



SHARED EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Chiefs Michael Kehoe and Kristen Ziman share an experience every law enforcement leader dreads—the peace of their communities was shattered by an incident of mass violence.

Chief (Ret.) Kehoe was the chief of the Newtown, Connecticut, Police Department on December 14, 2012, when a shooter opened fire in the Sandy Hook Elementary School, killing 26 people, 20 of whom were children. He was one of the first officers to enter the school after the shooting.

Chief (Ret.) Ziman led the Aurora, Illinois, Police Department following a horrific attack at the Henry Pratt Company on February 15, 2019, that left five people dead and five of her own officers and one civilian injured. Chiefs Kehoe and Ziman provide a firsthand look at the events of those fateful days, and they reflect on the experience, highlight lessons they learned, and provide valuable insight into how law enforcement leaders can be better prepared and better respond in the event that an incident of mass violence occurs under their watch.

Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting



December 14, 2012

Mourners gather inside the St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church at a vigil service for victims of the Sandy Hook School shooting, December 14, 2012. (Pool/Getty Images News/Getty Images)



BY
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ON DECEMBER 14, 2012, AT APPROXIMATELY 9:35 A.M., A 20-YEAR-OLD LONE MALE SHOOTER FORCED HIS WAY INTO THE LOCKED SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BY SHOOTING OUT A SIDE WINDOW TO THE SCHOOL ENTRANCE WITH A BUSHMASTER AR-15. Once inside the school, the gunman shot and killed 20 first-grade students and 6 Sandy Hook Elementary School staff members, including the school principal.

Before going to Sandy Hook Elementary School, the gunman shot and killed his mother within their Sandy Hook, Connecticut, residence. Once Newtown Police were notified of an active shooter within Sandy Hook Elementary School, all available Newtown police officers were dispatched to the school and surrounding communities were notified to send mutual aid. State and federal law enforcement agencies also responded to the school.

The first Newtown police officers arrived at the school within three minutes of being dispatched. Other Newtown police officers would arrive within seconds of them.

Tactically, Newtown police officers arrived at the front of the school and the rear of the school simultaneously, when they observed a male on the outside of the building near the rear of the school. Police were advised by dispatch prior to arriving that the shooter was possibly on the outside of the school; however, officers quickly determined that the male was not the gunman, but a parent looking to help his child who went to the school.

After arriving at the school, officers entered into the school from the rear and front of the school and were subsequently supported by other neighboring law enforcement officers who responded according to mutual aid protocols. It is believed that the gunman took his own life with another firearm upon the arrival of the police at the school.

The school was searched for victims, survivors, the gunman, and other threats. All students and staff were eventually evacuated from the school where they were led to the nearby Sandy Hook Volunteer Fire Department firehouse, which became the reunification location for students, staff, and families.

Investigators would determine that the gunman fired approximately 154 shots from the AR 15, and that he killed himself with a Glock handgun. All told, investigators cataloged four weapons the shooter took to the school.

What were the biggest challenges your agency faced? How did you address them?

Sandy Hook Elementary School is one of four public elementary schools within the Town of Newtown, Connecticut. The Newtown Police Department is a small police agency with 45 sworn officers. The challenges were numerous; most, if not all of the challenges, were issues that we were not adequately staffed to handle or that we were not accustomed to dealing with.

It should be noted that the critical incident itself, including the prompt response and elimination of the active shooter threat to an elementary school, was largely over within a couple of hours. The hours and days after the active critical incident would prove to be more challenging than the actual response to save lives and secure the school.

The early pressing and immediate job of reunification was the most challenging of all tasks. The reunification responsibilities that were encountered by police, school, and public officials were daunting. Parents and loved ones were notified early of a lockdown at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Once notified by the school district of the lockdown, parents and loved ones came to the school, impeding the early response of police and EMS personnel. Vehicles clogged existing rural roads, and parents began looking for their children (and for answers).

