The law enforcement response to active shooter events has greatly evolved since the mid-1960s. Programs such as Texas State University’s Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center (ALERRT), DHS Active Shooter Threat Training and contributions from the NTOA have highlighted modern police tactics while compelling police instructors to utilize a variety of skill sets in their curriculum. This type of training must include such tactical dilemmas as those experienced and trained by SWAT teams, as well as officers who may find themselves in a position of solo engagement, where they don’t have a partner (or five) watching their backs and covering exposed angles.

There have been valuable lessons learned about self-aid and buddy aid, rescue techniques concerning officer down and citizen down, the transition recognition ability needed when an incident goes from active shooter to barricaded subject, and the responding officer’s ability to communicate and lead under duress. As a veteran police officer and trainer, I would follow up with this question: Who are we preparing?

Police response times vary depending upon the size of your force, the size of your city, the time of day, what day it is, holidays, festivals, sporting events, etc. The city I work in has a population growth of about 111 percent during the standard work week from 0730 to about 1800. Apart from various other sworn members (traffic, SRO, NRO, administration) we have a minimum of five officers on patrol, which includes the patrol shift supervisor. Considering the average response time is about five to six minutes, and an event lasts an average two to five minutes, this math does not lend itself to a positive outcome.

If you look at the active shooter incidents that took place at the University of Texas in 1966, Columbine High School in 1999, Virginia Tech in 2007 and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, you will see a distinct shift in the law enforcement mindset and training methodology. In fact, it was not until the Sandy Hook shootings in 2012 that we as a nation, under the direction of President Obama with the creation of the Readiness in Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) document, began to see a shift in who we are preparing for success in active shooter response.

This is not to say that the arrival of law enforcement does not interrupt the plan of shooters who
then stop killing others and turn the
gun on themselves; however, to evoke
a tangible difference, we must turn
that instruction focus to our citizens,
who are the real first responders.
What they do in that moment of crisis
will determine the survival rate for
them and those around them. Who
better to provide that training than
the people who have been trying to
perfect a response to this problem for
more than 15 years?
It is simply not enough to tell
people to secure in place, lock down
and wait for the arrival of police.
We must provide the citizens of our
communities with the knowledge,
authority and physical tools to fortify
their positions while always looking
to improve that position, or possibly
transition to another response based
on the situation as they see fit.
This mentality is in direct correla-
tion with the ideology of leading un-
der duress. It is a simplified version
of commander’s intent and decentralized
command. If we provide the why and
the how to our citizens (commander’s
intent), then give them the authority
to proceed as the situation develops
(decentralized command) we may be
able to affect a difference.

TRAINING CITIZENS TO RESPOND

When citizens who are in harm’s
way do something to prolong their
own life or the lives of those around
them, they also provide emergency re-
sponders with a bit more time to join
the fight. We must also consider pro-
viding them with the training to apply
the principle of care under fire because
simple first aid is not adequate. While
the standard operating procedures
involved with getting aid into the hot
zone have started to change, a time
delay still exists. If we can get citizens
to take responsibility for starting
triage, then emergency responders
can focus more attention to pressing
matters such as finding the gunman
or level one trauma care.
Much like providing stranger
danger or rape aggression defense
(RAD) courses, law enforcement
should offer active shooter response
training through public forums. In my
city, our SROs are trained to deliver
civilian active shooter response train-
ing in our schools to administrators,
faculty, staff, parents, and when age
appropriate, to students. We offer
this training through our Community
Emergency Response Team (CERT)
program, our citizen’s police academy
and our city’s website.

IT IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH TO TELL
PEOPLE TO SECURE IN PLACE, LOCK
DOWN AND WAIT FOR THE ARRIVAL
OF POLICE.

Classes are held regularly and
prepare our citizens for what they
can expect from a police response,
as well as what we expect from them
until we arrive on scene. These classes
open a dialog between emergency
responders and citizens, business
owners and other city employees,
which helps create a more cohesive
approach to a very probable issue.
The partnerships created during these
community trainings open doors for
the police to come in and conduct
threat assessments (another citizen
learning opportunity) and possibly
secure future active shooter training
venues with willing role players, par-
ticipants or observers.

Today’s active shooter instructor
must be well versed in the evolving
trends in mass killing events. They
also must be current on the federal
mandates/recommendations that
exist about organizations providing
option-based training to their work
force and within the educational envi-
rone. These mandates/recommen-
dations are direct reflections of the
number of incidents in which people
responded proactively, showing a
higher survival rate verses remaining
idle and waiting for law enforcement
intervention.
The police departments in this
country are the industry leaders, but
we need assistance. We cannot do it
all. Who better to provide assistance
than those we see, educate and work
with day in and day out?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth E. Lott has been a police
officer for 13 years, beginning in San
Jose, California, and currently in Red-
mond, Washington. He is assigned to
the patrol division and training cadre
(firearms, less lethal), and is a member
of the North Sound Metro regional
SWAT team. He has worked as an ac-
tive shooter training coordinator for
both sworn and non-sworn personnel
since 2007, and continues that work
as a national trainer/independent con-
tactor for the Alice Training Institute.
In 1998, he received bachelor of arts
degree from the University of Central
Oklahoma. He served from 1992 to
2000 in the U.S. Army reserve.