**Active Shooter Crisis**

An active shooter is a hostile intruder that is actively engaged in fatally wounding and/or injuring people in a populated area, usually within a confined space, with the use of firearms and without a pattern or method to their victim selection. These situations are fluid and evolve quickly, necessitating the immediate deployment of law enforcement resources to halt the shooting and protect innocent victims. Unfortunately, schools have been targets due to the volume of vulnerable people available in confined spaces for long periods. As such, educational institutions must prepare their communities for maximum survival since the situation can go on for up to 15 minutes before the arrival of law enforcement. In line with the Department of Education’s (2013) planning framework, Cary University will plan for active shooter situations using the following steps:

**Step 1: Form a Collaborative Team**

The CIRT team at Cary is the core team for crisis management planning on our campus comprising of senior staff from Student Health and Wellbeing, Student Affairs, International Education and SHARE. Safety, however, is a collective effort and collaboration across departments and with local agencies is essential. The broader collaborative team includes:

* Campus Safety Representative: Shelter Locations, Early Alert System
* Student Representative: Student Experience
* Marketing/Communications Representative: Early Alert System
* Facilities Representative: Shelter Locations
* Residence Life Representative: Student Experience, Accounting for students, Shelter, Locations
* Faculty Representative: Classroom Experience
* Access & Accommodations Representative: Shelter Locations
* Emergency Response/Fire Protection Representative: Consultation, Recovery
* Law Enforcement: Security response
* Local health care facilities: Medical response

The agreed upon framework for crisis management planning at Cary University is the six-step planning process found in the Department of Education’s *Guide for Developing High Quality Emergency Operation Plans for Institutions of Higher Education* (2013). Members of the core planning committee chair sub-committees to focus on planning for and managing different categories of crisis situations: human, environmental and facility. During plan development and reviews, the core committee meets weekly, and information is disseminated to sub-committees. As the need arises, meetings with the broader team are scheduled.

**Step 2: Understand the Situation**

An active shooter situation is highly volatile and can lead to mass casualties at a very fast rate as it involves aggression from armed individuals with the intent to harm and kill randomly. In such situations, knowing what to do is essential to the preservation of lives in the community. Training, frequent awareness campaigns and drills are critical for the preparedness and safety of our community.

Even though active shooter incidents cannot be completely prevented, organizations should conduct background checks on all new employees and strive to provide conducive work environments as disgruntled staff pose a risk.

Big life changes and negative life experiences take a toll and can be risk factors as well. It is important for every member of our community to remain vigilant for disturbing behavioral changes and know how to report those. Warning signs include:

* Increased consumption of alcoholic beverages and/or illegal drugs
* Depression, withdrawal, or severe mood swings
* Resistance and overreaction to policy or procedure changes
* Behavior indicating paranoia
* A sudden deterioration in mental health
* History of aggression toward authority figures
* Unsolicited comments about firearms, weapons, and violent crimes have increased.
* Empathizing with other people who commit violence
* A fascination with previous mass shootings/attacks
* A traumatic life event, such as death, breakup/divorce, or job loss
* Being the target of workplace bullying

The Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) on-campus will continuously assess the campus for any threats. When disruptive behaviors are identified, the team will ensure individuals receive support to resolve issues that could potentially escalate into crisis situations. All members of our community are encouraged to report distressing behaviors to the BIT. Our campus police will continue to patrol for quick detection of potentially harmful behaviors.

**Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives**

Similar to the goals of managing other crisis situations, the goals for managing active shooter crises at Cary university are to:

1. Prevent the loss of lives
2. Provided medical attention to affected individuals

These goals will be achieved through the following objectives:

**Objective 1:1** Creating evacuation and shelter-in-place plans

**Objective 1:2** Periodic training on survival during active shooter situations

**Objective 1:3** Mandatory campus-wide drills in collaboration campus police and local law enforcement where possible to help the community familiarize with and internalize action steps

**Objective 1:4** Frequent awareness campaigns, audio announcements, posters around campus, SMS notifications and all other agreed upon means.

**Objective 1:5** Early and accurate multi-method communication during an active shooter incident to alert the community through website announcements, social media updates, emails, texts, and automated calls requiring a single digit response (e.g., 1 = safe and 2 = not safe) and an audible announcement across campus through our public address systems.

**Objective 1:6** Immediately notify law enforcement

**Objective 2:1** Paramedics and EMT’s will usually arrive with law enforcement as part of the first responders team to begin providing medical attention while taking injured individuals to the nearest hospital.

**Objective 2:2** Campus safety will collaborate with law enforcement to identify all injured individuals and ensure they receive quick attention

**Objective 2:3** Provide flexible schedules for campus community for mental and physical wellbeing and recovery.

**Objective 2:4** Provide early communication to institutional stakeholders; alumni, trustees, donors and provide information and support to families of injured individuals.

**Objective 2:5** In the event of loss of lives, law enforcement and senior management will inform the families and plan memorial services and artifacts with them while continuing to provide care and support.

**Step 4: Plan Development**

Recommended and widely promoted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security, the “Run-Hide-Fight" tactic is an effective plan to activate during an active shooter crisis.

1. Find an escape route where possible, run as far away from danger as possible and call campus security/law enforcement when sure of own safety.
2. When an escape is not possible, shelter-in-place using the following guidelines:

* Lock the door
* Turn off lights
* Close window blinds
* Blockade entrance with heavy furniture
* Move away from windows
* Silence all gadgets/devices
* Hide behind/beneath large furniture
* Remain quiet

1. If it is impossible to escape from the danger by running away or hiding, the active shooter must be engaged aggressively to be disarmed and immobilized. Use sharp, dangerous, and heavy objects in the environment with brutal force.

*The CIRT committee acknowledges that in the event of an active shooter crisis, individuals may freeze and may not be able to follow these steps in a linear fashion. All Cary community members are encouraged to take action to protect themselves in the best way possible given their ability, preparedness, and context.*

**Step 5: Plan Preparation, Review, & Approval**

The plan should be written down clearly providing details for easy comprehension and include a situational annex for an active shooter crisis. Accessibility cannot be ignored when preparing the plan in terms of language and ADA requirements. It is also important for the plan to be sufficient, covering all possibilities during the crisis and all action steps to be taken, feasible enough to be carried out by the community, and compliant with all applicable local, state, and federal laws. After completing these checks, the plan should be shared with senior leadership for approval before dissemination to appropriate stakeholders and community partners.

**Step 6: Plan Implementation & Maintenance**

Departments should hold meetings to familiarize faculty, staff, and students with their roles during an active shooter crisis, to discuss the approved plan and to develop and schedule training. The training syllabus should include identifying risk factors and reporting to BIT, evacuation routes and safe locations, the run-hide-fight tactic and cooperation with law enforcement.

It is important for the plan to be exercised through verbal walk-throughs in groups, drills, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises to test preparedness and collaboration between stakeholders in simulated events. These simulated events will involve the deployment of resources, cost must be taken into consideration and stakeholders should be notified ahead of time.

Review of the plan should take a continuous approach; it can be done in segments or in entirety but must be frequent. Certain factors that can necessitate a review outside of the scheduled times include:

* Actual crisis situations
* Policy, personnel, organizational structures, processes, or facility changes
* Formal revisions to planning guidelines or standards.
* Identified gaps or lessons learned from simulated crisis events
* Changes in threats or hazards, or the emergence of new threats or hazards
* Changes in the campus demographics (new faculty, staff, and students)

With every review, the CIRT committee must ensure that updated copies are provided to local emergency management and institutional leadership.

**References**

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