



Active Armed June 2024 Offenders CORE42

Preamble

This paper has been produced by Define42 Pty Ltd (T/A Core42).

We have compiled information from a variety of sources as a quick reference for the planning for, and response to, Active Armed Offender Incidents. We do not consider this paper to be comprehensive advice as every organisation, facility, and site is different and requires methodical and comprehensive planning to ensure security planning is fit for purpose.

We have provided this paper as a reference guide only.

We acknowledge the horrific incidents that have recently occurred in Bondi and Wakeley, and our thoughts go out to the victims and families affected.

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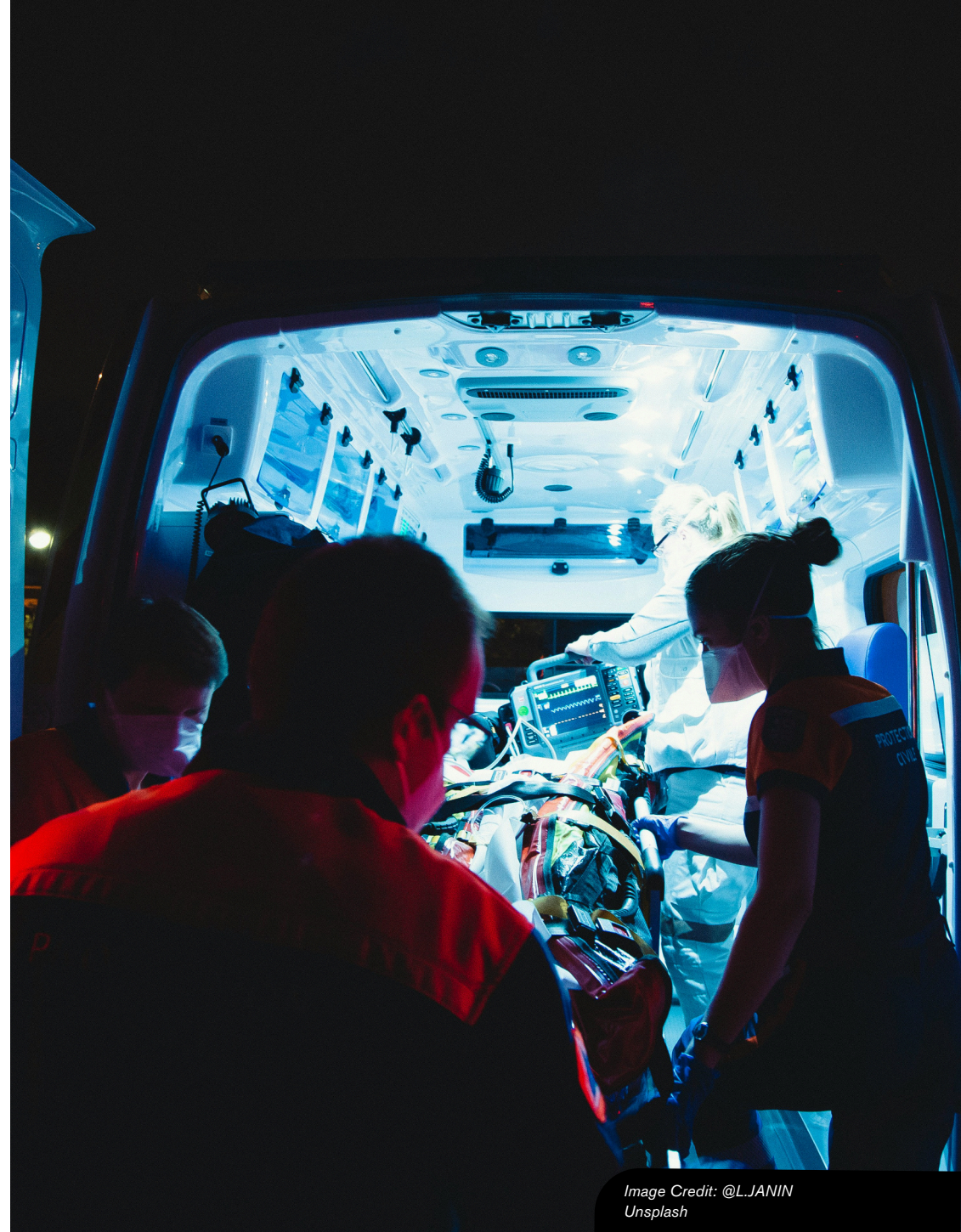


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Unsplash

Core42's View

The complexity of Active Armed Offender incidents in Australia and overseas demonstrates that no two acts are alike. Motivating factors can be clear cut in the case of more traditional religiously or ideologically motivated extremism, or unclear, where other contributing factors and no inherent belief system is present.

