

# ARE YOUR FACILITIES PREPARED FOR ACTIVE SHOOTERS?



By Anthony Pizzitola

In our 2012 interview with facilities and disaster-recovery professional Anthony Pizzitola, he explained that business continuity management is the key to business sustainability. Since then, he has performed research into low-probability/high-impact disasters that have destroyed communities and carried mega-billion-dollar price tags. Who would have guessed that two recent hurricanes would cruise the northeastern coast of the United States and devour businesses along the way? This is a prime example of how global warming has given low-probability events a front-row seat in the disaster arena.

But another human-created disaster has unfortunately made equally horrendous headlines, bankrupting businesses and taking a toll on their internal and external customers. Active shooters are now the disastrous news-making event that has businesses concerned about their viability.

**Q: Just to provide the readers with basic information, what types of disasters can businesses expect and prepare for?**

A: There are three types of disasters: natural, manmade, and technological. *Natural disasters* have increased in frequency and intensity as a result of global warming. This is evidenced by abnormal weather patterns impacting areas where seasonal weather patterns were typical but not generally disastrous. *Technological disasters* are related to utility and telecommunications failure and overload. *Manmade disasters* result from intentional or unintentional human error. Unintentional error occurs, for example, when drivers operate vehicles without paying attention to traffic signals. Intentional errors can result from the actions of such actors as arsonists, bombers, terrorists, or determined individuals entering a facility with an AK-47 with intentions to massacre.





## THE MOTIVATION OF ACTIVE SHOOTERS

is to make a statement or to “get even.” THEIR OBJECTIVE IS TO LIVE OUT A PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA, and they typically do not value their own life—and especially do not value the lives of their targets.

**Q: Why has this issue come to the forefront?**

A: In the words of U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, “Alarming, since 2009, the average [number of active-shooter situations] has tripled. We’ve seen at least twelve active-shooter situations so far in 2013.” I think everyone has an opinion as to why the events have escalated, but business people and corporate executives have neither the time nor the resources to attempt to identify potential active shooters who enter their premises. Psychoanalyzing the intentions of individuals and

groups is not their area of expertise. Yet those same owners and corporate executives are legally liable for not having prepared their facilities for all disasters, including active shooters.

**Q: But businesses have been threatened for centuries by robbers whose ill-fated intentions sometimes result in violence. What’s the difference?**

A: The motivation of a robber is to acquire money, and the objective is a quick get-a-way. Robbers typically value their own life and conceal their identity. Robbers strategize

their timing, entrance, and exits. The motivation of active shooters is to make a statement or to “get even.” Their objective is to live out a psychological drama, and they typically do not value their own life—and especially do not value the lives of their targets. Active shooters do not conceal their identity, nor do they strategize their exits.

**Q: So what are we solving for? What is the solution?**

A: Lightning bolts from the sky, and it also bolts from the working end of an AK-47. The solution is to derail the active shooter’s strategy, defeating their plan. Annihilate the active shooter’s first steps, and they will second-guess their plan under pressure. The active shooter must be captured in the parking lot or the parking garage and prevented from entering their target facility. The simple answer is deterrence. The simple strategy for deterrence does not exist in a vacuum but requires the assistance of all concerned. In presentations across the country, facilities have asked me why they should be involved with this level of protection. My answer is simple and realistic: they might be a random target of the active shooter.

**Q: Explain how this level of deterrence is implemented.**

A: Until recently, active shooters were seeking soft targets—locations with easy access that let them enter undetected. In the case of the Washington Naval Yard, a hard target was successfully entered due to a breakdown in communications. Whether the target is soft or hard, the active shooter must be prohibited from entering the site by implementing five basic action steps. There must be sophisticated CCTV surveillance, full-coverage exterior lighting, full-coverage

interior lighting, locks that work in the event of an emergency lockdown, and timely drills and exercises.

