

# Uncommon Journalism

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## How to Survive a Mass Shooting

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**E**ight minutes.

According to a [2012 New York Police Department analysis](#), that's how long most workplace shootings in the United States last.

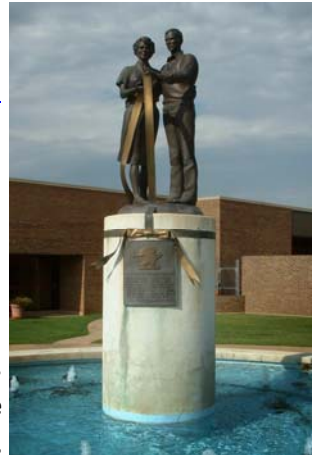
"That means we have eight minutes to solve the problem," said Bo Mitchell, president of [911 Consulting](#), during "[Active Shooter in Your Workplace: Lessons Learned and Best Practices](#)," a recent webinar hosted by the communications solutions organization [Regroup](#).

"Which means we have another insight," Mitchell continued. "Police probably can't help you. You're going to have to do this yourself."

Prior to founding his emergency consulting business -- having trained more than 21,000 employees over the last decade -- Mitchell served as the Wilton, Conn. Police Commissioner for 16 years. He has been board certified for emergency management, disaster recovery and corporate security -- [by organizations such as the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the International Association of Energy Managers](#) -- 16 times.

Over the years, he has provided consultations to several Fortune 500 businesses, including General Electric and MasterCard. He has also worked with the Waldorf Astoria New York -- "arguably the second safest house in America," Mitchell called it, "because the people who live in the first safest house in America visit it every two weeks...POTUS, FLOTUS, VPOTUS, the Secret Service keeps a permanent installation here 365 days a year."

**Today, a monument stands in Edmond, Okla. where, in 1986, 14 people were gunned down in the deadliest workplace shooting in U.S. history.**



***One of the nation's leading organizational safety experts addresses what employers can do to better prepare for the unimaginable.***

While there exists extensive data about workplace shootings, Mitchell believes there is a considerable lack of "insights" into the best practices for active shooter incidents -- and especially the "lessons learned" from such tragedies. A "complicated and difficult" issue, he said there is no "one size fits all" protocol for employers to follow to ensure worker or student safety in a shooting situation -- or to keep themselves from facing possible legal repercussions afterwards.

"Every site is different, with different responses necessary," he said. "So you need to have a plan, you need to have training, you should have systems, and they shall all be site-specific."

As such, he said that employers that rely upon "headquarters plans" or "copy and pasted" protocols across all of their sites are potentially making fatal errors. Nor should employers rely upon safety protocols put in place by landlords, Mitchell said, describing a majority of the plans he's seen as inadequate.

"No generic planning and training will make you legal," Mitchell said. "Or safe."

## The Disturbing Data

Earlier this year, Regroup released its [“2013 Active Shooter Report.”](#) It was a “banner year” for active shooter incidents, Mitchell said; compared to data compiled over the last five years, 2013 saw nearly three times the number of average active shooter incidents transpire.

“What is the ‘profile’ of the active shooter?” Mitchell said he is frequently asked. “The answer is, there isn’t.”

Referring to the aforementioned NYPD analysis, Mitchell said that the only real commonality among mass shooters is that, 96 percent of the time, they are male. Every other demographic variable, he said, swings wildly; in that particular report, for example, he said the ages of the active shooters ranged from 10 to 66.

Four out of five times, the shooter is familiar with the environment he attacks; that leaves about a quarter of active shooter incidents, Mitchell added, taking place at areas “randomly” selected by a gunman.

The average mass shooting incident in the U.S, Mitchell said, results in three deaths, with an additional 3.6 injuries. In only 14 percent of incidents do active shooters survive their own rampages; 46 percent commit suicide before being apprehended, while another 41 percent are killed by law-enforcement -- “suicide-by-cop,” Mitchell called it.