Core42 consider Active Armed Offender incidents in Australia as one of the most complex attack typologies to effectively prepare for, and respond to. This complexity is fuelled by the tumultuous and complex threat environment—attacks can be inspired through a variety of communication pathways, and successful attacks can fuel follow on incidents within short time spans.

The below trends provide some insight into this complexity; security professionals at all levels must be cognisant of the broader social and societal pressures facing those at-risk of radicalisation, mental health breaks, and generally violent behaviours.

Post COVID-19 Mental Health Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns caused significant psychological stress on the population of Australia. The ongoing effects of this event are still being explored by the literature, with some initial studies indicating a trend of decreases in psychological well-being for children and adolescence, alongside other age groups. More mental health problems, such as heightened stress, depressive and anxiety symptoms are prevalent. This is further compounded by increases in PTSD symptoms due to lockdowns, including impacts to emotional regulation.

While these trends are not definitively tied to increases in violent behaviour, it seems possible that those already prone to outbursts of violent or aggressive behaviour, or who were in the process of radicalisation, could have been further pushed into a more fragile and vulnerable position.

Cost of Living Crisis

Some studies indicate that insecure life attachments (i.e., experience of safety, inclusiveness, reliability, fairness, and facilitating well-being) can lead to extremism and radicalisation. Within the context of a cost of living crisis in Australia, alongside housing insecurity, the likelihood of violent outbursts and extremist behaviour is likely to increase.

As a systemic literature review conducted by Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality in 2018 noted:

"Countries with a higher percentage of people living in poverty were more likely to be targets of transnational terrorist attacks, while interregional inequality appears to be related to a higher incidence of domestic terrorism ... Higher perceived inequality was related to more radicalised attitudes in different contexts, regardless of the ideological orientation of radicalisation."

Consequently, it is Core42's view, that the current cost of living crisis, paired with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 lockdowns and associated global impacts to mental health, ongoing violence and extreme views are expected in the Australian community. These view are becoming more likely to be acted upon as stressors develop that cause fragmentation and division within the community. As social cohesion erodes, vulnerable individuals may search for significance in fringe spaces, where they are more likely to encounter the extreme and become vulnerable to radicalisation.

Media Speculation and Incendiary Commentary Online

During and after attacks of any type, including Active Armed Offender attacks, communications should be handled with great care and sensitivity. As has been demonstrated in recent events, speculation regarding the motivation behind an attack can be incendiary to the community and may lead to copy-cat style incidents.

Unfounded speculation of an attackers background, ethnicity, and motivations may lead to the isolation and stigmatisation of certain community members, which can contribute to a cycle of violence and radicalisation. In worst-case scenarios, this could drive vulnerable individuals towards extremist ideologies and potentially lead them to commit AAO attacks or terrorist acts themselves.

To prevent this, the media response to an event should be closely monitored alongside social media responses. If the information being disseminated by the media and commented on social media is

incendiary to certain community groups, short term threats could include follow-up attacks, protests, or riots.

Organisations should monitor for ongoing community backlash against hasty and non-evidence based speculation, and consider longer term impacts on vulnerable members of targeted communities.

Continuing Radicalisation Online

As the Director General of ASIO has advised publicly, there is an ongoing trend of online radicalisation, particularly of minors in Australia. The speed of radicalisation through online platforms is increasing, reducing the time it takes for a potential offender to become aware of a particular ideology, adopt it's viewpoint, and then committing violence in pursuit of that ideologies objectives and goals.

Individuals in the radicalisation process are generally younger males, under that age of 35. The current caseload for ASIO in Australia for individuals who are 16 years and younger is increasing.

Online radicalisation is further increasing with regard to extreme nationalism and right-wing terror in Australia.

Concluding Thoughts

The security environment continues to become more complex and unpredictable. Preceding factors to significant security incidents such as Active Armed Offender attacks are multi-faceted, global, and ever-changing. The need to be cognisant of global trends and how they may impact local community members is more important than ever.

Continued focus on planning, exercising, and investing in key security infrastructure to enable rapid response and situational awareness is vital.

