modifications to the school resulted in the relocation of the library and the science wing, which were the locations for much of the assault.

The unfamiliarity with the school, combined with the recent building renovations, presented challenges for response operations. Jefferson County officers and school officials sketched the building on the hood of a police car for use by responders. In one case, law enforcement personnel asked students who had evacuated the school to draw maps depicting key building features and the locations of victims and the shooters. Overall, the limited knowledge of the high school hindered the ability of responders to secure the building in a timely manner. It also contributed to a delay between Special Weapons

About This *LLIS.gov* Trend Analysis

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) reviewed exercise and incident AARs and other documents on the *LLIS.gov* system to develop this *LLIS.gov* Trend Analysis. *LLIS.gov* will revise and update this document as new information is received. If you wish to contribute to this *LLIS.gov* Trend Analysis, please email your data, information, or documents to research@llis.dhs.gov.



Columbine High School at the Time of the Shootings

and Tactics (SWAT) teams' deployment and the entry of EMS personnel into the school. Law enforcement personnel took over three hours to reach the Columbine library, where the shooters had committed suicide. Forty minutes after that, EMS personnel were allowed access to the school building and could start providing assistance to the victims. The [Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission](#) determined that "the task of entering a large public building under the control of armed perpetrators, a dangerous operation under the best of circumstances, was rendered even more dangerous because of the officers' unfamiliarity with the building."

In the aftermath of the Columbine incident, many jurisdictions began implementing measures to increase responders' familiarity with school facilities in their area and to ensure that they have access to updated information about facilities. The continuing importance of ensuring that responders are familiar with school facilities has been demonstrated in AARs from both exercises and real world events.

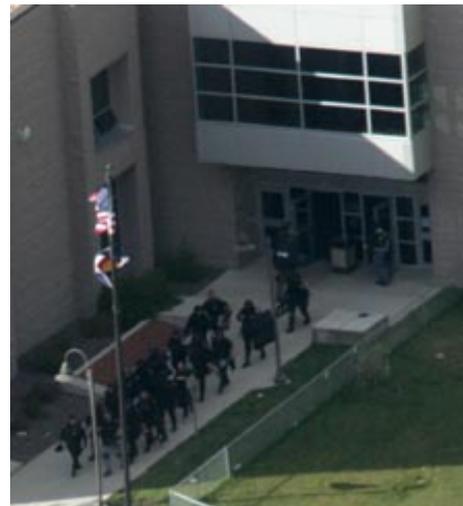
Related LLIS.gov Resources

For additional information on the Columbine High School shootings, please see: [Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission](#). The LLIS.gov team has developed for the following Lesson Learned related to the Columbine High School incident: [School Safety: Involving Emergency Response Agencies in School Emergency Management Planning](#).

The Platte Canyon High School Shooting

On September 27, 2006, an armed intruder took seven students hostage at Platte Canyon High School in Park County, Colorado. First responders established incident command as SWAT teams barricaded the perpetrator in a classroom. The perpetrator, who claimed to have three pounds of explosives in his backpack, released all but two of the hostages. When negotiations stalled approximately two hours later, the SWAT team made entry in an attempt to rescue the remaining two hostages. During SWAT entry operations, the perpetrator killed one of the hostages and himself while the final hostage escaped to safety.

At the time of the incident, Park County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) deputies were familiar with the school layout and located the shooter within minutes of arriving on scene. Deputies had visited the school regularly, participated in school programs, and served as school coaches. In addition, PCSO deputies held regular meetings with school personnel and students. This familiarity with the school layout as well as with students and staff helped PCSO deputies obtain and effectively use critical information at the onset of response operations. The Platte Canyon High School Shooting AAR states that "Strengths within the school were many. Once again, a strong relationship between law enforcement and school staff is crucial. Since many of the officers are involved with the school, they also are very familiar with the building itself. Therefore, when they were given information that the shooter was in room 206, they knew exactly where to go, saving time during the response."



SWAT Team Members Exit Platte Canyon High School

The 2010 University of Texas at Austin Active Shooter and Suicide Incident

On the morning of September 28, 2010, a University of Texas at Austin student began firing an AK-47 as he walked across the campus. Although the shooter did not aim at any specific

target, by the end of his spree he had fired a total of 11 shots in three different directions. The student then entered the Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) and fired a shot, killing himself.

The Austin Police Department (APD) and the University of Texas Police Department (UTPD) call centers received reports of an active shooter shortly after the student began firing. Officers from both APD and UTPD arrived at PCL within minutes of receiving the initial reports. Additional law enforcement agencies deployed personnel and resources to the incident, including the Texas Department of Public Safety, the Austin Independent School District Police, the Texas Rangers, the University of Texas System Police, and the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force.

The UTPD employs over 130 individuals and 65 are sworn police officers. The officers patrol over 400 acres in central Austin and surrounding university properties.

During the response, the operations section chief (OSC) directed the teams to conduct building searches due to unconfirmed reports of a possible second suspect. The OSC assigned a UTPD officer to each team to provide familiarity with the location and the layout of the buildings being searched. Initially, this proved challenging because UTPD did not have sufficient officers available; however, adjustments to the staffing of perimeters enabled UTPD to support the search teams during response operations.

The Chapman University 2011 Functional Exercise

After the Virginia Tech shootings, the Chapman University Department of Public Safety (DPS) began revising its active shooter plans and collaborated more closely with the Orange, California, Police Department (OPD). As part of this process, DPS officials provided schematics of university buildings to the OPD to expedite its response during an active shooter incident. The DPS also assembled emergency books that included building schematics that could be accessed quickly and easily during an incident. On January 25, 2011, DPS sponsored an active shooter training exercise with OPD. One component of the functional exercise evaluated the ability of DPS and OPD personnel to access building schematics during an active shooter incident. The exercise confirmed the validity of the processes established by DPS and OPD. The exercise AAR recommended conducting additional exercises to build familiarity with the Chapman University campus and facilities.

Chapman University is located in Orange, California, and has an enrollment of approximately 6,400 students.

California State University, Fullerton, 2011 Active Shooter Drill

On January 16, 2011, the Anaheim/Santa Ana Urban Area sponsored the California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) 2011 Active Shooter Drill. Participating agencies included the Fullerton and Brea police and fire departments; the Placentia and California State University Long Beach police departments; and the Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Newport Beach fire departments. The drill evaluated the agencies' plans, policies, and procedures for responding to an active shooter incident.

CSUF exercise planners assumed that the participating public safety agencies' officers were familiar with the CSUF campus and key facilities. Consequently, the planners did not provide participating agencies with campus layout information or established a



CSUF Law Enforcement Officers Review Scenario Data during an Exercise

standardized method for the identification of campus facilities prior to the drill.

During the drill, some officers from participating agencies encountered difficulties identifying key buildings on campus. This lack of familiarity hindered their officers' ability to reach strategic locations in a timely manner. The CSUF 2011 Active Shooter Drill AAR observes that lack of familiarity could lead to potential delays with severe public safety consequences. Further, the AAR states that the implementation of a standardized campus infrastructures' identification method would increase safety and shorten the response time of personnel from agencies adjacent to CSUF.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Maintaining the familiarity of emergency response personnel with school facilities within or adjacent to their jurisdiction requires on-going education and training activities. Turnover, as well as changes in facility structure can lessen responders' familiarity with school facilities. This *LLIS.gov* Trend Analysis illustrates how jurisdictions effectively use drills, exercises, site visits, and sharing building schematics to maintain the knowledge about school facilities that is critical to active shooter responses.

CITATIONS

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