While most individuals associate the term “active shooter” with school shootings, he said nearly three quarters of active shooter incidents take place off-campus. Citing [United States Department of Labor estimates](#), Mitchell said that nearly 2 million people report being the victims of workplace violence every year in the U.S. -- a figure that he believes is almost certainly an undercount.

“The statistics are that any workplace, on average in the United States, is 18 times more likely to have workplace violence than a fire,” Mitchell said. “Today in the American workplace, two people will be murdered by a firearm or a knife.”

## Run, Hide, Fight

“This is [the protocol](#) that is very vogue,” Mitchell said. “In one sense, this is a brand new thought to a lot of people who are being introduced to the subject, but really, this has been the answer to the question of what you do in an active shooter situation in the workplace for decades.”

Surprisingly, Mitchell said he frequently encounters active shooter plans that omit the “run” element of the decision-making continuum. “If I say to most employers ‘active shooter,’ they immediately say ‘lockdown,’” he stated. “Well, we skipped a step here...if I don’t have to take part of a lockdown subsequent to the incident as it unfolds, then I want to run and be out of it.”

In almost every active shooter plan, Mitchell said the “hide” aspect is synonymous with “lockdown” -- a protocol in which individuals lock themselves in a room, with the doors barricaded, and remain silent until given an all-clear notification.

And then, he said, there’s the “fight” dynamic.

“This is a very, very bad place to be, but if it is your last resort, it is your last resort,” he said. “If you’re with other people, you want to gang up on the active shooter [and] if you’re alone, you want to move hard, move fast and you want to use surprise -- but you’re only going to have one opportunity to take care of it.”

Generalities regarding the “run, hide, fight” methodology, however, can be dangerous, he added. “You just can’t say these words and have everybody understand exactly what that means,” Mitchell said. “We have to make it specific to your people and to your site.”

## We Hang Together, Or We Hang Separately

Police and EMT personnel, Mitchell said, are not the “first responders” to active shooter incidents. “They are the official responders,” he said, “[but] your employees are the first responders.”

Because of this, Mitchell said employers need to have plans for employees to break off into “emergency teams” in response to such situations. This, he said, isn’t just a sound safety measure -- it’s also federal law. “Remember, OSHA’s not a town in Wisconsin,” he said. “Unless your workplace is on a truck or a boat, you are subject to these regulations.”

[Indeed, virtually all U.S. employers are required to have emergency action plans and emergency management training protocols for its employees -- both annually and at-hire -- in place.](#) Under the Williams-Steiger Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, many of these OSHA regulations also [extend to nonprofits, churches and schools](#); furthermore, Mitchell said that under OSHA provisions, employers may also be found legally responsible for the safety of any non-employees who may be onsite during an emergency situation.

Sans a detailed response plan and adequate employee training, Mitchell said “chaos” is inevitable in the event of an active shooter incident.

“If we have no plan and no training, ‘run, hide, fight’ is going to fail because people don’t really know what that means,” he said. “We’re not just individuals responding, we have to respond in concert with everybody around us -- everyone’s response impacts your response. We hang together, or we hang separately.”

## The Three C’s

“**C**ommand, control and communication,” Mitchell said. “If you’ve ever been in the military or emergency services, these are the three pillars of all emergency response.”

In an emergency response situation, Mitchell said there needs to be someone in “overall command,” which in turn, creates a chain of command with enough commanders to cover all absences, shifts and people onsite at the time of the emergency.

“As far as our control is concerned, we need an emergency team with enough employees to cover all of our spaces and all of our headcounts during any hour of operation,” Mitchell said. “As far as communication is concerned, if we can’t communicate, we can’t respond.”

Among the many communication tools available to employers are PA systems, cell phones, landlines, e-mail, two-way radios and even digital signs.

“And you will need all of them in an emergency,” Mitchell said. “You can come back and say ‘isn’t that duplicative?’ but please remember in an emergency situation, redundancy is a beautiful thing.”

Emergency notification systems, across a broad array of communication devices and networks, can also be vital in the case of an onsite shooting, he said. “You can reach everyone, and you can do so fast,” Mitchell said. “The emergency notification system is really the only way to start the ‘run, hide, fight,’ and the only way to communicate in seconds and in minutes as we go through an active shooter response.”

