



# HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CAMPUS IN THE EVENT OF AN ACTIVE SHOOTER

# How to Prepare Your Campus in the Event of an Active Shooter

*The ongoing threat of active shooters on college campuses brings safety and security to the forefront of everyone's minds. **BY JAMIE UNDERWOOD***

**RECENT EVENTS**, including those at Florida State University and Purdue University, while unfortunate, serve the larger purpose of fueling discussions about how individuals and organizations can proactively prepare for these types of scenarios.

A recent study released by the FBI on active shooter incidents in the U.S. shows that these fears and precautions are well founded. According to the report, 160 active shooter incidents occurred between 2000 and 2013, resulting in 1,043 casualties (including those killing and wounded).

In response to the potential threat of an active shooter on campus, many colleges continue to enhance their campus emergency preparedness protocols to include clear instructions for students, faculty, and staff to follow in the event of an active shooter.

This guide features emergency management experts from notable universities who offer best practices in campus emergency preparedness.



Winthrop University was inspired from the 2007 Virginia Tech Massacre to amp up its on-campus security measures.



"We educate our law enforcement officers on what they need to do in order to respond, but we are also educating those people that are in those rooms waiting for us to get there," Zebedis says.

## Educating the Campus Community

Following the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre, Winthrop University immediately began looking for a solution to notify its entire campus in times of emergency.

The university installed a unified facility notification system to ensure comprehensive coverage in the event of an emergency.

However, the school didn't stop there.

"Along with the notification system that we have, it's important to have that educational concept or educational piece," says Frank Zebedis, Chief of Police at Winthrop University.

A proponent of educating the campus community on how to respond during an active shooter incident, Zebedis has developed and taught critical incident and response courses, including four classes that are now being funded through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and FEMA.

In these courses, Zebedis outlines both the university and police's priorities during an incident.

Campus police "focus a lot on training; what they're going to have to do in the event of an active shooter on campus," says Zebedis.

This includes protecting the lives of students, faculty, and staff by immediately implementing the active shooter protocol for which police have been trained.

Zebedis says that Winthrop conducts advanced law enforcement response training.

"That is also taught countywide, so everybody in the county is on the same page when it comes to responding," he says. "It's very beneficial because when you have an active shooter on your campus, you're not just going to have your public safety or your campus law enforcement. You're going to have law enforcement officers from all over the county, possibly the state, showing up."

Having a well-trained police force, both locally and countywide, is the first step, but Zebedis also says the importance of educating individuals to proactively ensure their own safety if they find themselves in a threatening situation.

Many colleges and universities, including Winthrop University, have started implementing a simple 3 to 4 step process on how individuals should respond if they find themselves in an active shooter situation.

"We educate first to get out, and if you can get out safely, do it," says Zebedis. "There's been a lot of discussion across the country on whether or not we should encourage people to leave a safe environment, but at the time is that environment safe? It might not be, or it may be for a split second, and things can change very quickly. So we encourage our students, faculty, staff, and visitors to get out if they can do so safely."

Individuals may find themselves in a situation where they cannot





A Washington University in St. Louis engineering student comments on an active tornado alert that is disseminated to all university desktop computers using the Alertus Desktop Notification solution.



Wall-mounted Alert Beacons are installed in strategic locations throughout the Washington University in St. Louis campus.

safely exit the building or immediate area. If this is the case, Zebedis encourages students or faculty to hide or shelter in place.

This includes closing blinds, turning off all lights, silencing cell phones, lying down away from doors or windows, and locking and/or barricading doors with desks or tables.

“We encourage them not to leave once they decide to hide in a room until law enforcement shows up to help get them out,” says Zebedis.

Finally, taking out an active shooter should be considered only as a last resort when no other option is available.

“We don’t instruct this; we don’t advocate this unless it’s your last chance or your last means of survival,” says Zebedis.

## Active vs. Passive Emergency Alerting

Washington University in St. Louis follows a similar protocol on what to do if confronted by an active shooter, drawing from the FBI’s “run, hide, fight” methodology.

In addition to having a comprehensive process or plan in place for these types of events, proactively identifying gaps in emergency notification is important.

