



School Safety Newsletter

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Illinois Campus Full-Scale Active Shooter Drill Involving Multiple Agencies that Helped Better Prepare a Community

In May 2009, Western Illinois University (WIU) conducted a full scale active shooter drill. Nine months later in February 2010, there was an active shooter at Farm King in Macomb less than two and a half miles from the original exercise at WIU. The 19 year old entered Farm King with an AR-15 weapon demanding ammunition. He fired multiple rounds, including some at police officers, before committing suicide in the store. At the time of the incident there were 50 – 100 people in the store who initially escaped, and six who stayed hidden during the five-hour incident. There were no injuries or deaths aside from the shooter and the response success has been directly linked to the preparedness of the community due to the full-scale active shooter training held at WIU. Captain Robert Elliott, Illinois State Police (ISP) District 14, was involved in both the drill and the incident and answered some of the following questions which could help your schools and community be better prepared.

How did you go about inviting people to attend the full-scale drill?

ISP was an invitee to the full-scale drill, and I served on the Exercise Planning Team. The Planning Team determined exercise objectives and, as a result, identified who needed to participate in order to accomplish the objectives. The exercise was supported by Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA); and the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) protocol was followed, which contributed to a very structured exercise design.

Did you have any conversations about why participating in this exercise would be important – and what were the most influential reasons that motivated people to attend?

Yes- most of the representatives on the Exercise Planning Team understood the value. School and university shooting incidents elsewhere were reminders that such incidents can occur anywhere, and realistic training and exercises involving multiple agencies is an effective way to prepare for an appropriate response that can contribute to lives saved.

How did the full-scale drill help prepare for the actual active shooter in the community/school/campus?

Agencies and individuals working together during the drill were among the same that responded to the Farm King incident. The drill helped to enhance working relationships, provided a common experience previous to the critical incident, and permitted lessons to be learned in the training environment as opposed to the real event.

Who was invited to the full-scale drill?

Full-scale exercise response agencies included: the McDonough County Sheriff's Office, McDonough County State's Attorney, McDonough County Coroner, McDonough District Hospital and Emergency Management Services (EMS), McDonough County Emergency Service & Disaster Agency (ESDA), Macomb Police Department, Macomb Fire Department, Western Illinois University Office of Public Safety, ISP District 14, ISP Zone 4, ISP Air Operations, Illinois Department of Transportation, and IEMA.

*Protecting our
future through
information
sharing*

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Example of an Illinois Campus Full-Scale Active Shooter Drill Involving Multiple Agencies that Helped Better Prepare their Community (continued)

Who responded to the active shooter incident at Farm King?

Local response included the McDonough County Sheriff's Office, McDonough County State's Attorney, McDonough County Coroner, McDonough County District Hospital and EMS, McDonough and Adams Emergency Service & Disaster Agency (ESDA), Colchester Police Department (PD), Bushnell PD, Macomb PD, and Macomb Fire Department.

State response included Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm System (Command Vehicle from Quincy), Illinois Department of Corrections (Local Parole Officer), Illinois Department of Natural Resources (Conservation Police Officers), Illinois Secretary of State Police, and Western Illinois University Office of Public Safety.

Illinois State Police response included 21 officers from District 14, seven officers from District 8, six officers from District 20, 22 agents from Zone 4, Air Ops, Statewide Terrorism & Intelligence Center (STIC), Tactical Response Team (TRT), and Crime Scene Investigation (CSI).

The Red Cross and Salvation Army were non-government organizations that responded.

Hy-Vee and Farm King Management were private organizations that responded.

In retrospect, was there anyone else who should have been invited and how important was the drill in preparation for the actual shooting?

We could have invited representatives from the surrounding counties. They assisted in the shooter response. The drill was essential for the actual shooting. It was a rehearsal in many aspects.

What were some of the lessons learned?

Media - The media needs to be anticipated well before they arrive. It is vital media representatives are directed to a designated area, identified, provided incident specific credentials, and controlled in terms of their access. They are capable of long range photos and need to be instructed early of "no live feed" until it is determined such images will not increase risks to students, faculty and responders. The media could also be useful by informing the public about road and building closures as early as possible. A dedicated media line with recorded updates should have also been used, much the same way media calls a weather line to determine road conditions.

Site designation - A situation map of the affected area is necessary. The perimeters, traffic control points, and staffing of these points should be established as soon as possible. During this incident, the Mobile Command Vehicle may have been too close to the scene considering the weapon involved and the EMS vehicles could have been further away from the inner perimeter. Also, there should have been road closures earlier to help with control of the perimeters and scene.

