



SITREP

Aurora

D·PREP

Target: Screening of *The Dark Knight Rises*

Location: Aurora, CO

Date: July 20, 2012

Attacker: 24m

Victims: 12 Killed, 58 Injured

Case Summary

At the start of the midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises*, the attacker left the theater, propping open the door behind him. He returned a few minutes later dressed in head-to-toe protective gear and deployed two tear gas canisters into the theater. He then opened fire, killing twelve and injuring 58. He surrendered to police outside the theater. The police found a package addressed to his psychiatrist that contained a notebook with details of his attack plan and his obsession with killing, as well as booby traps and multiple IEDs.

Team Leadership

One of the lessons learned from this attack was the importance of having team leadership align with national standards. BIT/CARE and threat chairs are often the chief student affairs officer, dean of students or conduct officer. In a co-chair system, there should be clear policy, procedure and practice guidelines to ensure areas of responsibility are well defined. BIT/CARE and threat teams are governed primarily by FERPA and team communications should be understood in this capacity. When mental health professionals chair a team, there is a danger of seeing the information sharing under state confidentiality law or privilege, which is a more restrictive standard of communication.

Further Reading: [Ending Campus Violence](#) by Dr. Brian Van Brunt; DPrep Safety's [Behavioral Intervention, CARE & Threat Assessment Team Audit Tool](#)

Collaborative Multidisciplinary Teams

Teams work best when they include membership from a variety of core campus areas including student conduct, counseling, and police/campus safety. Leaving any of these three core areas off the team severely limits the ability of the team to accurately view the elements of a case from a variety of viewpoints. In addition to these three areas, teams should include members from residential life (as applicable), health services, athletics, ADA/504 accommodations, Title IX, human resources, and faculty representation. Teams should operate in the range of 8-12 members, with weekly or bi-weekly meetings.

Catalyst Events

As with many threat cases, the attacker's environmental stressors that serve as triggers, catalysts or escalators toward violent action should be identified and monitored in cases that are deemed higher risk. Catalyst events can include the loss of academic major or career potential, the loss of an intimate relationship, the death of a loved one, termination from a job, suspension or expulsion from an academic program, the diagnosis of a terminal/chronic disease, loss or change in therapy or medical options/treatment, financial distress, or loss of housing. If more than one of these occur, this increases the level of concern. In this case, the attacker failed a key oral exam on June 7th and dropped out of his program of study. In a rare example of clarity on this issue, the attacker writes, "people would erroneously believe that failures with women or with jobs led to...the rampage. Both failures were expediting catalysts, not the reason. My causation being my state of mind for the past 15 years."

Further Reading: [*Understanding and Treating Incels*](#) by Drs. Brian Van Brunt and Chris Taylor

Leakage and Legacy Token

Leakage in an attack is the intentional or unintentional sharing of attack details prior to the violent action. A legacy token is a manifesto or explanation of the attackers motivations and/or reasons for the attack. Attackers often deliver a this legacy token in the hours prior to the attack. In this shooting, there was some inaccurate reporting that a notebook detailing the attacker's thinking and plans was mailed a month prior to the attack. In reality, it arrived in the mail room addressed to the attacker's psychiatrist on the day of the attack. The Isle Vista attack, El Paso shooting, Virginia Tech massacre, and Collier County shooting at an LA Fitness all involve token legacies shared at the moment of attack.

Further Reading: [*An Educator's Guide to Assessing Threats in Student Writing: Social Media, Email, and other Narrative*](#) by Brian Van Brunt, W. Scott Lewis, and Jeffrey H. Solomon

Weapons Acquisition

Determining access to firearms, incendiary devices or other weapons is an essential part of assessing the lethality and actionability of an attack plan when conducting a violence risk or threat assessment. In this case, the attacker acquired high capacity magazines and weapons immediately following the failure of his oral exam. The acquisition of weapons occurred immediately prior to the attack in the Uvalde shooting and the El Paso attack. In the Norway attack, weapons were acquired over time. These attacks also involved the acquisition of ammunition and para-military protective/tactical gear. In coordination with the BIT/CARE team and law enforcement, campus mail room staff should receive training in, and develop a protocol for, responding to suspicious packages.