“We use Alertus as our centralized dashboard to activate multiple alerting technologies in the event of an emergency,” says Mark Bagby, Director of Emergency Management at the Washington University in St. Louis, who teaches emergency management and is an instructor for FEMA. “For an active shooter or tornado warning, our dispatchers have access to send out preset messages related to that event.”

Washington University in St. Louis includes six campuses and covers 4,635 acres, which means accurate, targeted alerting is very important.

“For active shooters, we have messages that are specific to the campus that the problem is on,” says Bagby. “It’s important to make sure that we get the right message to the right location if it only involves one campus.”

The university’s sprawling campus also dictates its unique passive vs. active alerting method.

“We actively alert through multiple channels to the population or the affected campus and then passively alert the rest of the university campus,” says Bagby.

In preparation for and in response to recent, violent protests in nearby Ferguson, the university utilized this particular campus-specific functionality to notify students, faculty, and staff that the West Campus would be closed given the unpredictability of events that might unfold in the Clayton area.

Finally, Bagby highlights the importance of crafting a clear, concise



The Alert Beacon, a wall-mounted audible visual notification appliance, is one of several devices that Washington University in St. Louis uses to notify faculty, staff, and students in the event of an emergency.

emergency message. Following a real-life, non-emergency exercise on February 20, 2013, Bagby explains that students, faculty, and staff found that the emergency message that was sent out was somewhat confusing.

This gave the university an opportunity to evaluate the message and consider important changes to sentence structure and wording. Updates to language included a clear explanation of what the threat was, whether it was designated to a specific area on campus, and specific instructions on what steps to take to ensure safety.

## Campus Lockdown Following Possible Gunman Threat

Many emergency events, active shooter incidents in particular, require immediate action and the ability to dispatch an emergency alert to everyone on campus.

“In an active shooter situation, you’re talking about the difference between people getting notified in a matter of 20 seconds or less versus four minutes when, according to statistics, most active shooter incidents are over in 12 minutes,” says Robert Williams, emergency manager at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM).

The recent FBI study also emphasizes this point, estimating that 60% of active shooter scenarios between 2000 and 2013 ended before police arrived.

CSUSM recently handled a possible gunman threat that led to a campus-wide lockdown.

“Our dispatch center received a call that there was a man on campus with a weapon,” says Williams. “Officers were dispatched to campus and started searching the last location of where the person was reported.”

The emergency alert was initiated when an authorized dispatcher at CSUCM pressed the Alertus panic button, which in turn simultaneously activated a number of other devices including wall-mounted Alert Beacons installed throughout the campus, spoken alerts via public address speakers, computer desktop and phone alerting, digital signage display, text, cell phone, and email messaging, and automatic door lock activation.

A series of alerts were then sent out to the campus community during the search for the potential gunman, each message providing updated information on the situation at hand and instructions for students, faculty, and staff to shelter in place:

**First alert:** Lockdown and shelter in place, await further instructions

**Second alert:** Remain locked down, law enforcement on campus, subject description

**Third alert:** Remain locked down, law enforcement entering last known area where subject was seen

**Fourth alert:** All clear, subject located and no weapons found



Police officers across San Diego County respond to the possible gunman threat at California State University San Marcos.

These messages were broadcast and displayed using multiple emergency notification modalities.

“People were saying that while they were locked down, it was nice to continue receiving timely updates,” says Williams. “Depending on where they were in lockdown, some said they had access to digital signage, some desktop alerts, some could hear the phone notifications, and most were getting the information via their cell phones (call, text, and email).”

Fortunately in the case of CSUSM, the potential gunman was discovered to be an employee of the university who was carrying a long umbrella that someone had mistaken for a rifle.

In discussing CSUSM’s emergency notification process, Williams stresses the importance of having a comprehensive emergency notification system.

In the case of CSUSM, a number of emergency alerting devices are installed throughout the campus that allow for comprehensive and immediate emergency alert notification across facilities.

Comprehensive notification coverage generally requires a variety of alerting methods to overcome obstacles that may prevent individuals from receiving an emergency alert. Where are people located when the emergency occurs? Do they have access to a computer or mobile device (and is it powered on)? Are they in an area where they can see or hear the alert?

“It was extremely beneficial to have so many options for getting information out to our campus community,” says Williams.

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