

ACTIVE SHOOTER PREPAREDNESS

Current State of Readiness;
Detailed Guide on How to Be Prepared

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FOREWORD

Public and private organizations have long sought to prepare themselves for natural disasters, severe weather and other large-scale incidents that can pose dangers to employees, visitors, students, patients and customers. But in recent years, the increased frequency of deadly active shooter incidents has elevated these events to top-of-mind for anyone responsible for the well-being of those people and the continuity of their business.

Advance planning and training are the keys to maximizing the safety of your people, but they also play a key role in the continuity of your business. Active shooter events have repercussions that extend well beyond their actual duration, so knowing what to do before, during and after will help create an atmosphere of security and stability. This may seem like common sense, but as Everbridge learned through its comprehensive 2016 survey, [Active Shooter Preparedness](#), what makes sense isn't always what is being done.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation defines an "active shooter" as "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area." Alongside [data from the FBI](#) about active shooter incidents since the year 2000, this report presents the results from the survey to provide the perspective of nearly 900 leaders from business, academia and government on where their organizations stand in terms of awareness, preparedness and practice. These will provide insights – many of them real eye-openers – about the state of readiness for active shooter events across a broad swath of industries and organizations.

We also include recommendations from Regina Phelps, founder of [Emergency Management and Safety Solutions](#). Ms. Phelps is an internationally recognized expert in the field of emergency management and contingency planning. She has provided consultation and speaking services to clients on four continents since 1982 and is the author of *From Response to Recovery: Conducting Successful Exercises*. This report also touches on insights from Everbridge on critical components of a comprehensive emergency communications system so organizations can minimize both the immediate impact and enduring consequences on your personnel and your business from active shooter incidents and other workplace violence.

The reality of the modern world is that we all must be prepared for the worst. We hope that this report gives you tools and information you can use to ensure that your company is as prepared as it can possibly be.

– The Everbridge Team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research for our Active Shooter Preparedness report was conducted in July 2016, asking more than 850 respondents – who were responsible for the security and emergency preparedness at a variety of businesses and organizations – about their safety plans and ability to manage an active shooter situation, and the challenges they faced.

Key Findings

78%

of respondents were responsible for multiple locations.

69%

of respondents view an active shooter incident as a potential top threat to their company or organization.

71%

of respondents replied that communicating to affected individuals was their biggest challenge during an active shooter situation.

40%

of respondents said they didn't have a communications plan in place for active shooter events.

79%

of respondents replied that their companies or organizations were, at best, only somewhat prepared for an active shooter incident.

61%

of respondents shared that they do not run any active shooter preparedness drills.

Photo by Jérémie Hartmann / [CC BY](#)

Analysis

Respondents were overwhelmingly concerned about violence and violent acts taking place at their company or organization, but a majority also said they were not properly prepared for an active shooter situation. One of the top concerns was their ability to communicate with those affected in such an incident.

Shortcomings included not having a communication plan in place and not conducting safety drills at their organizations – two of the more common ways to prepare for the potential of a violent act. Communication plans and readiness go hand in hand, as it is imperative that companies have a way to share critical real-time information with all parties in these life or death situations.

Here are the three top takeaways from the research:

01

Three of the top five threats companies are preparing for were active shooter situations (**69 percent**), workplace violence (**62 percent**) and terrorism (**38 percent**). An overwhelming majority (**79 percent**) of respondents are more concerned about employee or student safety than they were 2 years ago.


02

The biggest anticipated challenge was communicating to impacted individuals during an active shooter situation (**71 percent**), followed by locating people in an impacted facility (**55 percent**). Nearly all (**94 percent**) agreed on the importance of having a method for employees and students to easily relay information to safety officials during an incident.

03

While respondents understood the threat of violent acts, many are still simply unprepared. Many (**nearly 40 percent**) don't have a communications plan in place for active shooter events, and even more (**44 percent**) don't have a plan for scaled alerts to those most likely to be affected.

More than half (**61 percent**) said they do not hold active shooter response drills. Asked how prepared they felt for such an event, only one in five (**21 percent**) expressed confidence in their preparations; nearly eight of ten (**79 percent**) said their organizations were, at best, only somewhat prepared.



THE STATE OF ACTIVE SHOOTER PREPAREDNESS

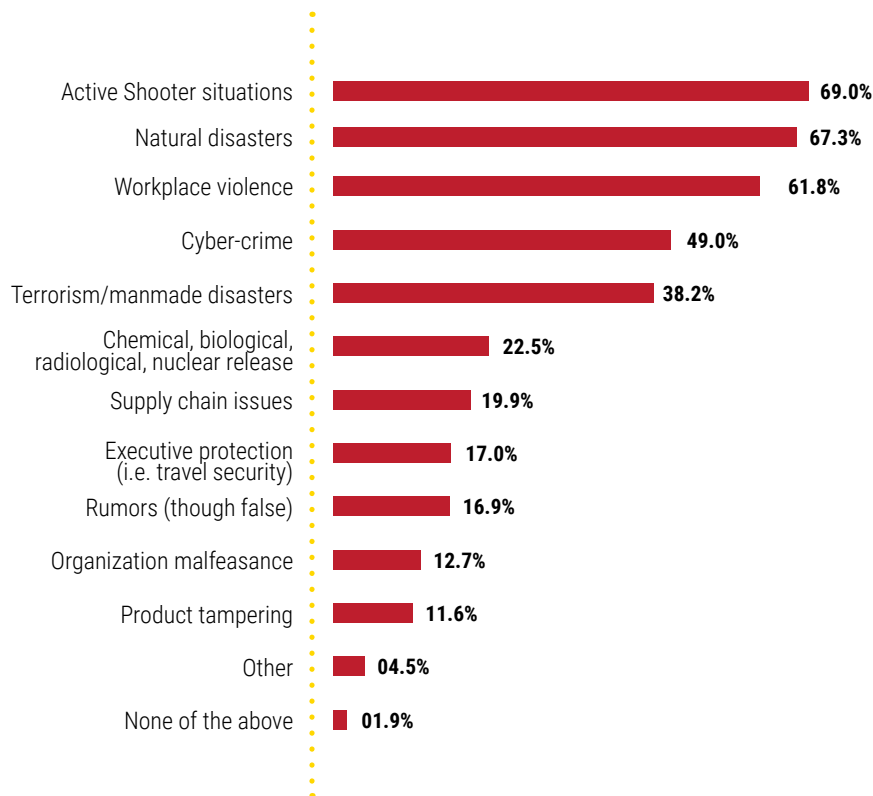
How To Be Prepared

Increased Cause for Concern

Recent **Federal Bureau of Investigation data** confirm what many intuitively believe: Active shooter events are happening with greater frequency.

