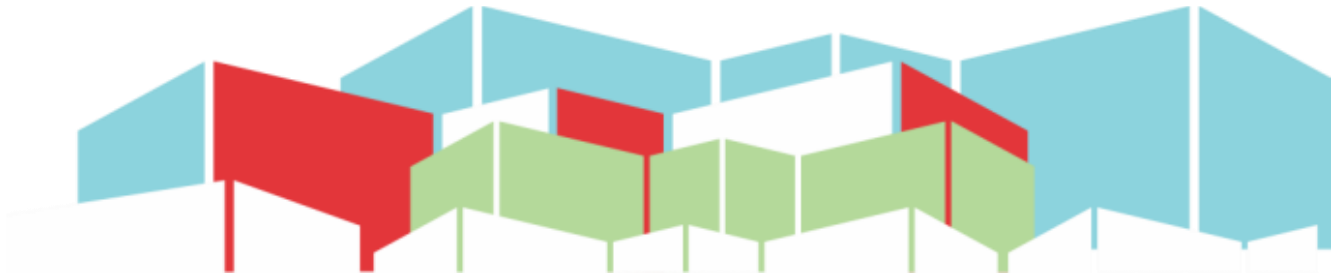
Situational Awareness & Early Indicators: Preventing Violence Before It Happens

Michael Julian, PPS CSP CPI

CEO/Creator

MPS Security & Protection

A.L.I.V.E. Active Shooter Training Program



Learning Objectives

- A clear framework for spotting behavioral and environmental red flags before escalation
- Practical methods to reinforce situational awareness across staff and contractors
- Approaches for aligning safety protocols with everyday facility routines
- Tools for evaluating existing emergency plans through a threat-aware lens

Why This Matters

470

U.S. workplace homicides in 2024

BLS Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries

54,230

workplace assault injuries serious enough to cause days away from work

NSC Injury Facts, 2023–24

76%

of mass attackers showed concerning behavior or communications beforehand

U.S. Secret Service NTAC, 2016–2020

4.7

concerning behaviors, on average, displayed by active shooters before attacking

FBI, Pre-Attack Behaviors, 2000–2013

Targeted violence is rarely spontaneous. It is the end of a process, and that process is usually visible to someone.

Situational Awareness

Situational awareness in general is the ability to perceive, understand, and anticipate what is happening in your surrounding environment and how it may change

Situational awareness as it pertains to violence is the ability to actively notice, interpret, and evaluate your surroundings to detect threats and avoid a violent encounter before it starts

Levels of Awareness



Live in Yellow. Recognize Orange early. Have your plan before Red.

Adapted from Jeff Cooper's Color Code of Awareness

Precursors to Violence - Familiar

Know what's going on with your people

- Examples:
  - Retaliation
  - Disciplinary
  - Termination
  - Harassment, feeling marginalized – by an employee or supervisor/manager
  - Financial
  - Emotional – depression, anxiety
  - Relational – divorce, death, child custody

Keep your thumb on the pulse of your people's wellbeing

Train everyone to See Something, Say Something

The Pathway to Violence



Every step before the attack is a chance to intervene. The earlier you spot it, the more options you have.

Adapted from Calhoun & Weston, Contemporary Threat Management (2003)

Behavioral Red Flags

Recognition Of Warning Signs – Familiar and Unfamiliar

- Aggressive or threatening behavior, increasing belligerence
- Bizarre or irrational behavior, emotional outbursts
- Sudden/extreme behavior changes, hypersensitivity to criticism
- Comments or threats related to suicide/homicide
- Obsession with supervisor/coworker/grievance, ominous specific threats
- Writings or posting on social media about violence
- Hopelessness, Despair, Isolation, Loneliness
- Sudden stockpiling of weapons
- Fascination with prior mass killings

Culturally and Groups

- The energy changes
- People get quiet, tense
- You can feel it

Environmental Red Flags

People & Behavior

- Unfamiliar people in restricted areas
- Tailgating through secured doors
- Loitering, watching entrances, photographing access points
- Unusual questions about schedules, shifts, or security

Physical Environment

- Doors propped open; broken locks or latches
- Cameras down, poor lighting, blind spots
- Unattended bags, packages, or vehicles
- Blocked exits and cluttered egress routes

Procedural Gaps

- Badges not worn, shared, or never collected
- Former employees or contractors with active access
- Visitors not signed in or escorted
- Contractor crews that change without vetting

Facility teams walk the building every day. You are the first to notice when "normal" changes.

