



FIVE RULES

for Mass Notification

In the event of a workplace violence incident – or any emergency – timely communication is essential when it comes to minimizing the incident’s impact, protecting people’s health and safety, bringing order to a chaotic situation, and enabling first responders to perform their duties safely and efficiently.

Today’s mass notification systems offer more capabilities than ever before – working across indoor, outdoor, and electronic environments and integrating multiple technologies, including alarm systems, access control systems, gunshot detection systems, loudspeakers, duress stations, electronic messaging displays, and messages sent to mobile phones. These integrated systems can give you all the resources you need to respond to threats faster and more successfully.

The key is knowing how to use these resources most effectively. The following five rules for mass notification provide you with the essential directions you need to respond to a workplace violence incident in the safest and most effective manner possible.



PREPARE EVERYONE.

Make sure everyone in your facility is trained according to your Workplace Violence Prevention Plan. Conduct regular drills – at least twice a year – to familiarize employees with procedures, including lockdowns and evacuations. People tend to react better during

an emergency when they can demonstrate behaviors learned in simulated contingency situations to the point that they don’t have to consciously think about their response.

In addition, use your mass notification system regularly for non-emergency communications (such as company event notices, training opportunities, and surveys) so that employees are used to receiving and responding to messages. This will also ensure that you always have everyone’s up-to-date contact information. Personnel with emergency responsibilities should train more frequently and practice a variety of specific scenarios.



USE ALL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS.

In an active shooter situation, you have to reach everyone – including people who are not at their desks. Communicate across all your communication channels – phone messages, SMS texts, voice broadcasts, digital signage displays, social media updates, and email notifications – to ensure that everyone gets the message. Just as importantly, keep your message consistent across all channels to minimize confusion.



USE PRERECORDED MESSAGES.

One way to save vital seconds is to prerecord and save scripted messages that can be instantly deployed in an emergency. You can supplement the prerecorded information with live instructions as events develop and information becomes available. Prerecorded messages have the added benefit of sounding reassuring and authoritative when everyone is under duress. Scripted alerts can also provide a shield against liability. Have your legal and insurance personnel review and approve the wording.



KEEP MESSAGES SHORT AND CONCISE.

According to the FBI¹, the average active shooter incident lasts 12 minutes – and 37% of incidents end within five minutes. Time is of the essence, and messages need to be short and simple with clear, direct instructions. Ideally, your message should answer five questions:

- **Who is delivering the message?**
- **What actions should people take?**
- **When do people need to act?**
- **Where is the emergency taking place?**
This helps people determine who needs to act immediately and who does not.
- **Why do people need to act?**
Provide a description of the hazard and its dangers and consequences.

Most security experts recommend keeping messages under 30 seconds in length, so provide just enough information for people to get to safety.

It is also recommended that you avoid using acronyms in the content of any mass notification. While their brevity may seem appropriate, acronyms can end up creating significant confusion if their meanings are not universally understood.



USE INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY TO INFORM AND SPEED RESPONSE.

In the chaos of an emergency, reliable, accurate information is usually in short supply. If you're unsure of an active shooter's location or movements, how can you provide occupants with evacuation instructions that don't increase their risks? Fortunately, you can now integrate multiple technologies – including access control systems, gunshot detection systems, fire systems and mass notification systems—to mount a faster, more coordinated response. With these systems working together, you can immediately identify, locate and report gunshot activity in a facility and provide reliable guidance to occupants.



1. <https://leb.fbi.gov/2013/may/addressing-the-problem-of-the-active-shooter/view>

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