

ACTIVE SHOOTER TECHNICAL REPORT Q&A With Brian Hammer, Z590.5 Committee Chair

The ASSP Technical Report (TR) Z590.5-2019, "How to Develop and Implement an Active Shooter/Armed Assailant Plan," was released in February 2019. PSJ sat down with the committee chair to learn more about the background and creation of the report, and best practices employers should follow.



Brian Hammer

Brian Hammer is a senior transportation consultant with Nationwide Insurance. Prior to that, he was a safety manager for Yellow Roadway Corp. He is a retired police lieutenant who served 20 years with the Muscatine Police Department in Iowa. He serves as vice chair of ASSP's Standards Development Committee, as a member of the ANSI/ASSP Z15.1 Safe Vehicle Operations and Z15.3 Automated Vehicles committees, and as chair of the Z590.5 Technical Report. Hammer also served as chair of the Agricultural Branch and Area Director of Region V, Area 2.

PSJ: Let's start with a bit of background. How has your experience helped you on this committee?

Brian: My background brought the law enforcement aspect to the committee, and not only the workplace aspect. I spent 20 years as a law enforcement officer. While I never responded to a mass shooting incident, I was in many other situations where shootings and violence occurred. This gave me a better understanding of the importance of having a plan in place so people know exactly what to do.

I also served as a school board president. Back in those days, we had to have a bomb plan because people would call in bomb threats. A lot of times it was a student trying to get out of taking a test, but you had to have a plan and realize that, back in the '80s, that was not something that was well-developed at all.

I think the law enforcement experience has brought forth a perspective that needed to be there, as well as the experiences that other members brought from dealing with their own plans that they have developed in their workplaces.

PSJ: What prompted the creation of this technical report?

Brian: There is an absolute need for it. When you can't go too long in a calendar year before you see one of these incidents occur, it is a time when there is a need for guidance like this. What we found is that larger companies have the expertise, and they were going ahead with their plans. But it was companies that were smaller in nature, maybe they didn't have a professional security department and they were simply looking for guidance. During my time at Nationwide Insurance, we insured convenience stores and other retail establishments, and they needed plans to deal with things such as robberies. So small employers needed some assistance to help guide them through the complicated system of developing a plan that gives them the best shot at being safe during the possibility of this kind of incident.

PSJ: Who is the target audience for this report?

Brian: The committee members had a long discussion on this and we concluded that we would develop the technical report as it related to all employers, but our goal was to help those who maybe did not have the technical expertise available. We had someone from Walt Disney World on our committee and obviously they've

got everything they need to discuss how to deal with this type of incident. We were able to benefit from his experience. But take those smaller employers who may not have that; while the technical report is kind of targeted to everyone, we realize that it's those companies that may not have the necessary expertise or skills within the organization and are looking for a blueprint to help them. In those companies, that task will often fall on the safety manager or the safety professional. Our goal was to help that safety professional develop that blueprint.

PSJ: I noticed that the terms *active shooter* and *armed assailant* are used frequently throughout the report. Is there a difference between the two?

Brian: Certainly, there is a difference. We all seem to concentrate on shootings with a firearm but, in reality, most injurious assaults occur with weapons other than firearms. From knives to bombs to the incident in Oklahoma in which a machete was used. We just wanted to make sure that the technical report was not concentrating only on firearms because that is not the only type of weapon used in these types of incidents. People can cause harm utilizing a variety of things, from motor vehicles to knives to explosives. We wanted to make sure we were inclusive with the threat that may exist for the person developing the plan.

PSJ: What are the steps that an employer should follow when developing a plan to prepare for these kinds of incidents?

Brian: The first thing that we talked about is developing a risk assessment and a vulnerability assessment to identify any deficiencies in a company. This is an important part of getting started. You really need to look at your organization and say, "Where am I most vulnerable? Where are the most risks at my facility?" These are the same techniques we use in the safety world to keep people safe from workplace injuries. We assess our facility for those types of indicators that might show some safety concerns. It's the same in this type of situation. So that's why we felt it was a good technical report for a safety professional to have.

We were cognizant that small employees will not want to have multiple different safety or security committees. We assume that most safety professionals have a safety committee within their organizations, and that's why we decided



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to make sure that, when we talked about developing a security threat assessment committee, we always talked about a safety and security committee because they can certainly be combined together. There's no reason that a security committee at a smaller employer couldn't also handle additional members who may have more to add to the regular safety committee. But we're not looking to force companies to say, "Hey, I've got to have another committee here." There's no reason that a good safety committee couldn't be combined to be the security committee with some additional personnel who may be more in tune with that committee.

PSJ: While we're on the topic of the security threat assessment committee, can you walk us through its general function and goal?