Warning Signs Go Unreported

51%

of active shooters leaked their intent to harm before the attack

54%

of cases, someone who noticed concerning behavior did nothing

FBI, Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters, 2000–2013

Why people stay silent

- Fear of being wrong or overreacting
- Fear of retaliation, or of getting someone fired
- "It's not my business"
- They don't know who to tell or what happens next

Make it easy to speak up

- Multiple channels, including anonymous
- No retaliation for good-faith reports
- Close the loop: thank the reporter
- Include contractors, vendors, and tenants

Build a Threat Assessment Team

Who sits at the table

- Human Resources
- Security
- Facilities
- Legal
- Operations leadership
- EAP / mental health
- Law enforcement liaison

1 Identify

Take reports from any channel and triage fast. Every report gets looked at.

2 Assess

Gather facts: behavior, history, stressors, access to weapons, possible targets.

3 Manage

Build the plan: support, discipline, access restrictions, security, law enforcement.

4 Monitor

Follow up. Risk can return after trigger events: terminations, court dates, anniversaries.

References: ASIS WVPI AA-2020 Workplace Violence & Active Assailant Standard. California employers: SB 553 (Labor Code §6401.9) requires a written Workplace Violence Prevention Plan.

Evaluating Existing Emergency Plans Through A Threat-aware Lens

- Walk through every part and place in your organization with your Threat Assessment Team and talk through the best way to react/respond to every scenario; discuss possibilities and options, and document.
- Use different scenarios: active shooter, fight between employees, customer and employee
- Discuss current policies and procedures and ask yourself: how would these change during a violent event?
- Notate improved security procedures for each scenario to add to your SOPs

Aligning Safety Protocols With Everyday Facility Routines

Have and Teach a **Security Mindset**

Build it into your job protocols, daily routines, and communications

01
Shift huddles
A 60-second safety note at shift start: who is expected, what changed, any concerns.

02
Door & access discipline
Every walk-through checks doors, locks, cameras, and lighting.

03
Visitors & contractors
Sign in, badge, escort. Add an awareness briefing to contractor onboarding.

04
Work orders
Add a "security concern" field so techs can flag what they notice.

05
Drill with fire drills
Pair lockdown and Run-Hide-Fight drills with routine fire drills.

06
Plain-language alerts
Clear alerts plus a known phrase for "I need help now."

Then What?

Training, Training, Training

- Onboarding for every employee and contractor
- Annual refreshers on warning signs and reporting
- Role-specific training: supervisors, front desk, facilities
- De-escalation skills for customer-facing staff

Practice, Practice, Practice

- Tabletop exercises with leadership and the threat team
- Walk-throughs and drills: announced, then unannounced
- After-action reviews: what worked, what didn't
- Update the plan, then practice again

Under stress, people don't rise to the occasion. They fall to the level of their training.

When to Bring in Outside Help

- If you don’t have a threat assessment team
- Credible or escalating threats against staff or leadership
- High-risk terminations or disciplinary actions
- Domestic violence spilling into the workplace
- A protective or restraining order is in place
- Internal security is stretched thin or not trained for the threat
- Protests, strikes, layoffs, or controversial announcements

Consult with/retain a vetted, licensed, insured security/protection company already familiar with your site before it becomes an incident

Conclusion

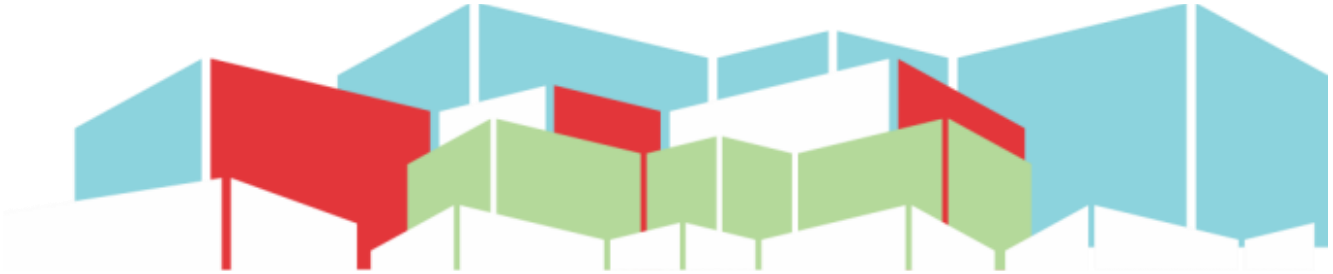
1. **Violence is a process, not an event.**
   And the process leaves signs.
2. **Awareness is a skill.**
   Teach it, model it, practice it.
3. **Know your people and your building.**
   Notice when "normal" changes.
4. **Make reporting easy and safe.**
   Then act on every report.
5. **Prepare before you need it.**
   Plans, a team, training, and outside partners.

Michael Julian, PPS CSP CPI

MPS Security & Protection
Security-MPS.com

A.L.I.V.E. Active Shooter Training Program
ActiveShooterSurvivalTraining.com

866-678-4408



Thank you for completing a session survey in the **NFMT event app!**

NFMT west