

One Voice on Disaster Preparedness

How Run, Hide, Fight Was Adopted and Changed the National Dialogue on Civilian Safety

By Katherine Schweit, Chief of the Violence Prevention Section, FBI Deputy Director's Office of Partner Engagement

Training civilians to respond in a crisis has progressed dramatically in the past few years in the United States. Much credit goes to the adoption of a single federal voice empowering civilians to remain aware and, if needed, to *Run, Hide, Fight*.

The recent campus threat at Ohio State University (OSU) perfectly illustrates the value of swift, consistent messaging. The university blasted out on Twitter: "Buckeye Alert: Active Shooter on campus. **Run Hide Fight**. Watts Hall. 19th and College." They tweeted 90 minutes later that the scene was secure and the shelter order lifted.

Kudos to OSU for training everyone and then using this shorthand phrase to provide information of value to the entire campus community. The significance of its messaging reaches far beyond the campus.

Shootings and incidents like the OSU stabbing/car attack occur in schools, malls, and on public streets. They are terrifying. Domestic and internationally inspired terrorists continue to pose a threat with guns, knives, and improvised explosive devices. For example, the FBI has shown that active shooting incidents continue to increase.¹

Citizens and emergency planners have risen to the occasion, however, and are more prepared than ever. The 2013 adoption of a single federal voice empowering civilians to *Run, Hide, Fight* has changed the narrative both on HOW to respond and WHO can play a role in saving lives.

Detractors who still debate whether



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these words are the *right* words miss the point of the discussion.

More than anything else, a discussion about *Run, Hide, Fight* has created much-needed conversation on where training and preparedness money is spent and how policy decisions are made in business executive suites, at campus board meetings, and in school administration offices. Today, more than ever, civilians, emergency managers, law enforcement, and other

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first responders have been given the green light to train civilians, changing this conversation from choosing buzzwords to the substance of what to expect and what to do.

The evolution of *Run, Hide, Fight* and how it helps is one of the most

common questions I am asked as I travel the country to lecture on behalf of the FBI. Though some discord still exists on the use of the slogan, it's important to understand how the guidance has improved civilian preparedness.

Agreement on this single mantra has allowed the FBI to join with many federal agencies, including the Department of Education (Dept. of ED), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to issue the same message repeatedly through in-person and Web-based training sessions. *Run, Hide, Fight* is helping save lives by better preparing citizens to act effectively in an emergency.

Some background may help.

Credit for the term goes to a team at the City of Houston, working on a DHS grant, who came up with the phrase in 2012 as part of larger and continuing aggressive efforts to develop regional disaster preparedness planning². The director of the Houston Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security Dennis Storemski told Yahoo! News

that Houston wanted to create a common-sense reaction that would be easy to remember³.

Mr. Storemski's reasoning was

simple and sound.

In 1999, the nation struggled through the murder of 12 students and one teacher and the wounding of more than 20 at Columbine High School in

Continued on page 27

an unincorporated area of Jefferson County, Colorado. Since then, Jefferson County Public Schools, Jeffco, as it is known, increased its aggressive programs to support parents, students, and district personnel developing prevention and recovery tactics not only for natural disasters but also man-made⁴. In time, they adopted the “I Love You Guys” Foundation⁵ trademarked Standard Response Protocol urging *lockout, lockdown, evacuate, shelter* as options.

Around the same time, a couple of police officers worked with others to develop what is now the ALICE program, a shortcut for *Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate*⁶, which has trained thousands across the country. It became one of the many, many for-profit businesses that have popped up, offering “civilian training” and “certifications.” There were no shortages of other catch phrases and shorthand mnemonics.

The need for better training tools increased as the world joined in to express its distress eight years later after 32 were killed and 17 wounded at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 2007⁷. The crime prompted a modification to the Clery Act, passed in 1990, which requires U.S. institutions of higher education to collect data on campus security procedures and crime statistics.

But cries of “never again” never translated into prevention and response practices that permeated nationally. Many educational facilities and businesses had not considered the issue and had no policy at all.

After the killings at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State

University, the Clery Act was modified to require better notice to help save lives. This includes: “A *statement of current campus policies regarding immediate emergency response and evacuation procedures, including the use of electronic and cellular communication (if appropriate), which policies shall include procedures to:*

- *immediately notify the campus*



community upon the confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students or staff occurring on the campus, as defined in paragraph (6), unless issuing a notification will compromise efforts to contain the emergency;

- *publicize emergency response and evacuation procedures on an annual basis in a manner designed to reach students and staff; and,*
- *test emergency response and evacuation procedures on an annual basis.”⁸*

This prompted institutions of higher education to begin developing more articulable plans, if they had not done so previously: plans that included notifications to students, faculty, and

staff. Illinois, where five were killed and 16 injured at Northern Illinois University in 2008, and Virginia, were the most aggressive. Still, few included active-shooting threats in their plans.

