Partners In Safety Paper

Why Law Enforcement Officers Should Be the Only Armed Personnel on Campus

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After every major shooting event that occurs in this country, proposals to arm teachers, or other civilians on campuses, get pushed forward as a possible response to these types of attacks.

More untrained guns during a violent attack can create more danger rather than mitigating it. Arming civilians to defend against Violent Critical Incidents, such as active shooter or violent intruder attacks, may create more problems, sets these armed civilian responders up for undue challenge or failure, and could have a negative impact on outcomes.

Armed civilian responders are often inadequately trained, tasked with an incredibly difficult mission, and must race against time to succeed.

Inadequacies of Civilian Firearm Training

This publication provides an overview of required standards and best practices for the protection of Federal employees and private citizens who work within and visit U.S. government-owned or leased facilities. The Interagency Security Committee, is chaired by the Department of Homeland Security and consists of 54 Federal departments and agencies.

1.   Oversimplification of the situation.
Most civilian firearm training paints a simplistic picture of clear and justified use of weapons, including lethal force. To meet the standards of justified use, the armed civilian must recognize and correctly interpret the event. Also, the armed civilian must have a complete understanding of the law – which varies by state. Neither of these criteria are covered in depth in a regular Concealed Handgun License (CHL) class, or even the mini-academies some states are requiring their carrying educators to successfully complete.

2.   Little to no hands-on experience.
Citizens turned armed response civilians have little to no hands-on experience until a real event occurs. They will likely have no real need to pull out their weapon until confronted with violence. And

critically, they lack experience with "shoot"/"no-shoot" decision making. In comparison, law enforcement officers will pull their weapon hundreds of times in their careers with most never taking a shot. Citizens will not be afforded that real-life practice. And without it, hesitation is a real prospect.

3.   Self-defense training does not equal strong offensive training.

Most civilians' highest level of handgun training will reach that of self-defense. This means they are prepared to pull their weapon when suddenly confronted by an aggressor using some amount of force. This is reactionary and puts them in second place immediately. Second place is not the place to be in during a close-contact and immediate gunfight. Law enforcement officers will unholster and even pull and point their weapon long before a trigger pull is necessary. They rely on their experience and intuition from numerous dangerous encounters. Very few civilians will be able to pull from that experience. Some will have prior military or law enforcement experience, but the majority will not.

Training to the level of self-defense does not afford the CHL holder the opportunity to practice the tactics, movement, and engagement strategies from an offensive perspective. For example, a teacher is in his classroom when a "shots-fired call" in the cafeteria comes out. What should he do? Does he remain in his classroom with the ability to defend the occupants, or does he leave the classroom and proceed to the cafeteria? Does he move with the gun at the low ready position or keep it concealed? When should he transition? As the armed civilian arrives in the cafeteria, should he shout verbal commands or just begin shooting at the person pointing a gun but not firing? Is the person holding the gun the actual shooter? Or is it a parent who was having lunch with their child and has disarmed the shooter?

Law Enforcement Officers include these types of scenarios in their training on a regular basis. Will armed civilians be afforded this type of mental practice on a regular basis? Without regular and realistic training, hesitation and mistakes can happen. In this environment, mistakes can result in deadly consequences.

4.   Interaction with responding law enforcement.

Are these armed civilian response policies adequately preparing and protecting the armed civilian responders? Responding law enforcement officers will be searching for a person with a gun. Is the armed civilian trained on how to encounter law enforcement? Inadequate training on the realities of

interacting with responding law enforcement officers can lead to bad outcomes for the armed civilian who is just working to protect others.

5.   The "good guy" does not always win the gunfight.

The notion that by adding an armed civilian responder to a school means that the attacker will lose the gunfight is just not reality. Look to law enforcement as an example. Each year, multiple law enforcement officers are lost to armed encounters while they are working to protect and serve. Bad outcomes happen, even to people who are highly trained. What is the likelihood of bad outcomes for someone with substantially less training faced with this type of violent attack? And just like downed officers' guns have been used by bad guys to further the carnage, the same could happen in a school shooting event if an armed civilian is disarmed by the bad guy.

Mission: Shooting Accurately

1.   Shooting accurately is difficult.

Shooting accurately requires a combination of mental and physical skills that can be difficult to maintain in a focused and calm situation and is even more challenging in a dynamic and chaotic situation. Fear, stress, distractions, and confusion are examples of mental inputs that an armed civilian responder would have to overcome in order to both make good "shoot"/"no-shoot" decisions and successfully go through the mental and physical process of shooting accurately.

Shooting accurately requires target acquisition, sight picture/sight alignment, proper stance, grip, and breathing, and trigger control. Impediments anywhere in the mental and physical process means hit rates go down, at least on the intended target. And whether the event occurs in a hallway, classroom, library, cafeteria, office or gym (all attack locations which have already occurred in previous school shootings) there will always be "friendlies" in that area who cannot become collateral damage.

The US Department of Justice regularly reports on police shooting accuracy in deadly force encounters. Annually, that number is around a 30% hit rate. That is a terrible number, but understandable given the stress of the moment and situations in which these encounters occur. Armed civilian responders cannot be expected to perform much better. All bullets go somewhere. What will the 70% of misses be hitting?

2.   Accuracy is essential.

In these environments, accuracy must be ensured. Does the armed civilian responder know exactly how close he or she must be to have a 100% hit rate? Doubtful because even in highly stress-induced training, there is not complete replication of the real event. Additionally, in high stress training misses still occur at very close distances. In an attack on a campus, armed civilian responders would likely need to perform near contact shots to ensure 100% accuracy. Will these responders do that? Do they know how? How will they get into that position without making themselves an easier target? These questions do not have universal answers and will likely not be addressed until responders are confronted with the actual event. That is not the best time to solve these problems.

Time

Time is one of the most critical factors impacting the outcome of violent events. Longer events allow for higher casualty counts. The sooner the threat is neutralized, the less time the attacker will have to inflict casualties.

Ron Borsch's SEALE Academy research of these events reveals an average murder attempts per minute rate of 4.7. With hit rates by the shooters of over 50%, and a 1:1 ratio of killed to wounded, the armed civilian responder would not have to be too far away in the building for their presence to have negligible impact on the outcome. This does not even address how quickly responders become aware that there is even an event on-going.

Where are these armed civilians located when the attack begins? Will they be where they are needed, when they are needed? Relying on armed civilian responders to mitigate bad outcomes in these attacks means that they must be able to correctly identify an attack is happening and respond to the threat in a short enough amount of time to prevent casualties. This is an unrealistic expectation.

Conclusion

It does not take a good guy with a gun to defeat a bad guy with a gun.

Armed civilians as a response to Violent Critical Incidents such as active shooters or violent intruders are not the most effective response and could cause problems. Armed civilian responders are often inadequately trained to the realities of the situation, tasked with a high-stakes mission that demands expertise and can have devastating outcomes with failure, all while racing against the clock to save lives.

It is for these reasons, individuals should not be trained to wait for others, law enforcement or armed civilian responders, to save them. The most effective strategy to respond to these types of Violent Critical Incidents is to empower individuals to participate in their own survival using proactive, response strategies.