The FBI defines an active shooter as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.” According to the bureau’s statistics, there were 200 active shooter situations in the United States between 2000 and 2015, resulting in 578 people killed and 696 wounded.

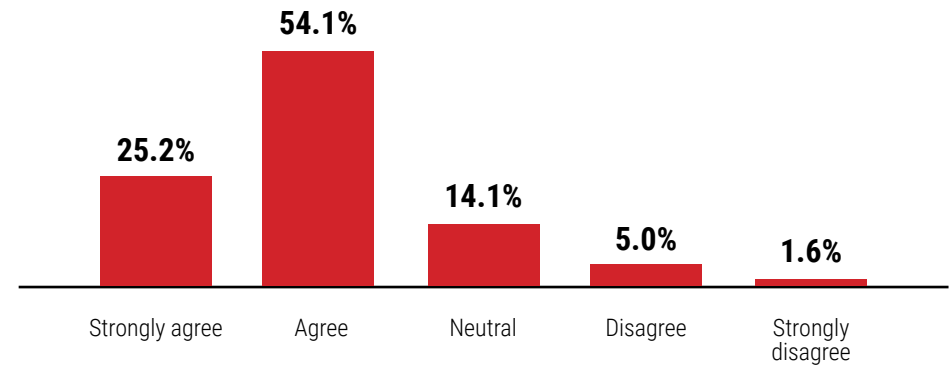
*What are the top threats that your organization is preparing for?
(Select all that apply)*



During that 16-year span, the average number of incidents per year showed a steady increase – from 6.4 during the first seven years, then 16.4 over the next seven years, and 20 per year in 2014 and 2015.

When we asked what crisis scenarios caused them the most concern, respondents overwhelmingly cited violence and violent acts – such as active shooter situations – taking place at their company or organization. In addition, more than 75 percent of executives and leaders surveyed said they had greater concern for employee and student security than they did two years ago.

Executives and leaders in my organization are more concerned about employee/student safety than they were 2 years ago.

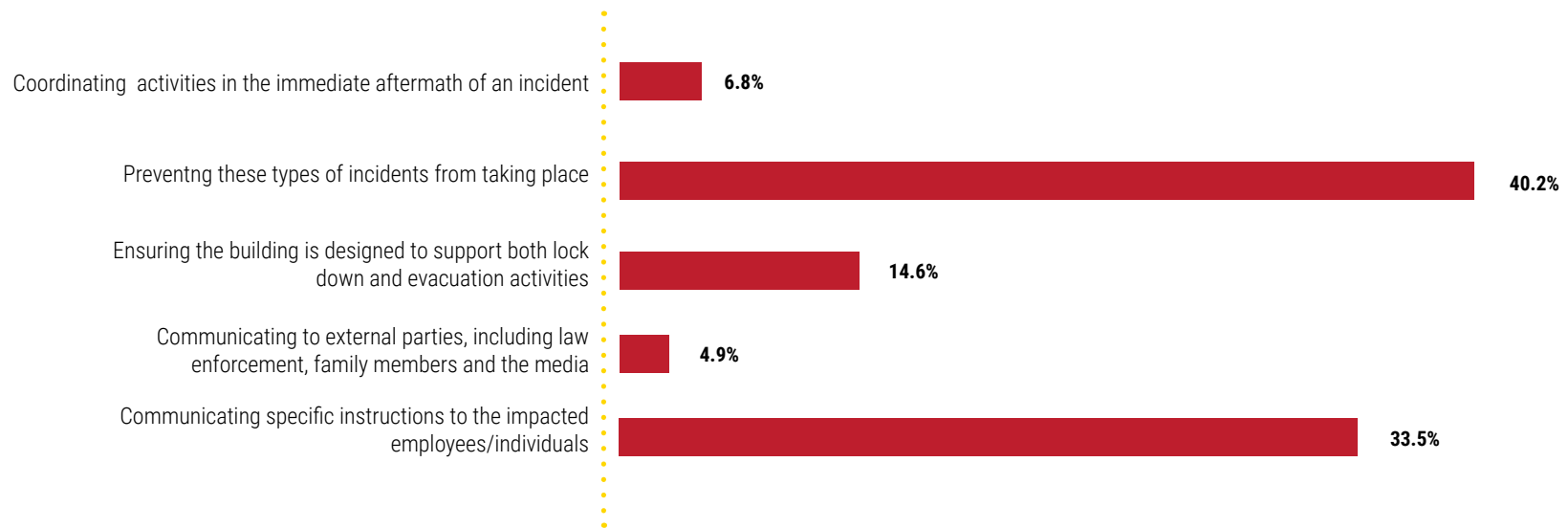


Because the FBI's definition of an active shooter specifies "a confined and populated area," this highlights the danger to workplaces and educational institutions. In fact, they make up a majority of active shooter locations. FBI records show 88 of the active shooter incidents (44 percent) occurred in places of commerce. Of those, 53 were in businesses that were open to pedestrian traffic, while 26 were in businesses closed to pedestrian traffic; in the latter locations, more than 20 of the shooters were current or former employees. Schools and institutions of higher learning were the site of 45 incidents. Another nine took place in shopping malls.

Of the remaining incidents, 22 took place in government or military facilities, 21 in open spaces, 10 in residential areas, eight in houses of worship and six in health care facilities. Since the conclusion of the FBI's study, there have been other high-profile active shooter incidents, including the Pulse nightclub attack in Orlando, Florida.