In the early stages of the response, personnel shortages didn't allow for the complete assignment of available and necessary law enforcement personnel to cover all tasks that had to be performed. Urgent tasks, such as the safe evacuation of more than 450 students and 45 faculty and staff, a proper search of the school and grounds for threats, creating and maintaining an inner and outer perimeter, traffic control issues, and immediate media infiltration into sensitive areas, needed to be attended to. In addition, managing the multitude of first responders from neighboring agencies required additional command resources not readily available.

The Sandy Hook Volunteer Firehouse (the designated reunification point) became a focal gathering point of parents and loved ones, interested persons, and local leaders as the evacuation of Sandy Hook Elementary was taking place. Very soon after the school had been declared safe to move students and staff, the firehouse bays became a meeting point between loved ones, children, and staff.

Local leaders, available school district staff and law enforcement personnel, including local school resource officers were



Children return to school four days after 20 children and six adults were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School, December 18, 2012. (John Moore/Getty Images)

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN RESPONDING TO MASS VIOLENCE EVENTS



By John Nicoletti,
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The psychological footprint of a mass violence event will be larger than the medical footprint, and the trauma of such an event will impact a number of groups:

- Entry teams
- Rescue responders
- Crime scene investigators
- Dispatch/call center personnel
- Public information officers
- Leadership
- Family members of officers, victims, and survivors

Recommendations

- Where possible, defusings should be provided to on-scene responders before they leave the area.
- If possible, the psychological response should be available from the incident beginning and last for several days.
- The early role of the mental health responders should be serving as the “Outboard Brain” for the on-scene responders.
- Another early role of mental health should be providing psychoeducation regarding the trauma syndrome.

tasked in a hurried fashion to coordinate the reunion of children with families. Management of worried family members and traumatized children while cataloguing the children being returned to their families became the priority.

Another challenge, just as important as the reunification piece of the puzzle, was the mental health and well-being of agency personnel. When a critical incident occurs, everyone—civilian and sworn, responding personnel or non-responding—is affected. The mental health concerns in the aftermath of a critical incident like the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting is a natural byproduct of law enforcement that permeates the organization, impacting everyone.

How did this incident impact agency dynamics? Did you make any changes or implement new policies/programs as a result of the incident?

Initially, the agency became a uniquely unified group with a common cause to get the jobs done. Over time, with some personnel struggling and others coping, natural divides occurred within the ranks. Many efforts were made to deal with the trauma endured by staff. One successful policy that was implemented was an allowance for officers to take time off without drawing from their allotted leave time.

Experts in the police mental health field were utilized to restore organizational unity, personal development and fitness, and a sense of normalcy. For a short time afterward, mandatory mental health and wellness checkups were implemented. All staff were encouraged to seek out and visit their own private mental health experts, as well.

Peer-to-peer teams and programs were formulated within the agency along with appropriate agency policies. Many mental health workshops, conferences, and retreats were offered to all staff.

Based on your experience, what are key strategies, protocols, and policies that agencies can implement right now that would help them respond to and recover from a mass violence incident?