Personnel - There should have been a safety officer assigned early with the sole responsibility to identify perimeter issues, access control, equipment, weather, and any other aspects of risk that required mitigation or other intervention. There should also have been a designated rest area for responders either rotating out of an assignment or those awaiting an assignment.

A Staging Area Manager should have been designated and a Check-in Recorder at the command post to accurately track personnel there. Agency representatives of all participating organizations should have been at the command post to assist in coordinating each agency resources.

Communication - Some communication issues needed improvement. There should be dedicated frequencies for different units in order to limit distractions, yet the supervisors should have a dedicated frequency for the Mobile Command Vehicle in order to improve collaboration and communication. Communication with the inner perimeter officers should have been improved. They were not always aware of tactical and other positions or actions at the scene. All of this should be tested prior to an emergency.

There were redundant means to ensure timely entries of events at the scene. This issue should have been discussed earlier, and one method used. Also, as the event unfolds, the Incident Command System structure should be formalized through clarification, documentation and posting. The command post should have conducted regular update briefings in order to ensure common understanding.

Response - There were questions on whether the initial police response was adequate. Officer reallocation should be based on if an officer is trained in rapid response and equipped with a rifle. The duration officers are on an assignment should be monitored closer. Frequent rotation should occur to minimize fatigue and would ensure optimal readiness to respond to sudden threats. Staffing for subsequent shifts should be anticipated for and planned even if it is not ultimately implemented.

Other - A designated building to interview witnesses is very helpful however it is essential all witnesses be identified first and then interviewed.

An additional suggestion relates to off duty law enforcement. It is recommended those off duty carry a service weapon. There was a trooper

Monthly Webinars!

First
Wednesday
of Every
Month at 10
am.

Next
Webinar -
August 6,
2014

Each webinar
has a round
table
discussion at
the end.
Questions are
always
welcome!

To participate,
you must be a
vetted member.
For more
information
please email
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.state.il.us

Example of an Illinois Campus Full-Scale Active Shooter Drill Involving Multiple Agencies that Helped Better Prepare their Community (continued)

at the Farm King previous to the incident and during the incident several responding off duty officers were not carrying a weapon at the time.

Multi-agency training exercises should continue to be conducted through scenario exercises and full-scale drills. Additional rapid response refresher training and advanced Incident Command System training is needed. The rapid response protocol needs to be incorporated in the county Emergency Operations Plan.

What were the incident objectives for the drill and for the active shooter incident that were met?

1. Respond to active shooter
2. Secure and coordinate multi-agency communications
3. Identify, keep clear and communicate kill zone
4. Establish and maintain inner and outer perimeters
5. Establish unified command post
6. Establish staging areas for responders and media
7. Request, coordinate and utilize additional resources
8. Manage incident from response to termination

Did the drill help prepare not only the campus but also the community?

Yes, the WIU Public Information Officer (PIO) facilitated media briefings to provide the public insight on how area agencies were working together to increase preparedness during the drill. Although the Farm King Incident was not a part of WIU campus, the active shooter full-scale drill at WIU was invaluable to the community and the unified response to the shooter at Farm King.

What else did you find valuable during the full-scale drill in preparation for active shooters in schools and campuses or even the local community for Illinois?

Key point...all agencies have plans, some are very thorough and well written. Most include what assisting agencies will do during an incident. Whether the "plan" will work as written is only speculation until it is tested. These full-scale drills are time consuming and can be costly however the real costs may be by not testing them. Lessons learned should be identified when real players are the "victims" not the public at the time of a real incident.

Putting together a full-scale drill is a major undertaking. Do you have any suggestions on steps to take to build up to this type of approach?

Start with a Tabletop Exercise, follow up with a Functional Exercise and work toward a full-scale exercise. Use the FEMA HSEEP process, incorporate your IEMA Regional Coordinator, and review After Action Reports of other full-scale exercises and actual incidents.

If there are agencies in an area who do not get along with one another or agencies that schools or campuses have a hard time getting to participate, do you have any suggestions about how to improve those relationships and motivational words of wisdom that could help agencies feel important and find value in participating in the drills?

If communication barriers or personality conflicts currently exist, it is imperative they are overcome before a stressful incident such as a school shooting occurs. The potential for serious injuries or deaths will only increase during a response when multiple agencies are not capable or rehearsed in coordinated efforts. Relationships may be improved by taking the high road, acknowledge the value of the other agency and how their involvement is critical to an effective response. Stress the importance of working together in an exercise so you can learn from them. A quality exercise will include third party unbiased evaluators. If some agency representatives lack either technical or people skills, it should be apparent and tactfully reflected in the feedback provided. Often reminding other agency representatives a media briefing will be held during the training may entice them to participate if they see that as beneficial to themselves. Plans to invite elected officials to observe the training may also entice them as they may not want to be the only one not at the table. Another option is to provide them the executive summary from any previous school shootings. Typical shortcomings noted include poor communication, limited interagency cooperation, lack of accurate and timely information and response plans that are inadequate or not shared or practice. Participation in an exercise can address all the shortcomings.