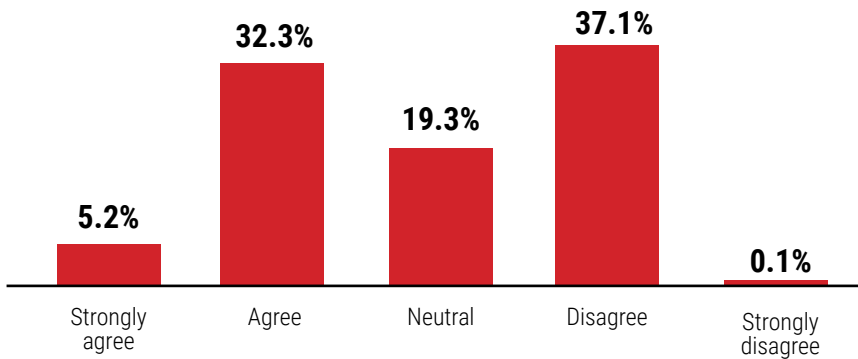
It is unsurprising that survey respondents said their biggest concern regarding Active Shooter events was preventing them from happening in the first place.

Overall, what would you say is your biggest concern related to an Active Shooter event?



As to whether such shootings were actually preventable, respondents were closely divided; some 43 percent disagreed with the statement that “mass shootings are not preventable in most venues,” while 37 percent agreed and nearly 20 percent were undecided.

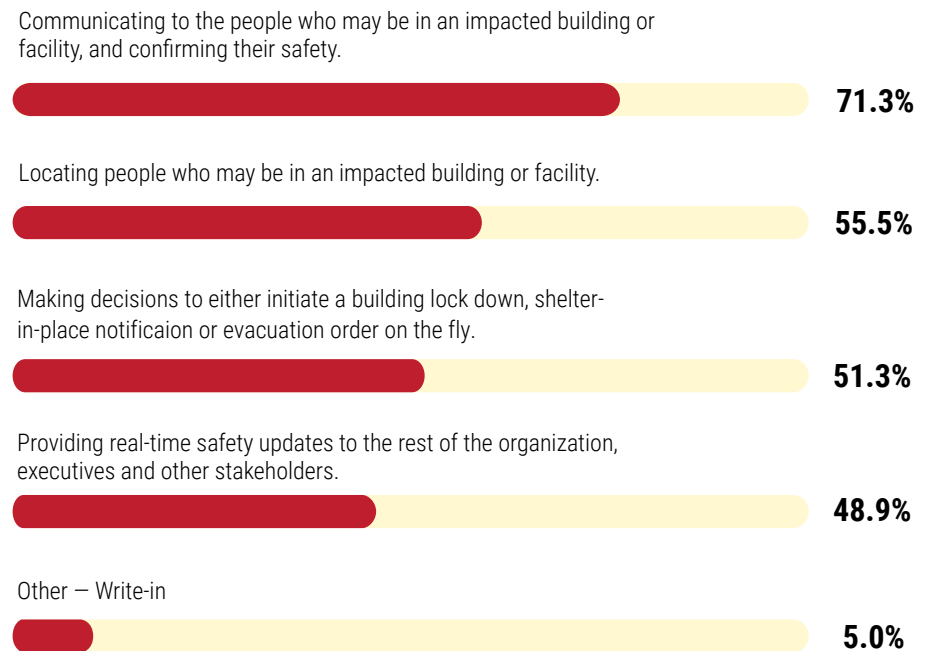
The tragic events at the Pulse nightclub in Florida have sparked many questions about the security of businesses and event spaces large and small. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Mass shootings are not preventable in most venues.”



Emergency Communications: The Top Concern During an Active Shooter Event

Preventable or not, in the event an incident did happen at a location they were responsible for, respondents said being able to effectively communicate with personnel in impacted areas was the top concern.

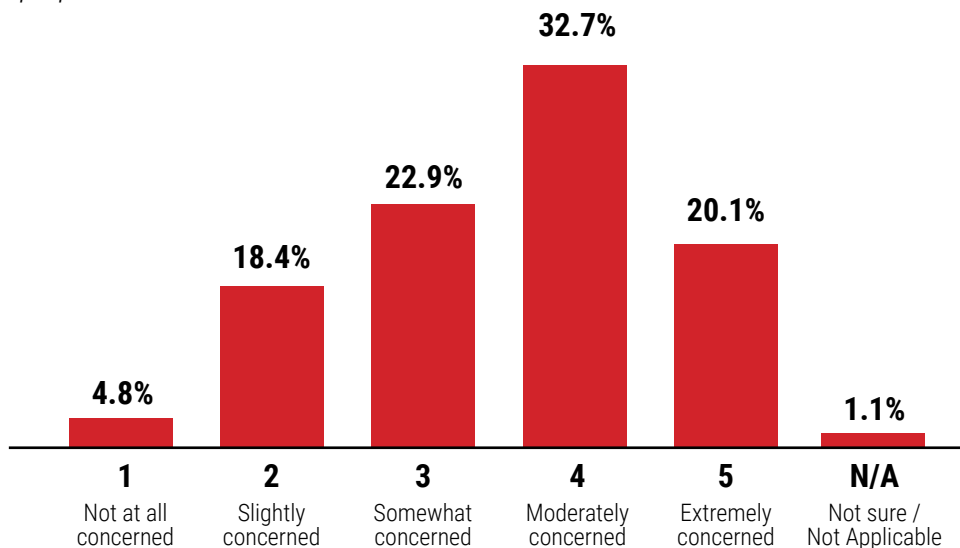
During a location-specific active shooter incident, what are your biggest challenges/concerns? (Select all that apply)



FBI records show the overwhelming majority of these incidents involved only a single shooter, and while some lasted for hours, many were surprisingly brief. While the agency's data don't include the duration of every incident, 44 ended in less than five minutes, and half of those lasted less than two minutes. On more than three dozen occasions, the incident had ended with the shooter's suicide before law enforcement even arrived.

This emphasizes the importance of having a crisis management plan in place. However, our survey found fewer than a quarter of respondents considered their organizations prepared; more than half expressed moderate to significant concern.

On a scale of 1-5, how big of a concern to your organization is active shooter preparedness?



