How to Create Active Shooter Response Guidelines for Your Workplace



The February 10 Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia shooting is the latest and deadliest of a long running series of mass and random shootings in schools, workplaces, and other public places across Canada. Yet, many employers remain complacent, stubbornly choosing to believe it could "never happen" at their sites. Of course, employers at the sites of the incidents listed above probably felt the exact same way.

The 10 to 15 Minutes of Decision

So-called "active shooter" incidents typically happen suddenly and with no warning and unfold over a 10- to 15-minute span. By the time law enforcement shows up, the carnage is already done. **Bottom Line:** Workers on the ground need to know what to do in those crucial minutes after the shooting begins and before help arrives. Such preparation can spell the difference between death and survival.

The Need for Active Shooter Response Guidelines

In addition to providing training and staging drills, you can prepare workers by giving them guidelines explaining what to do if an active shooter incident occurs at your workplace. Whether they're freestanding or part of your Workplace Violence or Emergency Response policy, like the template Active Shooter Guidelines on the HR Insider site, your guidelines should include six essential elements.

1. **Statement of Purpose**

Explain that the purpose of the Guidelines is to help workers prepare if an active shooter incident happens at the workplace (Guidelines, Sec. 1).

2. **Definition of "Active Shooter Event"**

Include a definition of "active shooter event." Example: "An incident in which one or more individuals make an actual effort to kill people in a workplace or another confined and populated place, typically with firearms and on a random

basis" (Guidelines, Sec. 2).

3. **Policy Statement**

State your company's commitment to provide a violence-free workplace and note that the Guidelines are there as a backup in case your prevention program fails and an active shooter incident happens. Add *gravitas* by explaining how being prepared can spell the difference between surviving or getting killed or injured in such an incident (Guidelines, Sec. 3).

4. **The 3 Active Shooter Response Options**

The core of the Guidelines is the section that explains in detail each of the three things workers can do if they find themselves in an Active Shooter event, including (in order of preference):

- Running away.
- Hiding and sheltering in place.
- As a last resort, confronting the active shooter verbally, indirectly, or via direct attack (Guidelines, Sec. 4).

5. **The Do's & Don'ts of Dealing with Enforcement Officers**

The next thing workers need to know is what to do—and not do—when law enforcement officers arrive on the scene after an active shooting event occurs (Guidelines, Sec. 5).

6. **The Information to Give 911**

Last but not least, list the crucial information that workers should be ready to give operators when calling 911 to report an active shooter incident, including:

- The active shooter's location.
- The number of active shooters, if there's more than one.
- A physical description of the active shooter.
- The number and type of weapons the active shooter has.
- The number of potential victims at the location (Guidelines, Sec. 6).

“It could never happen at our workplace”

Canada’s Most Deadly Active Shooter Events

1989: Ecole Polytechnique: 15 dead

1992: Concordia University: 4 dead, 1 injured

1999: OC Transpo: 6 dead

2006: Dawson College 1 dead, 19 injured

2014: Western Forest Products 2 dead, 2 injured

2017: Islamic Cultural Centre of Québec City 6 dead, 19 injured

2026: Tumbler Ridge Secondary School: 9 dead, 25 injured