

When Seconds Count: Stopping Active Killers

Reported by: Brendan Keefe WCPO.COM : 11/21/2008

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There have been so many school shootings over the last 40 years that researchers have been able to develop a profile of the typical mass murderer. They're called "active shooters" or "active killers" and their crimes play out in a matter of minutes.

After the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, police changed their tactics. The two student gunmen killed 15 people and themselves before the SWAT team was in position. **Commanders realized that it simply takes too long to assemble a tactical team in time to stop an active killer.** The new tactics developed in response to Columbine involved creating an ad-hoc tactical team using the first four or five patrol officers on the scene. They would enter the shooting scene in a diamond formation with guns pointing in all directions. This technique was employed by police departments around the country. Then 32 people were killed by a lone gunman at Virginia Tech in April 2007. Seung Hui Cho shot 47 people, 30 fatally, in the university's Norris Hall in just 11 minutes. That means every minute he killed more than three people and shot a total of four. Once again, the gunman continued shooting until a four-officer team made entry and then he killed himself. Law enforcement once again reviewed its tactics.

Based on the Virginia Tech data, top tactics training facilities determined the first officer on scene should make entry immediately with an aggressive attack on the shooter. Every minute the officer waits for back-up, another three or more people could die. In other words, **while it was once considered suicide for a lone officer to take on an active killer, it is now considered statistical homicide for him not to do so.**

Tactical Defense Institute in Adams County, Ohio developed one of the first "single officer response" programs in the nation. TDI was teaching the tactic even before Virginia Tech. Now the National School Resource Officer Organization (NSRO) is using TDI instructors to teach school resource officers nationwide how to confront a gunman immediately. Locally, all Blue Ash police officers are trained in these new tactics in large part because their chief, Col. Chris Wallace, is also a TDI instructor.

The other statistic that emerged from a study of active killers is that they almost exclusively seek out "gun free" zones for their attacks. In most states, concealed handguns are prohibited at schools and on college campuses even for those with permits. Many malls and workplaces also place signs at their entrances prohibiting firearms on the premises. Now some **tacticians believe the signs themselves may be an invitation to the active killers.**

The psychological profile of a mass murderer indicates he is looking to inflict the most casualties as quickly as possible. Also, the data show most active killers have no intention of surviving the event. They may select schools and shopping malls because of the large number of defenseless victims and the virtual guarantee no one on the scene is armed. As soon as they're confronted by any armed resistance, the shooters typically turn the gun on themselves.

(UPDATE 11/21/08 by Anchor/Reporter Brendan Keefe):

We have received many requests about the source for our assertion that most mass murders have occurred in otherwise "gun free" zones.

The experts are Ron Borsch from SEALE Academy in Bedford, Ohio and John Benner from Tactical Defense Institute.

A summary of Borsch's study : Ohio trainer makes the case for single-officer entry against active killers Force Science News May 14 2008
<http://www.policeone.com/active-shooter/articles/1695125-Ohio-trainer-makes-the-case-for-single-officer-entry-against-active-killers/>

We also conducted our own analysis of mass murders in the U.S. The vast majority occurred in schools or on college campuses where firearms are banned as a matter of state statutes. Others took place in post offices where firearms are banned as a matter of federal law. Most of the rest took place in shopping malls or other businesses where the owners posted signs prohibiting firearm possession by anyone including those with CCW permits.

In some states, like Ohio, those signs have the force of law and violators are prosecuted under the relevant statute. In other states, like Texas, the signs are considered trespass notices and violators are first asked to leave, then they are arrested for trespass if they decline (of course, if your weapon is visible, it's no longer concealed and there are other potential legal consequences).

Based on data from the SEALE study, an analysis by TDI, and our own painstaking research, we are able to say definitively that most "active killer" shootings have occurred in so-called "gun free" zones. The experts who say they may be "invitations" are also John Benner and Ron Borsch who have six decades of law enforcement experience and training between them.

The Luby's Cafeteria shooting in Killeen, TX in 1991 took place before Texas adopted its Florida-style CCW law. In fact, that mass murder of 23 people was used as an example by those seeking to enact the CCW legislation.

It is accurate to say firearms were banned in Luby's at that time because there was no uniform concealed carry law in place in 1991. In fact, several victims and survivors had legally owned handguns in their cars at the time of the shooting.

While that shooting was not addressed in our story, it and others over the last 40 years were analyzed in our investigation.

As journalists, we are not interested in entering into the heated debate over gun control. We are, however, interested in reporting the facts. In this story, the facts point to the active shooters ignoring gun prohibitions and perhaps selecting those locations because they are "soft targets" where no resistance would be found.