Knowing Versus Planning: The Big Disconnect

The survey results show that many leaders who are responsible for emergency preparedness suffer from a crucial disconnect: They understand the importance of emergency response planning and may even have a plan in place, but do not commit to the education, training and processes necessary to be ready organization-wide for such an incident. Having a well-thought-out emergency response plan is not the same as being prepared.

This disconnect can be found even among a highly risk-averse group of businesses: tech companies. **Disaster Recovery Journal's** 2014 "State of IT Resiliency and Preparedness" a joint survey study with Forrester Research, surveyed 96 member businesses and found:

- **35 percent** said they update their disaster plan continuously; **49 percent** at least once a year; and only 16 percent less often or not at all.
- **39 percent** conducted a full test once per year; **31 percent** at least twice per year; and 40 percent less frequently or not at all.

It is telling that, in an industry where nearly nine out of 10 businesses revamp their disaster plan at least once a year, more than a third of those same businesses seldom or never hold training exercises for their personnel. What are the odds your industry does even that well?

Spotlight on Regina Phelps, founder, Emergency Management & Safety Solutions



Regina Phelps, RN, BSN, MPA, CEM is an internationally recognized expert in the field of emergency management and continuity planning. Since 1982, she has provided consultation and speaking services

to clients in four continents. She is founder of Emergency Management & Safety Solutions, a consulting company specializing in emergency management, continuity planning and safety. A partial list of clients includes McAfee, IMF, Microsoft, American Express, Northern Trust, VISA, Triton Container, Intuit, Stanford University, Caltech Institute, JPL, Merck, MasterCard and the World Bank.

Ms. Phelps has lectured extensively at international disaster and business continuity conferences including: DRJ, CP&M, WCDM and IAEM. She is the author of *From Response to Recovery: Conducting Successful Exercises*, a textbook on exercise design, and has developed college-level courses in exercise design.

As a complement to the State of Active Shooter Preparedness 2016 survey report, Ms. Phelps offers seven definitive actions organizations can take to prepare for workplace violence situations and minimize the impact of such events on personnel and business.

The Importance of Preparation

For perspective on the significance of our survey results, Everbridge sought out Regina Phelps, founder of Emergency Management & Safety Solutions. Not only does she have more than three decades of experience in emergency preparedness, she literally wrote the book on the subject. Ms. Phelps observed that with mobile devices making communications faster and easier than ever before, there is no excuse for an organization not to have a plan in place.

“Every company needs a clear policy regarding violence on the job,” Ms. Phelps said. “If you don’t have one, develop a workplace violence policy and plan. It should include details about what is in place and how threats and incidents are to be managed.”

“Companies must also educate personnel on the importance of timely communications in order to get the data necessary – home phone, mobile phone, personal email, etc. – to keep them informed,” she added. “While active shooter events may not be preventable, more effective and timely communication could make the difference between life and death.”

ACTIVE SHOOTER RECOMMENDATION #1

Establish a clear workplace violence policy and plan.

Every company needs a clear policy regarding violence on the job. If you don’t have one, develop a workplace violence policy and plan. It should include details about what is in place and how threats and incidents are to be managed.

* Pending permission by the publisher

Despite the clearly articulated concerns about readiness among our survey respondents, a majority also said that they were not properly prepared for an active shooter situation, identifying communication to those affected as one of the major issues.

Ms. Phelps advises organizations to include specific active-shooter procedures in their company emergency response plans and make them widely available. These need to be clear, short, and concise instructions to your personnel that detail how to respond during an active shooter situation, she said.

More than half of our survey respondents said their company either does not provide, or has developed but does not promote, active shooter response plans. Only one in four both have a plan in place and provide regular instruction for staff.

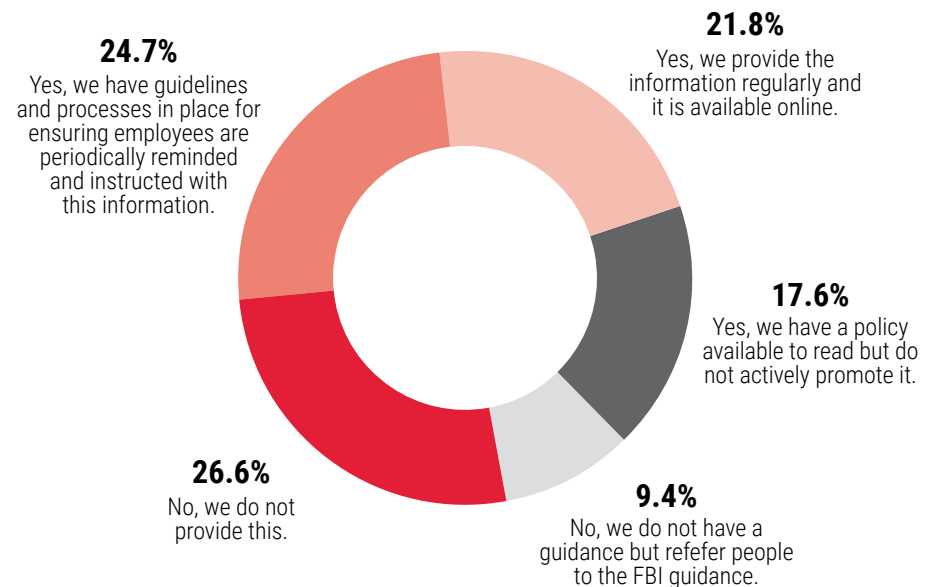
A majority of respondents indicated they did have a plan in place for communicating with emergency services agencies, which is another must-have according to Ms. Phelps. In fact, she said organizations need to build relationships with emergency responders now, not just know how to contact them when they are needed.

ACTIVE SHOOTER RECOMMENDATION #2

Maintain complete and accurate employee data to facilitate emergency communications.