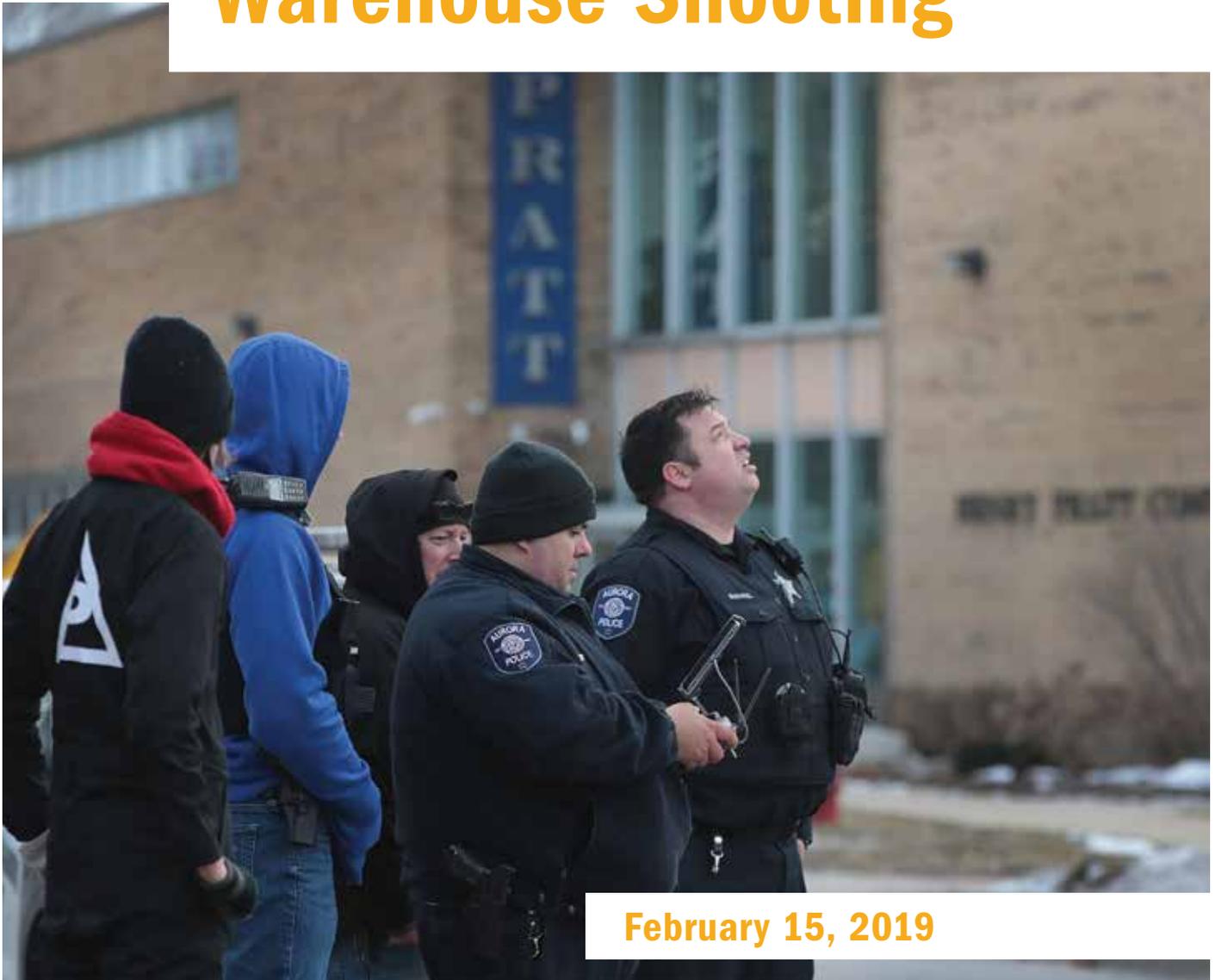
If law enforcement agencies are going to survive a critical incident such as a mass violence incident in their communities, they must have strong relationships with those agencies that will respond to a call for additional help. Chiefs and agency leaders must have the trust and strong personal relationships with other leaders to successfully navigate the aftermath of a critical incident.

Robust training policies are needed so that the agency personnel practice and train for mass violence events. Developing regional memoranda of understanding, in addition to implementing a regional mass violence incident command structure and response coordination, will go a long way in managing the initial response.

Enhance mental health policies and review them annually, so that if a critical incident should befall an agency and community, the agency is prepared to move forward with the needed mental health practices. Developing trusting relationships with police mental health providers ahead of time is critical to successful outcomes.

As a chief or agency leader, it is important that all personnel know that you care about them and their families. Meeting regularly with staff and with family members of staff to communicate available services and to address their concerns will go a long way in restoring a sense of normalcy. As soon as is practical, chiefs should also collaborate with union representatives to ensure unified messaging to the rank and file regarding all matters that concern membership.