Brian: Well, the committee members would first help to develop the threat assessment and vulnerability assessments. Then that committee would come through and get ideas about how we are going to develop our plan, and then how we're going to get that assessment done. Then we're going to talk about the training exercises that the committee would have to put together, training staff and having their tabletop exercises, then actually doing a tactical exercise or a full-scale exercise. So, it is encompassing in the fact that it takes a lot of work, but that committee has the responsibility to develop the plan. Training would be a big responsibility, then running through those exercises to see how well that plan is put together.

Obviously, the plan has to have a lot of contingencies because you never know what's going to happen, and that's the reason you have those tactical or full-scale exercises, to work out some of those kinks.

PSJ: Who should be on this committee?

Brian: We did not anticipate that an employer would have to completely add a new committee, that they may be able to help or may be able to utilize a safety committee to help with this process. But obviously, there are people who have some unique skills who may not be on a safety committee. Human resources plays a big role on this committee, and they may not be on the day-to-day safety committee. Someone who could communicate to management should also be included because this committee requires complete management support. And then you have fundamental things like building maintenance and the engineers who may have to talk about structural changes to a facility in the event that a facility is vulnerable in some areas. So, it just depends on the location. During their first assessment phase, an employer may determine that it needs to bring in different personnel from the company to sit on the committee who may not already be on it. So it's a decision they have to make, and they have to research.

PSJ: Can you walk me through a post-incident plan for safety professionals to follow?

Brian: It is our concern that once the incident is over, it can be hard for an employer to manage what goes on because things are going to be taken over, maybe by law enforcement. And yet, we still have a company to run. We have to manage our employees. So, we must control or try to control the image that is put out there in the press.

There are a variety of factors post-incident that are important for a company to consider. If the shooter or the armed assailant is neutralized and no longer a threat, it doesn't end there. It's about communication with the media. It could



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be that you may need some continuing production plans because the facility may be closed for a week while things are locked down for evidence collection. Addressing some of those considerations in that post-incident plan is important for the company.

PSJ: Before a formal program is developed, what are steps that employers can take now to prepare the workplace for these kinds of incidents? What kind of technologies can an employer implement?

Brian: We were cognizant on the committee about not including a lot of high-dollar technologies in the plan even though some technologies that cost a lot of money are very successful. We wanted companies to look at what they could do much like they would do on a safety assessment throughout their facility. Some of this can be simply changing procedures about key custody or securing doors, those types of things that may have loosened up over time and can make a company vulnerable to someone coming in the rear door versus coming through the door we would want them to so we can have a check. Obviously, we are a big fan of things like badge control systems and cameras. We think that a lot of companies already have those technologies in place and we would encourage employers to strongly look at key control, badge control and camera control of their facility because they're simply good safe practices securing the facility from vandalism and theft to making sure we can account for employees during

emergencies. You can look at what a company would need to change that would help it in this kind of emergency. But then we also understand that there are some companies that simply don't have the resources to buy camera systems or the highly sophisticated badging systems that many larger companies have. We encourage them to take a look at procedures they can implement in lieu of some of those systems.

PSJ: What are some best practices when working with outside experts such as a local police force to prepare the workplace and implement this plan?

Brian: The best practices are don't be afraid to contact your public officials. It's not simply law enforcement. It could be the fire department. It could be the emergency 9-1-1 operating center. Some of our customers are located in areas where an emergency 9-1-1 operating center serves several communities, whereas the police department only serves that one community. It's important that we have contact with them. In smaller communities, having that relationship is paramount.

One of the discussions that law enforcement officers frequently have about these incidents is that they do not know their way around the facility. This was a similar problem that fire departments faced years ago. Then, fire departments made the effort to start performing building inspections and now they have an idea of the building layout. That rarely happens with law enforcement.

So, invite law enforcement to your facility so they can tour it, look at your situation and determine how they would respond. More importantly, they may also give suggestions from their point of view. For example, if a company is looking to prevent burglary, an officer could visit and offer tips about how to prevent your building from being broken into. Those things are still applicable today, making sure that officers have knowledge of your facility and how to get around. Inviting them out to your workplace on a frequent basis is important.

PSJ: Any final thoughts?

Brian: I come from the insurance side now. It's important that companies realize that having this type of plan is like any other plan that helps reduce risk. Insurance companies always want you to reduce risk and none of it is 100% but, if you can reduce the risk to as low as reasonably practicable, then you have an improvement on your plan.

We know that an armed assailant or an active shooter comes from several different places. And sometimes we think it may be a terrorist, or we think it is someone who specifically targets our facility. But it most likely will be a disgruntled or terminated employee, spouse of an employee, or a disgruntled customer or vendor. Those are the things we want to make sure people concentrate on. **PSJ**