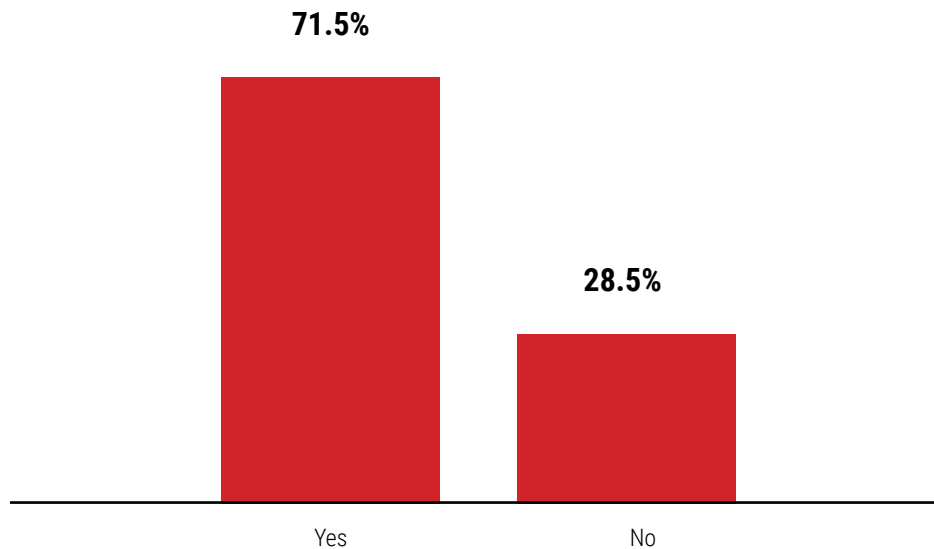
Educate your personnel on the importance of timely communications in order to get the data necessary – home phone, mobile phone, personal email, etc. – to keep them informed. While active shooter events may not be preventable, more effective and timely communication could make the difference between life and death.

Do you have specific instructions for staff that detail how they should respond during an active shooter incident?



Ms. Phelps advises organizations to open communications with local law enforcement in order to build relationships before an emergency arises. Building close ties with first responder agencies well in advance of an incident may help streamline emergency responses in the event their assistance is needed in the future.

Does your organization have an established plan to work with the emergency services during and after the incident?



ACTIVE SHOOTER RECOMMENDATION #3

Include active shooter-specific procedures in your workplace emergency response plans.

Include specific active shooter procedures in your company emergency response plans and make them widely available. These need to be clear, short and concise instructions to your personnel that detail how to respond during an active shooter situation.

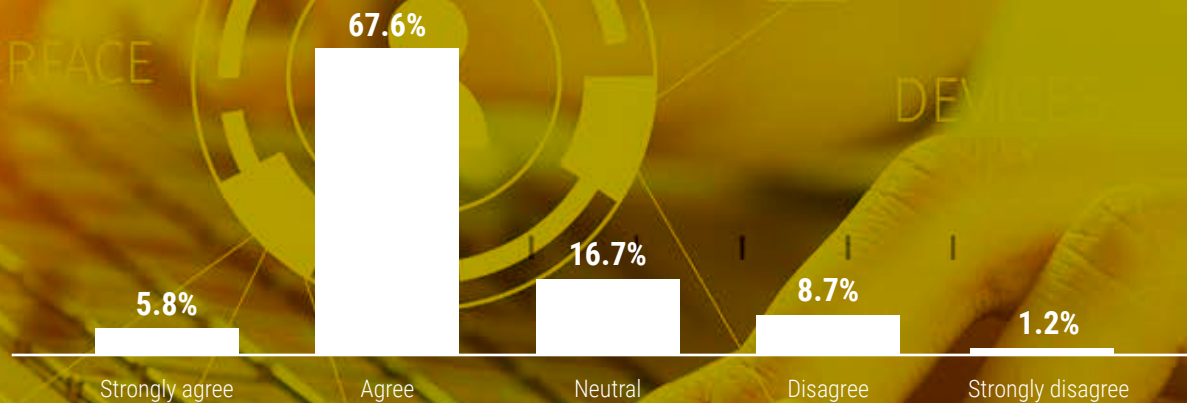
ACTIVE SHOOTER RECOMMENDATION #4

Develop a relationship with local law enforcement agencies now.

You need to be prepared to work closely with local law enforcement, but you don't want to find yourself exchanging information only after an incident has happened. You need to reach out to your local law enforcement agencies and develop a relationship with them well in advance of any problems.

Does Security Require Sacrificing Privacy?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Employees and students are willing to exchange some aspects of privacy for enhanced safety."



Our survey results indicate the respondents believe their employees and students value safety ahead of privacy in regard to being kept informed during emergency situations, and this is in line with recent trends in public opinion regarding that classic debate, according to the Pew Research Center.

A [2016 Pew report](#) addressed the issue and found that, in the wake of the 2015 attacks in San Bernadino, California, and Paris, France, "56 percent of Americans were more concerned that the government's anti-terror policies have not gone far enough to protect the country, compared with 28 percent who expressed concern that the policies have gone too far in restricting the average person's civil liberties." That contrasts with a [2014 Pew report](#) that found "74 percent [of respondents] say Americans shouldn't have to give up privacy and freedom in order to be safe from terrorism, while just 23 percent say Americans need to be willing to give up privacy and freedom in order to be safe from terrorism."

That context of public safety is key to understanding the shift. For example, when asked if they supported government data collection like the NSA surveillance program, 35 percent of respondents favored it if done "as part of an anti-terrorism effort," as opposed to just 26 percent if the terror connection was not mentioned. Pew also found people's attitudes depended on who they were being asked to share their data with, and for what reasons, based on the trustworthiness of the party asking for the data. But overall since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Pew has found that "majorities of adults favor a 'security first' approach" to issues of privacy vs. safety.