Furthermore, Mitchell said many employers have inadequate procedures for headcounts during emergency situations. “A clipboard and a number two pencil is not a real process,” he said. “You are required to do this, and it has consequences if you fail.”

While some employers claim that doing adequate headcounts during emergencies is impossible, Mitchell begs to differ. “Well, use your emergency notification system,” he said. Numerous communication platforms, especially in concert with two-way radios, allow employers to ensure that assembly areas are covered, he said, “so that you can account for all your people.”

## What is the “Active Shooter Protocol?”

**A**ll 13,000 police agencies in the United States -- on the federal, state and local-level -- follow a uniform “Active Shooter Protocol.” Mitchell explained the procedure.

“First, they come in and find the shooter, and then they neutralize him,” he said, “which is a politically correct way of saying ‘they track down the guy and they kill him.’”

There is “no hand-holding” in such situations, he said. Police are trained to walk past those who may be injured and they make no attempts to “clear rooms,” which was the standard protocol before 1999’s Columbine High School Massacre.

During the procedure, Mitchell said that employees should refrain from making direct contact with the police officials. “Basically, what you have is a bunch of males high on testosterone and adrenaline, all of them carrying firearms,” he said. “They don’t want someone screaming at them.”

When drawing up emergency response plans, Mitchell said employers should definitely factor the Active Shooter Protocol into their procedures. “Every police department does this differently...some jurisdictions want the curtains closed, some want the curtains open,” he said. “It’s your job to make sure that you are in concert with arriving police officers.”

# The Importance of Exercises

**A**lthough emergency response exercises aren't legally required like training and drills, Mitchell believes they are certainly the best way to "test" plans and employee preparedness.

Communications systems, he added, should also be routinely tested. "Communications are absolutely critical to your response," he said, "so you're going to want to have lots of communications systems available to you, especially cell, text and e-mail, which is ubiquitous, probably, with all of the occupants in your workplace."

Emergency notification systems, he said, can be easily "degraded," however, primarily through a lack of employee engagement. "Having 85 percent of our employees signed up still leaves 15 percent who aren't getting the word when we want them to run, hide and fight," Mitchell stated. "That's a lot of people who have been left exposed, who you haven't been able to communicate with."

Training, he continued, is absolutely "everything" in emergency situations. "If we don't get the words off the paper and into people's heads, we have failed," he said. To exemplify the point, he brought up two different "crash and burn" accidents involving Boeing 737s. In [an accident at Calgary International Airport in 1984](#), no fatalities were recorded, while a year later, a similar accident at Manchester International Airport claimed the lives of [55 people](#).

"The NTSB reported that the difference is, in the non-fatal crash in Canada, just about everybody onboard was a frequent business flyer," Mitchell said. "Unfortunately in [Manchester,] 55 people died. Almost all of them were first-time fliers...a majority of those 55 people were still buckled in their seatbelts, so frozen were they."

# There is No John McClane

**M**itchell said he often hears complaints from employers, who say that active shooter response training frightens employees. [National surveys](#), he said, speak to the contrary; when employees are asked to name their most important workplace issue, Mitchell said 85 percent of respondents pinpoint 'safety' as their utmost concern.

"All the other things I thought would be number one -- wages, promotions, leaves, sick-days -- all of these things were way below 50 percent," Mitchell said. "There wasn't a number two, there was only a number one that stuck out as far as what your employees want."

Instead of terrifying employees, he said active shooter response training builds true confidence in employees, and empowers them by taking the "scary" out of an unsettling situation.

In the real world, Mitchell said action movie protagonists like Bruce Willis's character in the "Die Hard" films do not exist -- just normal people, whose emergency preparedness training could spell the difference between life and death.

"The idea that the untrained amateur in your workplace will suddenly and instinctively rise to the occasion and save everybody's lives is pure Hollywood, it's pure fiction," he said. "We don't rise to the occasion, we sink to our level of training."

"And untrained," Mitchell concluded, "we just sink."



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