Henry Pratt Manufacturing Warehouse Shooting



February 15, 2019

Police secure the area following a shooting at the Henry Pratt Company, February 15, 2019. (Scott Olsen/Getty Images)



BY
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ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2019, POLICE RESPONDED TO AN ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENT AT THE HENRY PRATT MANUFACTURING WAREHOUSE IN AURORA, ILLINOIS. The incident began early in the afternoon when the 45-year-old shooter, employed at the company for 15 years, arrived at work and was summoned to a meeting room to initiate termination proceedings. The shooter, predicting that the termination of his employment was imminent, brought a legally purchased .40 Smith & Wesson handgun to work.

At approximately 1:24 p.m., during the meeting, the offender drew his pistol and fatally wounded four of the six Henry Pratt employees present in the room. The other two individuals were able to escape alive. The shooter then exited the meeting room, where he killed one additional employee.

The 911 communications center received multiple reports from Henry Pratt employees beginning at 1:24 p.m., immediately following the first shooting. Dispatchers noted gunshots in the background during the calls. The first Aurora Police Department (APD) officers arrived within four minutes of the initial calls.

The initial officers on-scene entered the building at a southwest corner door. A second wave of officers arrived near door 14 on the north side of the building. The shooter opened fire on the officers from the vestibule as they approached door 14, striking one officer. The initial officers inside the building heard the shots and split up—two officers went upstairs to clear the office space and two officers headed out toward the sound of shots. The offender returned to the second story where the first victims had been shot and encountered the two officers, shooting one before retreating back downstairs.

The shooter again established himself in the vestibule of door 14, engaging officers attempting to rescue the injured officers in the parking lot. Five patrol officers approached door 14 at which time the offender fired upon the team and wounded three officers before retreating into the warehouse.

Four officers were nonfatally injured between 1:28 p.m. and 1:35 p.m. The injured officers were evacuated as more responders arrived and shooting continued. At approximately 1:52 p.m., the gunman retreated into the 290,000 square-foot warehouse, where he hid from officers.

The suspect was located by police over an hour after breaking contact. Police did not have access to blueprints of the warehouse and were unfamiliar with the layout of the large facility, which required an extensive search operation and a large number of responders to secure and hold areas of the building and evacuate employees. At 2:38 p.m., police located the shooter in a machine shop near the rear of the warehouse, which was his usual workspace.

Gunfire was exchanged, resulting in the death of the shooter. The entire incident duration was approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes.

What were the biggest challenges your agency faced? How did you address them?

Command Post and Incident Command: We established unified command with the fire department. With police and fire right next to each other with radios going off and people coming and going, it was too loud; each discipline separated to opposite sides of the mobile command vehicle. Police had one side, fire the other, with open communications with the city's emergency operations center and leadership in the middle.

Incident command could have co-located sooner to avoid fragmentation in decision-making. At one point, there was an Aurora command post and a nearby restaurant as a secondary command post, with many decisions made in assorted parking lots.

The mobile command vehicle was delayed in responding due to miscommunication in requesting it and not having a trained individual available to drive the vehicle on scene. Once the miscommunication was identified, it took some time for a trained driver to return from the inner perimeter of the scene to pick up the vehicle and head back to staging.

Communications: When it was identified that radio communications with other agencies would be an issue, we [command] had the foresight to put an APD officer on each rescue task force. In addition, in accordance with standing procedures, the fire chief designated a chief officer to go to dispatch to monitor radio communications and assist dispatchers with resource management. This individual proved to be critical for resource allocation and management.

Command shared regular updates on which areas were cleared and where victims were and communicated when the offender was pushed to the back of the building. Command also noted areas that had been pushed and held.

Forward Command: Some responders cited a need for a formal forward command position closer to the scene to direct resources. A presence closer to the scene could have clearly outlined the cold zone, warm zone, and hot zone, improving responder safety. In addition, there may have been better access control and accountability, considering how many responders self-deployed. Reportedly, there were both individuals and teams that entered without the knowledge of incident command.

There was an informal forward command presence close to the facility, where two police officers began to organize the officers that responded to the scene prior to the establishment of the staging area. These officers were tracking how many officers were making entry and how many were coming out. It was acknowledged by City of Aurora officials that there is a need to have better control of these operations in future incidents.