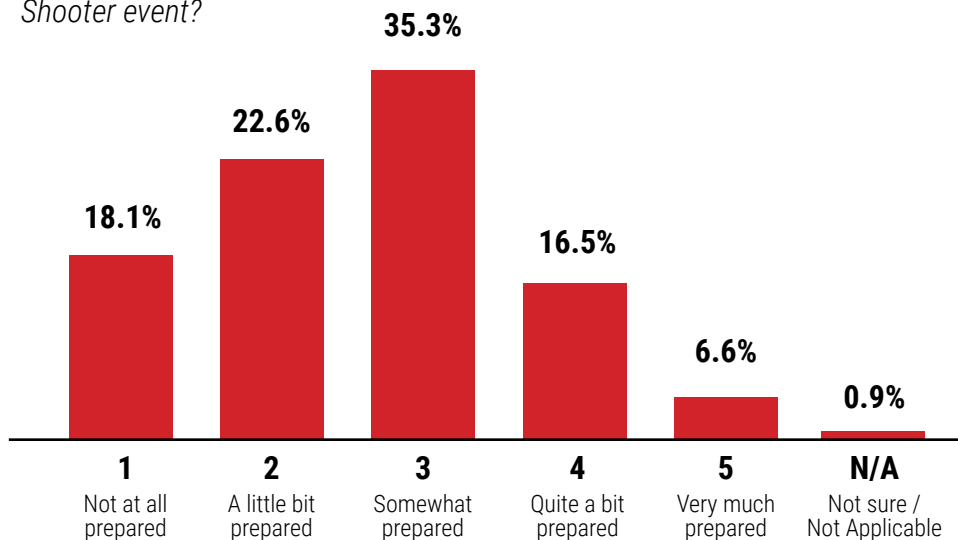
Training: Essential but Overlooked

Every year, Regina Phelps conducts more than 100 emergency exercises for clients around the world. A company can have the most thoroughly devised plan possible, she emphasizes, but without training it will never be as effective during an emergency as it could be.

“Training employees about your company’s overall workplace violence policy and plan is only part of the job; they also need to know the active-shooter response plan,” she said. “Employees should be practiced in how to report threats and how to respond during an active shooter situation.”

Once a plan is in place, organizations need to ensure their personnel are properly trained in its execution. However, the survey found that few organizations conducted safety drills or practiced their emergency response plans in any way. Fewer than a quarter of respondents indicated a high level of confidence in their preparedness, and nearly one in five respondents said they were not prepared at all.

On a scale of 1-5, how prepared do you feel your organization is for an Active Shooter event?



A host of active shooter response videos exists online. Many are documentation of exercises rather than instructional trainings, and none should be seen as a replacement for developing a customized emergency response plan and conducting training with employees on a regular basis. A few, however – like “**Run. Hide. Fight.**” from Ready Houston – emphasize the practical recommendations for those caught in an active shooter event, while also effectively portraying the gravity of such situations. As the title suggests, the video highlights three responses that people facing an active shooter situation should consider, in order:

- 1. RUN** Always try to escape or evacuate if you can. Help others leave with you if possible, but don’t be delayed by those who resist fleeing. Call 911 once you are safe.
- 2. HIDE** If you can’t evacuate safely, find a place to hide. Lock and barricade the door. Silence all cell phones and remain quiet.
- 3. FIGHT** If all else fails, improvise weapons and try to incapacitate the shooter.

ACTIVE SHOOTER RECOMMENDATION #5

Conduct regular training with your personnel.

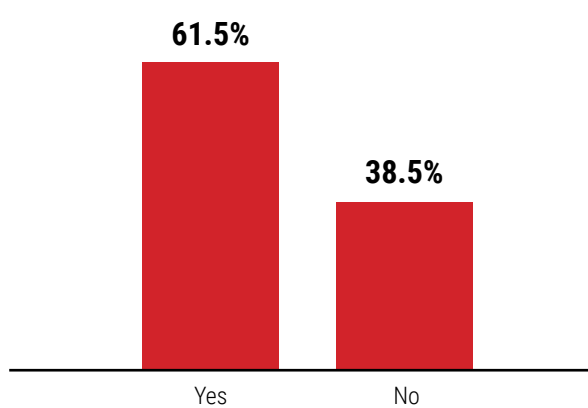
Training employees about your company’s overall workplace violence policy and plan is only part of the job; they also need to know the active-shooter response plan. Employees should be practiced in how to report threats and how to respond during an active shooter situation.

Communication is key in an active-shooter situation, and Ms. Phelps says having an emergency notification system (ENS) could literally make the difference between life and death for an organization's personnel. She recommends an ENS exercise be conducted *at least* once a year with your full staff. But while more than three-quarters of our survey respondents had a plan to communicate with all employees or students during an emergency, only slightly more than half were prepared to provide escalating alert notices to the individuals most likely to be affected by a given incident.

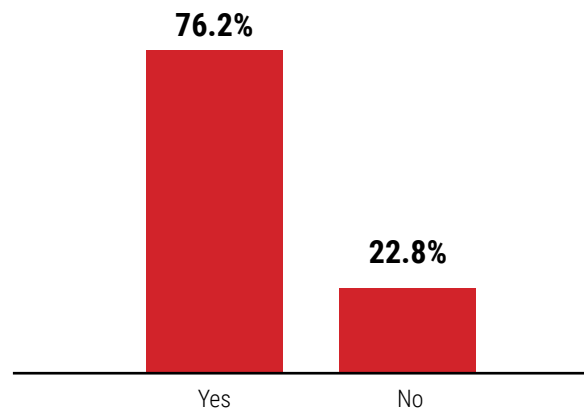
ACTIVE SHOOTER RECOMMENDATION #6

Deploy an Emergency Notification System (ENS) organization-wide.

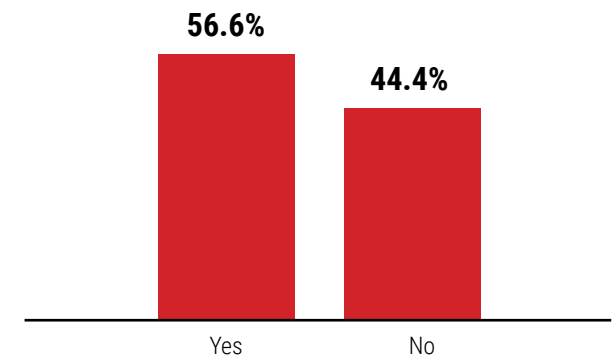
Communication is key in an active-shooter situation, and an emergency notification system (ENS) could literally make the difference between life and death. Conduct an ENS exercise with your staff no less frequently than once per year.



Does your organization have a communications plan in place for active shooter event(s)?