Everything changed at the federal level when a shooter killed 27 and wounded two people in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012. Agony and unyielding pain came with news that 20 of those killed were young school children at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

President Barack Obama issued a plan called *Now is the Time*, pushing several initiatives.⁹ One of the nine elements of the president’s plan called for a directive to “[m]ake our schools safer with new resource officers and counselors, better emergency response plans, and more nurturing school climates.”

Everyone wanted a way to prevent these incidents. Everyone asked how to be better prepared. After all, Sandy Hook faculty and students trained in active-shooter preparedness.

I joined Vice President Joe Biden’s White House team with other executives and policymakers from the Department of Justice, DHS, Dept. of ED, FEMA, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Adopting a single federal voice on civilian response was a difficult and sometimes bumpy road. Some members of the team were reticent to tackle changes. Some had invested significant resources in different directions. Others were struggling with the true meanings of *Run* and *Fight*.

Continued from page 27

We began meeting daily at the Dept. of ED's old building to brainstorm on how to change the language and culture of the country— no small task! We centered our attention on replacement of outdated and inconsistent federal guides for emergency preparedness. The Dept. of ED had a four-step process for developing emergency operations plans that were years old. FEMA had a six-step process. The HHS, DOJ, and FBI were not really in the business of developing such guidance. No one could blame the public for not knowing the best response guidelines.

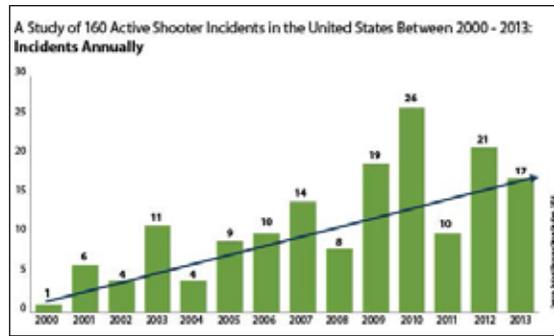
The group agreed that the goal was to develop "all hazard" guides using FEMA's six-step process that would prepare citizens and entities for natural AND man-made disasters. For man-made threats, we struggled over ways to explain the threat and how to protect civilians. We sought a way to empower millions who would be the most vulnerable—individuals who may find themselves on the bad end of a knife or gun.

Everyone agreed we needed something as simple as *See Something, Say Something*, the DHS-adopted motto created by the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority's advertising agency the day after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack.¹⁰ We needed a catchy *Stop, Drop and Roll*-type phrase.

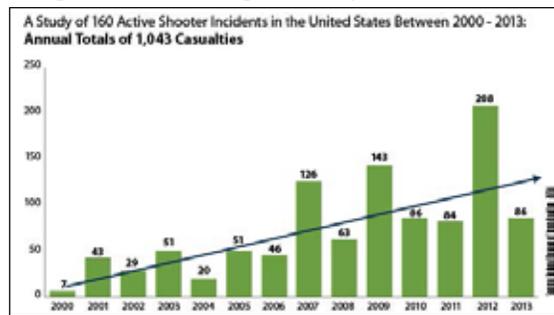
Existing mantras for what to do when a shooter was nearby were cumbersome, not easy to follow, not memorable, and not necessarily helpful to someone who might have limited English-language skills. We talked about creating a best practices public service announcement, and though the FBI volunteered its film studio and experienced movie editors, we knew that would take time.

During my research, I ran across the six-month-old *Run, Hide, Fight* video on YouTube. The six-minute

film was simple and compelling. I loved it! Clearly Houston had a great team that put the film together as

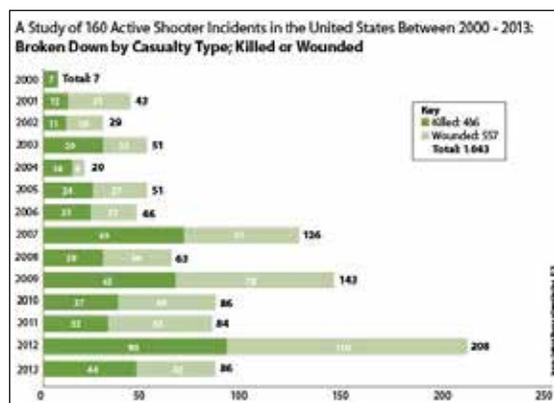


part of a thoughtful and thorough preparedness package. Houston acknowledged permission for unlimited free use by federal agencies and the public, indicating that they had been



supporting cross-country requests since posting the video.

The next week, I asked the White House team to watch the film and



Graphs and map in this article and on page 27 provided by Federal Bureau of Investigation, Office of Partner Engagement, Active Shooter Unit

consider adopting it. Initially, the group expressed concerns about steering away from *Lockdown and Lockout* used by many schools. There were concerns the film would be viewed as too violent or would encourage violence.

