Are You Prepared for an Active Shooter Incident?

Yesterday’s tragedy at the Washington Navy Yard is the most recent in a depressingly long string of active shooter incidents. We like to think such horrors will never be visited upon us, but consider the locations of other active shooter incidents: Newtown, CT; Littleton, CO; Santee, CA; Nickel Mines, PA; Red Lake, MN; and Chardon, OH. Residents and students in these areas likely doubted they would ever be victims.

An active shooter situation is any incident in which a person or persons armed with a deadly weapon is systematically, actively, and presently employing the weapons against innocent victims upon the arrival of the police. An AS incident can develop anytime, anyplace, and remember: it has happened at NOVA (WO in 2009).

While it is impossible to include all pertinent active shooter response information here, the following vital themes may help keep you safe:

1. Expect the unexpected. Look at people’s behavior critically.
   - Today’s friend/colleague could be tomorrow’s active shooter. Be aware of behavioral changes; suspicious packages; inappropriate dress (e.g., a long coat on a sunny summer day could be hiding a rifle); increased use of illegal substances; seeming depression; loss of interest in school, friends, and usual favored activities; etc.

2. If you see something that makes you uncomfortable or arouses your suspicion, report your concerns immediately to the NOVA College Police at 703-764-5000. The police rely on information from the entire NOVA community to keep us safe and will investigate/respond to all reports.

3. Police may not arrive on the scene to respond to an active shooter for several minutes. During this time, you are responsible for ensuring your own safety through planning (i.e., have a plan for each location you frequent) and a commitment to survive.

4. Time is critical. You must be prepared to act decisively. In the event of an active shooter on campus, you have three options, which are summarized in an excellent video found on the NOVA Police website
   - Flee. Evacuate the area immediately. *If you can evacuate, this is your best chance of survival!* Even if the shooter is approaching you, you are more likely to survive by running away, since a moving target is difficult to hit and most shooters are not trained marksmen.
   - Hide. If you cannot evacuate, lock the doors; turn of lights, pagers, and cell phones; hide behind articles such as desks as far out of view from windows as possible; and remain quiet.
   - Fight. In extreme circumstances, when evacuation is not possible and you’re actually confronting an active shooter, you and others must go on the offensive. Just like Todd Beamer said “let’s roll” and set off with other passengers to attack the 9/11 hijackers, you must do the same. Yell, throw articles at the shooter, attack, and secure the shooter. Put the shooter on the defensive to minimize your own casualties.

5. Police will respond aggressively.
   - Don’t get in the way or contribute to an already confusing situation. The police’s immediate goal is to go to the shooter to end the threat. They will not stop to help the wounded.
   - Don’t allow yourself to be considered a suspect. Keep your hands visible and make no quick/unpredictable movements. Leave handbags and backpacks, which police will assume is hiding a weapon, in the classroom.

The NOVA Police Department offers detailed briefings on active shooter history, their motivations, what to do in an active shooter incident, and what to expect from the police response. Groups interested in receiving this presentation should contact the Department’s Community Outreach Officer, Tony Ong, at tong@nvcc.edu.