In the event of a situation that impacted a location(s), do you have plans to communicate to all employees?



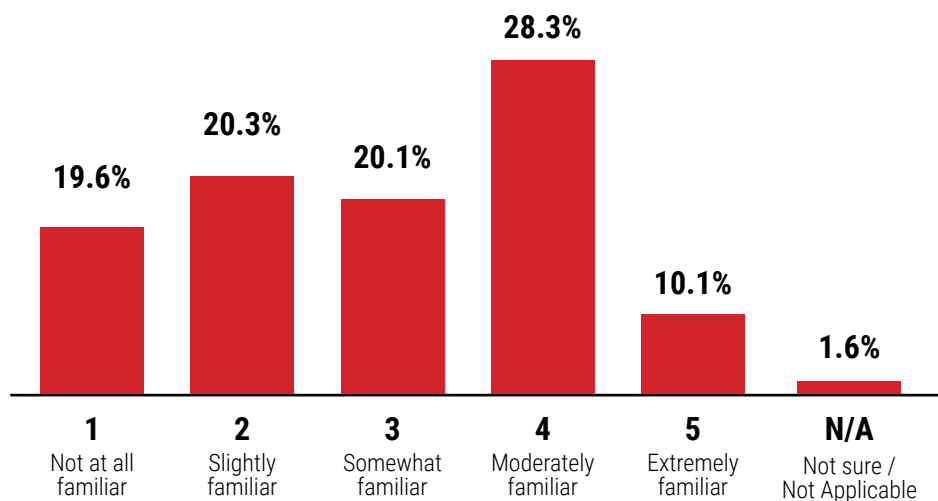
Does your organization have an established plan of how to communicate and escalate alerts in an active shooter situations to those individuals who are most likely to be impacted?

Finally, Ms. Phelps urged leaders to remember that an active shooter incident or other crisis will have repercussions that extend well beyond the event, itself.

“A shooting may only last a few minutes but the impact could last for years,” she said. “Knowing what to do after an incident is also critical. That’s why it’s important to conduct an exercise with your incident/crisis management team that focuses specifically on the aftermath of an incident and the impacts to the people and the business.”

This sort of full-spectrum preparedness stood out in our survey as an area where improvement was widely needed. Training was overwhelmingly cited by respondents as their biggest preparedness challenge. Only 10 percent of respondents expressed extreme confidence in their employees’ preparedness, while 40 percent felt their employees were slightly or not at all familiar with what actions to take. Despite a majority of organizations having a communications plan in place, only slightly more than a third both have an active shooter response plan and conduct a drill at least once a year.

On a scale of 1-5, how familiar are your employees with the correct actions to take in an active shooter situation?

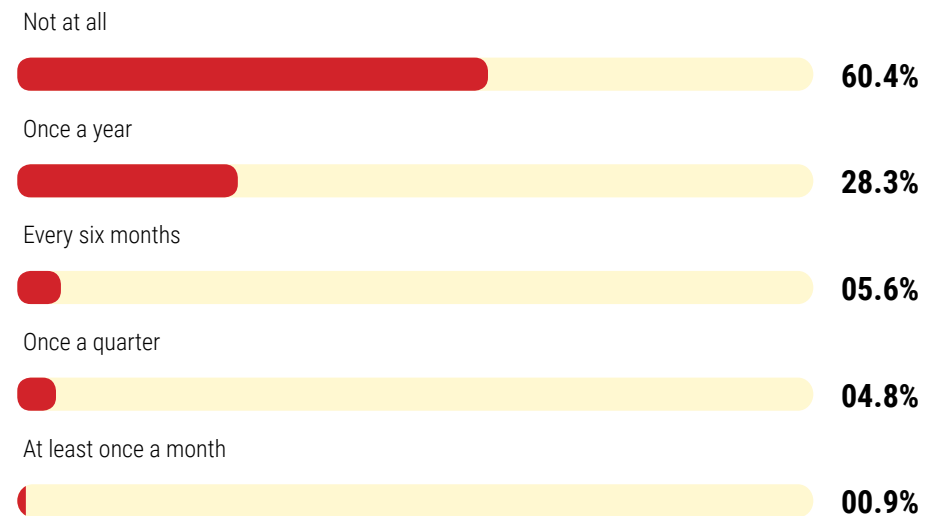


ACTIVE SHOOTER RECOMMENDATION #7

Conduct a workplace violence exercise.

Conduct a workplace violence exercise with your incident/crisis management team that focuses on the aftermath of an incident and the impacts to the people and the business. A shooting may only last a few minutes but the impact could last for years. Conduct an exercise that focuses on the aftermath of an incident.

How often do you run an active shooter drill?





ENABLING DYNAMIC EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Everybody, Everywhere

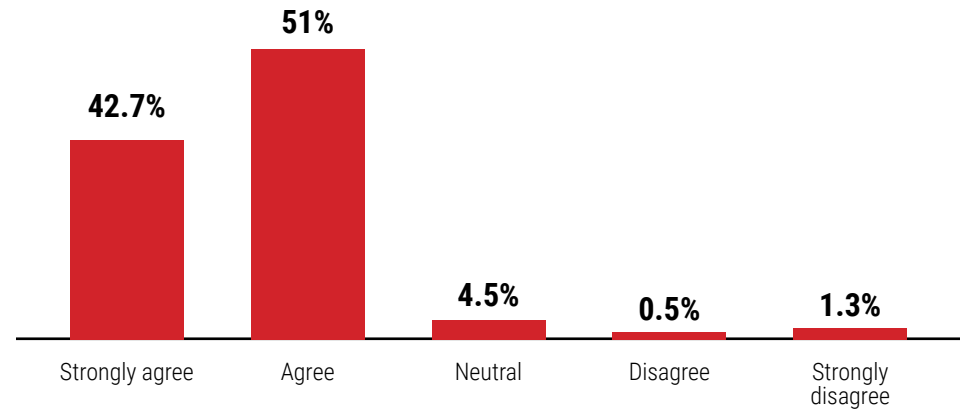
Although most active shooter events involve only a single attacker, the fact that many enterprises and organizations today are dealing with a mobile workforce, and often multiple physical campuses, means any emergency communications plan must be dynamic – adaptable to the ever-changing locations and means of contact for its personnel.

