



ACTIVE SHOOTER EVENTS SURVEY

By Bob Parker

During a recent public debrief of an active shooter event, the chief of police in a small town in the Midwest stated that when he heard the call come out, he knew how to get to the site but was not aware that there was an industrial-type business at that location. It was a telling statement, and not an uncommon occurrence.

Every jurisdiction faces this problem. Can we possibly predict who will be the next active shooter in our city and what location he will choose for a killing field? Law enforcement cannot possibly be aware of every business or other private domain that is a potential site for an active shooter scenario, nor can we be aware of potential suspects and their weapons and motivation. We can profile shooters; we can compile stacks of data breaking down all the variables involved. However, it is essential that we increase our awareness as much as possible through human intelligence and police intuitiveness.

A great volume of data pertaining to active shooter events and the shooters themselves has been compiled and analyzed over the years. Profiles have been created, circulated and then discarded as more events occurred and more was learned about the suspects. So far, these studies have primarily relied on raw data from a multitude of active shooter incidents. Very little weight has been given to the input of first responders and surviving victims of these tragedies. Not much effort has been given to elicit opinions or viewpoints of the cops on the ground who respond in various ways to the incidents.

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The New York City Police Department conducted a very comprehensive statistical analysis of 281 active shooter events that occurred in the U.S. from 1966 to 2010. These incidents were identified by using the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) definition of an active shooter as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.” The NYPD further limited the definition to include only “those cases that spill beyond the intended victim to others.” The NYPD’s efforts in establishing criteria for these events were stellar, and appreciated. Let’s expand on this definition and look at some of the same and additional issues.

Recent happenings, such as the massacre on Utoya Island in Norway (July 2011), were not confined events. In March 2009, a suspect went mobile and killed 10 people at different sites in Alabama. Some of the victims were his original targets; others were not. The Los Angeles Police Department is one of

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the first departments I know of that has established protocols for responding to an outdoor active shooter. One of their most recent responses to such an event in an outdoor venue was in December 2011 at Sunset and Vine. There was no known connection to the location, nor were there any known intended human targets. It seemed to be purely random.

Interactive analysis

We need to know more. In this issue, *Countermeasures* is going to be interactive. You — the reader, the practitioner — are in a unique position to analyze an active shooter event. Evaluate a past event in your jurisdiction and predict possible future incidents. Your opinions and the intelligence you can provide are important. Your perspective is more than just a compilation of data; it is the voice of experience that may help guide future responses.

To participate in this informal study, it is not necessary to have been immediately involved in the incident. There are questions that you can answer to the best of your recollection, knowledge and general impressions. The definition of an active shooter event will be flexible. If you believe a local incident was an active shooter, your information and responses are welcome.

Most active shooter events do not end with a high victim count. There are many that are under the radar with the media outside of the immediate area to the shooting. We need to be made aware of these too.



We have compiled a short online questionnaire/survey and we hope you will take part. Go to:

www.surveymonkey.com/s/parkeractiveshooter

(Figure 1 is an abbreviated example of the survey questions.)

Please complete the online survey to the best of your ability and recall (see link above). The object is to identify possible trends, tactics, planning, spontaneity, weapons, location/site of shooting and problems with law enforcement response. Additionally, if there were any issues that you believe were unique to your active shooter event, please elaborate. This information will be shared with the readers/members of the NTOA, but is not intended to be part of any database. Your anonymity is assured.

Please take the time to contribute to this important effort. I will share the findings with you in an upcoming *Countermeasures* column.

Make yourself aware of the potential dangers in your jurisdiction and stay safe. ■

For those who prefer to respond directly to me rather than participate in the online survey, please forward your responses to ntoa699@yahoo.com.

About the author



Lt. Bob Parker (ret.) served with the Omaha (NE) Police Department for 30 years and retired in 2001. Bob served for many years as a lead instructor with NTOA.



This issue marks Bob's 25th year writing his *Countermeasures* column for *The Tactical Edge*. We thank him for his dedication to NTOA and the law enforcement community.

Figure 1

SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

- Where did the active shooter event take place?
- Did this appear to be a preplanned event or a spontaneous opportunity?
- Did the shooter have any known connection with the victim(s) or the site?
- What was the motivation for the attack?
- What types of weapons were used?
- How many rounds were fired by police, civilians and/or suspect?
- How many shooters were involved?
- Were there suspected co-conspirators who did not actually participate in the attack?
- What was the duration/time span of the attack?
- How much time from first shot, to dispatch, to arrival?
- Was the shooter stopped before anyone was harmed?
- How was the shooter stopped?
- What types of weapons were used by law enforcement or armed citizens?
- How did the event end? (*Suspect suicide, arrested, killed by LE, etc.*)
- How many law enforcement officers were first on-scene?
- What additional type of officers responded? (*such as off-duty, multiple agencies*)
- Are you aware of any planned active shooter incidents that were prevented by intelligence gathering in your jurisdiction?
- What means were used to gather intelligence? (*social media, suspect communication, etc.*)
- If police intervention stopped the killings and assaults, did active shooter training work?
- Were mistakes made in tactics or decision-making?
- What type of formation was used, if any?
- Please provide comments on possible future active shooter attacks, such as motive, site/location, weapons and types of suspects.