I countered that lockdown/lockout only covered the *Hide* part of *Run, Hide, Fight*. FBI research underway at the time identified many shootings, but few in classrooms. We know now that in the 30 shootings that took place in pre-K through 12th grade schools between 2000 and 2016, only a handful occurred inside a classroom, making lockdown a hollow preparedness option. In reality, the majority occurred in cafeterias, hallways, and parking lots.

Research was establishing that in every shooting situation those facing a threat had turned to all three actions—running, hiding, and fighting—to try to survive. We agreed that running might not always be the best move, but that those who can safely run, can't be shot or used as hostages if the situation persists. We agreed that hiding must be done strategically, and training would be needed to teach people to evaluate their proximity to the threat and the best methods of concealment and cover. We agreed that fighting is a very personal decision and can be done with words, outwitting an opponent, fists, or through more aggressive means.

Within weeks, the agency representatives agreed to sign off and place their department seals on what is now the seminal federal emergency planning documents, guidelines that also advocate the use of *Run, Hide, Fight*.¹¹ Agency representatives sat on the White House lawn as Vice President Biden announced the joint release of guidance to schools, institutions of higher education, and houses of worship on how to work with first responders and other community

Continued on page 29

partners to plan and prepare for emergencies such as active-shooter situations, tornadoes, and earthquakes.¹²

Since then, new guidance has been released for health care facilities. These discuss complex issues, including caregivers and patients who cannot or may not want to flee.¹³ Guidance for airports and businesses are under draft.

Since that warm summer day the federal policy was announced, millions have been trained in the use of *Run, Hide, Fight*. Those of us who teach preparedness know the phrase *Run, Hide, Fight* is just the beginning.

Teaching tactics behind each word is still crucial. Situational awareness is critical in deciding what course of action to take. Some, primarily in education, continue to voice concerns focused on two areas: discomfort over the reality that they may lose control of the children who *Run* and how to talk about *Fight* at the same time they are trying to teach a climate of inclusion and kindness at schools. These are relevant concerns that need to be addressed through proper training.

Teaching children poses a challenge, but it can and has been done. The City of Houston has developed a guide for adults as they help children deal with the fear and the realities of preparing for and dealing with disasters.¹⁴ Lesson plans rely on the “Ready Heroes” who can help youngsters sort through their fears and thoughts. Sesame Street also has developed extensive materials to help walk children through disaster preparedness. The state of Colorado has successfully been teaching children as young as kindergarten for years.¹⁵

Run, Hide, Fight may never be universal. Establishing a single phrase for the country, however, has drawn a common starting line.

Though not perfect, the successful adoption of *Run, Hide, Fight* less than four years ago has moved the conversation from catch phrases and confusing acronyms to an impressive effort at the national and local level to teach how to save lives.

End Notes

¹ https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/activeshooterincidentsus_2014-2015.pdf/view; Blair, J. Pete, and Schweit, Katherine W. (2014). A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000-2013. Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington D.C. 2014. <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-incidents/a-study-of-active-shooter-incidents-in-the-u.s.-2000-2013>

² Ready Houston, <http://www.readyhouston.org/>

³ <http://news.yahoo.com/why-the-san-diego-naval-medical-center-told-people-to-run-hide-or-fight-during-active-shooter-scare-233846531.html>

⁴ <http://www.jeffcopublicschools.org/security/Student%20and%20Parent%20Handout.pdf>

⁵ <http://iloveguys.org/>

⁶ <http://www.alicetraining.com/about-us/>

⁷ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=3049423&page=1>

⁸ <http://clerycenter.org/jeanne-clery-act>

⁹ Now is the Time, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/preventing-gun-violence#what-we-can-do>

¹⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/11/nyregion/11slogan.html?_r=0

¹¹ <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>, and <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/rem-s-k-12-guide-508.pdf/view>; https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/active_shooter_poster_508.pdf

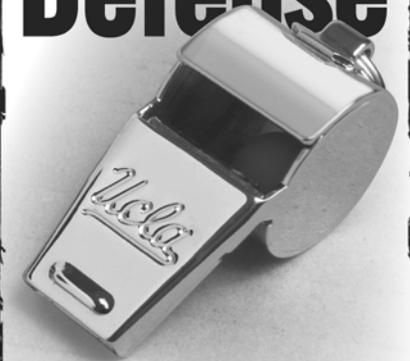
¹² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/18/vice-president-biden-marks-progress-executive-actions-help-reduce-gun-vi>

¹³ <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>

¹⁴ <http://www.readyhouston.org/schoolready/index.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.jeffcopublicschools.org/security/School%20Safety%20Plan.pdf>

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