Injured Officers: When the police officers were injured, incident command needed to identify the officer, status, and where officers were heading. There was some confusion on which hospital each officer ultimately went to for medical care. Patient tracking became a difficult task, in addition to providing updates to relevant parties. In the future, the transport officer, as part of the EMS branch, will record officer information and be responsible for tracking patient movement.

How did this incident impact agency dynamics? Did you make any changes or implement new policies/programs as a result of the incident?

A new procedure was formulated to isolate the incident command post, especially early in a response. Some reported that the influx of personnel made it difficult to coordinate and distracted unified command from the mission.

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH VICTIMS OF MASS CASUALTY EVENTS



By Max Schachter,
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shooting victim Alex
Schachter, Founder
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Safe Schools for Alex

- “If you need anything give me a call” might not produce the response you are looking for. Victims’ families don’t know what they need initially. Offer a suite of services you can provide for them.
- Utilize lessons learned from past tragedies to guide victims, e.g., “The victims of x tragedy did this or they found this beneficial.”
- Reach out to victims’ family members on a regular basis so they know they are not forgotten. Text them first and ask if you can visit them—face-to-face contact is always better.
- Delayed communication to victims’ families contributes to a lack of trust. Don’t hesitate to communicate for fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. Do not let that delay your outreach.
- Set up a communication method for the victims’ families to assist them in communicating with each other (e.g., Slack).
- Law enforcement and community efforts should be proactive and victim centric. All events and engagements should be vetted by the victims’ families FIRST. They know best how they feel and how they want their loved ones remembered.
- Victim advocates should meet the families in their homes, as opposed to the families traveling to a central location.
- Never assume victims’ family members have everything they need and do not need your assistance based on their financial status or legal representation.

REFRAMING OUR LANGUAGE

Don’t Say:	Instead, Say:
Anniversary	One month, six-month mark One-year mark, two-year mark, commemorate their life, remember who they are, etc.
Trigger	Activate
Execute	Facilitate, organize
Lost (for victims)	Killed, murdered
Event, incident	Tragedy

A standard operating procedure (SOP) was developed for coordinating with external jurisdictions and regional liaisons, with the goal of ensuring effective communications and minimizing the number of people at the incident command post.

We updated our policy on police actions during officer-involved shootings to include contacting the hospital’s public information officer (PIO), discussing hospital security, and intercepting media, as appropriate. Triage tags will be used in the future to track patients and identities.

We also updated SOPs to establish a line of direct and consistent communication between the PIO on scene (in this case, APD PIO) and the city’s communications director to encourage effective communications coordination.

Based on your experience, what are key strategies, protocols, and policies that agencies can implement right now that would help them respond to and recover from a mass violence incident?

Training. Training. Training. Prior to the incident, the City of Aurora and surrounding jurisdictions’ responding agencies invested time and resources to develop preparedness and response capabilities, specifically their capacities to respond to an active shooter incident. Integrated training across disciplines, agencies, and jurisdictions enabled them to develop strong working relationships and improved joint operations.

Invest in Equipment. Prior to the incident, the Aurora Police had invested in various equipment and policies that same year:

- Purchased pelican cases, emphasizing the ability to rapidly deploy;
- Issued diversionary devices and 9-Bangs to all operators to ensure availability in the field and conducted trainings for breaking/pushing contact through deployment;
- Purchased new armor and helmets, renewed emphasis on shield use, purchased four new pistol shields and four new rifle shields;
- Added marking using light sticks;
- Purchased training bolts and pistols;
- Implemented a new mass notification system (EVERBRIDGE); and
- Enacted policy to ensure that BearCat keys are accessible to all operators.

Aurora invested in tools and training in advance of this incident because we understood the importance of preparing for the unthinkable. Active shooter response training not only provided officers the operational skills they utilized that fatal day but also the mindset to pursue the shooter despite the risk to their own lives. ♡