In order to provide as much protection as possible to all employees, regardless of where they are working on any given day, a dynamic communications plan must have at its core the following essential capabilities:

- » Immediate location of, and communication with, all employees and ongoing tracking of employee locations while they are traveling
- » Instantaneous understanding of who is in each building or enterprise property
- » Automated communications and collaboration for mustering purposes and evacuation plans
- » Targeted outreach via SMS text, voice, mobile app, digital signage or desktop alerts
- » Two-way communication, including SOS messaging initiated by employees to disclose current location
- » Integrated data on expected employee location to anticipate travel to high threat areas

Our survey results echoed many of these findings, including the desire by employees for two-way communication with safety officials during emergencies, so they can provide information on evolving situations.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "It is important for employees and students to have a way to easily report information back to safety officials during a crisis."





Buildings.com on the Necessity of Emergency Communications for Active Shooter Preparedness

Buildings.com, a community of building owners and managers, [wrote in 2014](#) about the importance of an active shooter emergency communications plan that covers all channels and reaches employees in different situations and locations.

“Texts and emails may seem discrete, for example, but they’re not effective if someone doesn’t have a phone or computer nearby,” the article stated. “You may also be tempted to use a complete message over voice and a shorter version across other platforms. But what happens if a person isn’t in a safe position to listen to the full voice message, isn’t within earshot of the speakers, or has a hearing disability? All recipients should have access to the same emergency information regardless of how they receive those alerts.”

Buildings.com also emphasizes the role of exercises for dynamic communications plans. Anyone involved in communications – from the crisis management team to receptionists – needs to have “ample and frequent opportunities” to test their skills.



EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEMS: ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES

At Everbridge, we understand that in an active shooter or other workplace violence scenario, or in any urgent situation threatening your business and your people, a comprehensive communications system can be critical to minimizing the impact of a catastrophic event. Here are the essential attributes of a comprehensive emergency communications system.

01 Multimodal

From the outset, an organization's emergency communications system must be multimodal. The modern business environment means personnel can be scattered across the nation or around the globe. You cannot rely on a single method – or even two or three – to alert personnel during an emergency. Your communications system needs to cover the spectrum: SMS/text, voice, mobile app, digital signage, desktop alerts, etc.

02 Templated

Emergency messaging should always use templates for alerts and instructions, during both training and actual incidents. This ensures people will receive the right instructions at the right time. More importantly, it eliminates the opportunity for error created by manual messaging.

03 Scalable and Reliable

Above all, any communications system you have in place must be both scalable and reliable. It must be scalable, so that whether you are dealing with 10 employees or 10,000, it has the capacity to handle all of them and grow as your organization grows. And it must be reliable, so that wherever your people are – across hallways or across the International Dateline – the correct messages will be delivered where and when they are needed.

04 Automated

The system must be automated, so it knows the location of every employee by leveraging data from your badging system, wired and wireless access points, travel management software, and more. Not everyone should get the same message during an emergency, because instructions will change depending on their location and what is happening there. Also, automated storage of communications data generated during a training or an incident will support reporting and compliance requirements. Records can be analyzed to evaluate response and provide documentation to authorities when necessary.

05 Responsive

Your communications system must also leverage your personnel's smartphones. Personal devices allow the system to be responsive, enabling two-way communications between your workforce and the emergency response team and helping them stay safe while traveling by keeping them apprised of alerts and incidents. This allows personnel to respond to directives or report when they're safe.

06 Location Aware

Systems must aggregate location data such as access controls, wired and wireless access points, office hoteling systems, corporate travel management systems, and medical and security assist providers to locate and communicate with employees who may be in harm's way.

To find out how Everbridge can help your organization's preparedness by enabling comprehensive emergency communications, please visit <http://www.everbridge.com/platform/>.



THE CONTRIBUTORS

Photo by Patty Mooney / [CC BY](#)

About Everbridge

Everbridge is a global enterprise software company that provides applications that automate the delivery of critical information to help keep people safe and businesses running. During mission-critical business events or man-made or natural disasters, over 3,000 global customers rely on the Everbridge platform to quickly and reliably construct and deliver contextual notifications to millions of people at one time. The company's platform sent over 1 billion messages in 2015, and offers the ability to reach more than 200 countries and territories with secure delivery to over 100 different communication devices.

A broad set of applications enable companies, hospitals, agencies, states, cities and towns to address issues related to severe weather and man-made incidents, IT outages and cyberattacks, safety of traveling staff and regulation-compliant messaging. Everbridge serves 8 of the 10 largest U.S. cities, 7 of the 10 largest U.S.-based investment banks, 24 of the 25 busiest North American airports and 6 of the 10 largest global automakers. Everbridge is based in Boston with additional offices in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Beijing and London.

For more information, visit www.everbridge.com, read the company blog, and follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

About Regina Phelps

Regina Phelps, RN, BSN, MPA, CEM is an internationally recognized expert in the field of emergency management and continuity planning. Since 1982, she has provided consultation and speaking services to clients in four continents. She is founder of [Emergency Management & Safety Solutions](#), a consulting company specializing in emergency management, continuity planning and safety. A partial list of clients includes McAfee, IMF, Microsoft, American Express, Northern Trust, VISA, Triton Container, Intuit, Stanford University, Caltech Institute, JPL, Merck, MasterCard and the World Bank.

Ms. Phelps has lectured extensively at international disaster and business continuity conferences including: DRJ, CP&M, WCDM and IAEM. She is the author of *From Response to Recovery: Conducting Successful Exercises*, a textbook on exercise design, and has developed college-level courses in exercise design.

Ms. Phelps has received numerous honors and awards, including the Business Recovery Managers Association Award for Excellence in Business Recovery Planning, College of the Sequoias Hall of Fame, ARC Outstanding Employer, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Woman Entrepreneur of the Year and the Small Business Administration Champion of Small Business. She was the 1991 Chairman of the Board of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, the first woman, the youngest and first small business owner ever to hold that seat.