Multi-Agency Training Benefit Those Inside a Classroom during an Active Shooter Incident

In May 2014, Dallas City Elementary School went on lock down for an active shooter. Information was given to law enforcement that shots were fired, and they responded accordingly, even though the report ended up being a hoax. Below is a letter from a teacher on the inside of the school and what she and her class did to lock down and prepare if the shooter tried to enter her classroom. The incident in Dallas City is another example of how training from law enforcement can benefit multiple agencies including school faculty. For the past few years, they have practiced full scale active shooter drills and the staff has trained on preparing a tactical classroom as a last resort if the shooter tries to enter. The School Safety Information Sharing program recognizes this type of training may not be the best solution for everyone. However, we encourage those making safety decisions to talk to their local law enforcement and staff to be better prepared during an emergency.

Dear Illinois State Police, Hancock County Police Department and Dallas City Police Department,

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the job you did at Dallas City Elementary School on May 1, 2014. On behalf of the teachers, staff, and Administration at Dallas City School, I cannot thank you enough for the actions you took to keep our school safe. It is unbelievable how fast you arrived at our school. We just wanted to say thank you so much for your quick response time and all your help. I write this heartfelt letter to let you know how much your exemplary professionalism and compassion were appreciated. I think any educator would tell you that having a shooter in your building is their worst nightmare.

Every single officer that came to our school made an extremely scary situation much easier to handle and offered needed support at an uneasy time. I am so grateful for all the safety trainings we have had at our school and with what you taught us. It came in handy yesterday during a time of need. Without that there is no way we would have been able to keep our students as calm and as safe as possible.

During the incident, I had 8th grade boys for art in my room. When my class heard Mrs. Billbrey say on the loudspeaker to go into a hard lockdown, we quickly responded by locking the door, shutting the lights off, getting quiet, and hiding students. Many students asked me if it was a drill and I said, "I don't know, but I am going to make you as safe as possible." I began hiding my students. My students were incredible during this time. My class was very quiet, and I saw some real leaders this day. After I had my students hidden, I began barricading the door with the help of two students that could easily hide back into the closet if need be.

At this point, we still thought it was a drill. We had every piece of movable furniture in the room piled in front of the door (other than the pieces that were protecting/hiding students). I was moving a student to a better hiding spot at the point when I saw the shadow of feet in front of my door. My stomach dropped. I whispered to my students, please be as quiet and still as possible as there were feet in front of the door. We froze and listened.

I passed out scissors staplers and various weapons in the art room. We listened very carefully and heard them say they were going to check outside. I peeked out the window and saw police officers exiting the building with huge guns on their back. At this point, I knew it was real.

I can't even express to you how I felt at this moment. I told my students to stay calm. I told them what I saw and that it was the real thing. I began to converse with my two students in the closet about exiting through the window if we needed to. Soon after an all-clear was made on the speaker. Thank GOD!!! I did not feel safe enough to open the door. At this point, I began praising my students on what a great job they did and reflecting on what we could have done differently.

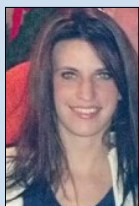
The students had a lot of input and so many ideas including how better to barricade the door. One student said, 'Miss Scheetz, just think about what you would have done if you had a classroom of little kids.' I said, 'Great point.' We began to talk about where I could have hidden all of them and other actions I could have taken in that scenario. All I can say is I AM SO GLAD THERE WAS NOT AN INTRUDER and thank you for being here.

I feel very safe having you here to protect us and seeing what a wonderful job you did. I am not an emotional person, but I have definitely shed tears thinking about this, knowing what amazing students I teach, and what great people risk their lives to serve and protect us each and every day! I cannot imagine what you must have felt.

Although you may not hear it as often as you should, you are tremendously appreciated. I wish I had a better way to say Thank You..... A way that would truly express how much your kindness has meant to my school and me. It takes a remarkable kind of person to care enough, to risk everything for others, and to do whatever it takes to help somebody out.

Again, from the bottom of my heart, for everything you have done, for everything you have given to the public, our community, and our students Thank You so much!!! Thank you and your officers, and I pray for all of your safety! You are amazing and true heroes in my eyes! God Bless!

From a very thankful teacher - Miss Carrie Scheetz, Dallas City Art Teacher (With Permission)



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