

Police and Civilian Response to an Active Shooter

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On August 31st, 2019 at 3:17pm a traffic stop was conducted by two Texas State Troopers, with the Texas Department of Public Safety, because the actor failed to use a turning signal. Once the two troopers were at his window, the actor grabbed a rifle and shot at the Troopers injuring one of them. After the actor fled the scene he began shooting at cars passing by on one of the busiest interstates in west Texas, I-20. The deranged man then began to drive through the City of Odessa shooting at random people and vehicles while leading Law Enforcement from different agencies on a high speed pursuit. The actor then executed a Postal Service worker and stole her USPS van and continued shooting at cars passing by. The actor then entered a movie theater parking lot where two police officers, one from Odessa Tx and one from Midland Tx shot and killed the actor. As a result of this tragedy, a total of 8 people were killed including the actor and 25 people were injured including 3 police officers.

Active shooters have become a huge problem in the US. Many people are unsure on what to do in the event of an active shooter. To get a better understanding of police response to an active shooter situation, I spoke with my mother, Sgt. Vasquez with the UTPB Police department, and Sgt. Upchurch with the ECISD Police department to get their input on police response to active shooters, mainly focusing on the August 31st shooting. Many people don't see what happens on the law enforcement side of things when there is an active shooter. When such a tragedy occurs, every officer responds regardless if they are on or off duty. For example, during the August 31st shooting both, Sgt. Vasquez and Sgt. Upchurch we're off duty but responded to the scene to assist officers and stop the threat.

Sgt. Vasquez and my dad, Deputy McCrury with the Ector County Sheriff's office were both off duty and at home with my family the day of the shooting. When they were made aware of what was happening, I remember they quickly changed into their uniforms and grabbed their kevlar vests and ran out the front door kissing us goodbye. They responded to where the active shooter was said to be at the time in order to eliminate the threat, as did so many other officers from all agencies. When Law Enforcement Officers respond to active shooters, their first priority is to stop the threat. This means their first priority is to stop the killing by any means necessary. The second priority is the preservation of life meaning checking for victims and getting them medical treatment. This could mean getting them medics or giving them first aid until the medics arrive on scene. On August 31st, 2019 Officers were loading victims into their units to transport them to the hospital themselves because there simply were not enough ambulances to accommodate the amount of victims from the shooting. The final priority for law enforcement is evidence preservation. Once the threat has been eliminated, the victims have been identified and provided medical attention, evidence must be preserved and the scene maintained for actor identification and prosecution if necessary. When a Peace Officer is sworn in and that badge pinned on their chest, they vow that their life is second to all others. When an incident arises

that requires someone to lay their life on the line to protect others, Law Enforcement responds, reacts, and neutralizes the threat at any cost, including their own life.

When I spoke with Sgt. Upchurch he informed that police officers go to about 4-8 active shooter training sessions a year. They use information from previous shootings to help eliminate any future mistakes from happening. Training for police officers really helps them keep up with the constantly changing environment. [HERE](#) is where you can find a video of an active shooter training that Sgt. Vasquez and officers from other agencies attended, which the ECISD police department hosted to train for single officer response to active shooters.

When speaking with Sgt. Upchurch and Sgt. Vasquez, they both agreed that civilians should be better prepared for active shooter situations. The public needs the correct knowledge on what to do and where to go in the event of an active shooter. Our local police department, Odessa police department (OPD) has a program called [CRASE](#) (civilian response to active shooter events). OPD created this program after the realization not everyone knows what to do during the attack of an active shooter. In that class civilians are taught what their options are and how to respond, in order to be better prepared.

Civilians can attend training such as the one provided by the Odessa Police Department or an ALERRT or active shooter training by a private entity. Civilians who are also licensed to carry and choose to do it responsibly can help stop the threat before the closest officer can respond to the scene and prevent others from getting injured. An example would be the Indiana Greenwood Park Mall shooting [HERE](#) is where you can find the article for that incident. However, civilians who are not comfortable intervening, should pay attention to their surroundings and know where every exit is upon entering and make a plan and practice with their family. They should also discuss with their family the difference between cover and concealment. Cover will stop live rounds from penetrating through it, whereas concealment obscures the shooter's line of sight between you and them but provides no ballistic protection. In conclusion, law enforcement can never have too much training to be better prepared for an active shooter situation and civilians, if properly prepared, can help save their own lives and possibly the lives of others.