**Q: So you're advocating that facilities managers perform site inspections to determine these critical areas needing protection.**

A: Yes, but other professionals can be involved. Certified Business Continuity Professionals and risk-management experts can also be involved. To drill down further, valued vendors and representatives from the insurance industry can also, during this risk assessment, provide detailed feedback on corrective actions that will identify threat areas to correct for active-shooter deterrence. This risk assessment will culminate with a business-impact analysis designed to note the degree of probability for the threats. An example: the northwest corner of the parking lot has minimal lighting and is shaded by trees. This area has 98 percent probability that an active shooter can park and remain undetected until he or she is minutes from the front entrance.

**Q: Elaborate on each area of deterrence.**

A: First and foremost, a sophisticated CCTV bank must be installed and monitored by professionals trained to observe suspicious behavior. This can be performed on location or at a regional location equipped with a bank of units. Second, intense exterior lighting is not always optimal. The primary need is for full-coverage lighting designed to capture every potential hiding place, with minimum lighting of one candle per square foot. Third, interior lighting is equally important, using the same specifications. Fourth, locks that do not work during a lockdown are an invitation to the courtroom. I have actually seen such locks in inspections across the United States. Fifth and finally, people panic when any disaster occurs. Although drills and exercises can seem mundane, they save lives because people can follow a practiced plan during an emergency.

**Q: Could you give us a basic scenario?**

A: For instance, a team of inspectors will perform site surveys at

night to determine areas that are not illuminated well in the parking garage. Where is the first place an active shooter would park or hide? Lighting in these dark areas should be enhanced. If the areas are illuminated with full coverage, a trained CCTV professional will capture the

assailant on the screen and automatically perform a lockdown before the person has the opportunity to enter the facility. Also, the team will make recommendations for the removal of any potential hiding places where weapons can be stored or areas that need additional secured fencing.

**Q: But in this economy, many business owners and corporate executives will claim that they cannot afford these proposed upgrades.**

A: Most insurance companies and attorneys will advise the insured that they cannot afford the lawsuit guaranteed to follow the incident. Disasters impact businesses on a quantitative and qualitative level. Quantitatively speaking, the cost of the upgrades is minimal compared to a lawsuit that continues for a decade. On a qualitative and reputational level, customers will avoid visiting a site to which ambulances have been rushed a few months before. Disasters have lingering effects on communities. Juries will only extend mercy to businesses that have attempted to mitigate their damages and installed protective measures to protect their internal and external customers. Remember that

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plaintiffs will saturate the courtroom with mega-size photos designed to show a breach in fulfilling the duty to protect invitees on their premises. The cost of implementing protective procedures is minimal compared to that of a lawsuit that reaches this magnitude.

**Q: What if the active shooter gains entry into the facility? What are your recommendations for such a scenario?**

A: Police departments should be able to access the organization's CCTV system via the Internet to monitor both the exterior and the interior camera systems and determine the exact location of an active shooter. While police are speeding to the scene, their command center will relay important logistical information about which corridor has been invaded. In such a situation, the police can gain vital details about the assailant's point of entry without wasting much time. Also, most protection services advise that anyone in the building seek the nearest designated hiding place to stay out of harm's way. An active shooter can't shoot what can't be seen; therefore, rooms should be equipped with multiple light switches that can be activated to turn off lights. A master switch to shut down all interior room lights could be a major deterrent to an active shooter. It's also crucial to ensure that all interior door locks are operative.

**Q: Any final thoughts?**

A: Although organizations are faced with numerous financial, manufacturing, and marketing challenges, protecting people should be their first priority. This can only be accomplished by being proactive, vigilant, and resilient in the face of disaster. **N**

*Anthony Pizzitola, CFM, CBCP, MBCI is a Certified Facility Professional and Certified Business Continuity Professional in the United States and the United Kingdom. He is the only professional in the field to hold certifications from the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA), the Disaster Recovery Institute International, and the Business Continuity Institute. Pizzitola was awarded 2013 Author of the Year by IFMA, who published his article "Disasters are the New Normal." He resides in Houston and welcomes comments at AFPizzitola@aol.com.*