While we believe that the continuation of violence in the Australian community is likely to continue over the longer term, we are not of the view that that there is an imminent crisis of active armed offender attacks just over the horizon.

While media speculation and online security media personalities will continue to push the 'hype' regarding knife crime trends and similar crime crisis narratives, Core42 notes that the criminal data collected by a variety of Government, and academic sources do not support this narrative at the present time. Youth knife crime continues to be an evolving area of focus, however overall knife crime is at 20-year lows in some states.



ESCAPE. HIDE. TELL.

Image Credit: Australian Government

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Active Armed Offenders

An Active Armed Offender is defined as an armed person or persons who is actively engaged in harming or attempting to harm people, and who has demonstrated their intention to continue to do so.

Active Armed Offender Attack Typology

Active Armed Offender (AAO) attacks continue to be one of the most common tactics adopted by terrorists and other criminals worldwide, partly due to the relative ease of access to weapons, including edged weapons and firearms, although firearm availability varies between countries.

In Australia, terrorist attacks are likely to be low-cost, utilising readily available weapons and simple tactics. The combination of weapons such as knives, vehicles, and firearms with simple tactics can maximise casualties. Australia is not immune to AAO attacks.

Internationally, several attacks targeting shopping centres, universities, and public spaces have been disrupted, and locally, recent events show the ability for lone actors to carry out this threat. AAO attacks may not be technical in nature and particularly in the case of a lone attacker, there may be no or very little indication that an attack is imminent.

The stabbing incidents at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction on the 13th of April, 2024, and the Wakeley Church attack on the 15th of April, 2024, demonstrate that AAO attacks, irrespective of motivation, remain a real threat to the Australian community.

An AAO attempting to inflict maximum casualties within the shortest time will typically target crowded places with the highest concentration of people. This was evident in the Westfield Shopping Centre attack, where six people were stabbed to death, and 12 people were hospitalised. In contrast, the Wakeley Church attack was an ideologically-motivated AAO incident in which a teenager stabbed a bishop multiple times.

01. CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ACTIVE ARMED OFFENDER INCIDENT

In Australia, an active armed offender attack is most likely to be carried out by a lone attacker with vehicles, knives, and improvised weapons, partly due to the limited availability of firearms.

Motivation

Active Armed Offenders may subscribe to a variety of religious, political, or other belief systems that has resulted in radicalised behaviour. Mental health may be a significant contributing factor to the attackers' motivation. Insider threats, such as disgruntled employees may also perpetrate AAO incidents against their employer.

Methodology

Attackers may be lone attackers, multiple attackers, or multiple groups of attackers. Subsequently, AAO incidents can vary significantly in the way they present to a location. Attackers may:

- Arrive to the location on foot, in a vehicle, or the attack may be perpetrated by insiders.
- Enter without using force, or forcing entry using an explosive device, a vehicle, coercion of someone with access, or a combination of these.
- Be armed with firearms, edged weapons like knives, or improvised weapons.

Target Choice

- Incidents often occur in crowded places where the offender has access to many potential victims.
- In the case of disgruntled employees or insider threats, the target is likely to be their place of work.
- Offenders not motivated by a specific belief system may target a specific group, or uncrowded location based on situational factors such as personal grievances.

***Every
second
counts.***

Planning

Offenders may conduct reconnaissance close to target and plan the attack

Preparation

Offenders may travel to a quiet location near the target, make ready and wait

Approach

Offenders travel to the target to begin the attack

Initial Attack

Offenders attack their target, causing casualties

Continuation

Offender searches for more victims. A Siege may occur.

Conclusion

Arrest, death or escape of the Offender

Attack Timeline

- Most incidents will evolve rapidly.
- Events can be as short as two-minutes in duration.
- Most incidents will not be effectively resolved peacefully.
- Most deaths occur quickly before police can respond.
- The incident may evolve into a hostage situation after police arrive.

Planning for Active Armed Offenders

While it is not possible to prevent all incidents, implementing preventive measures and strategies through the design of your premises, staff training and response planning can reduce the likelihood and impact of Active Armed Offender (AAO) attacks.

Proactive steps in the areas of business continuity, physical design, security technology, response planning, and exercises can create a comprehensive approach to deter, detect, delay, and respond to the impact of an AAO attack.

By integrating these elements and regularly reviewing and updating them based on evolving threats, organisations can enhance their resilience and preparedness.

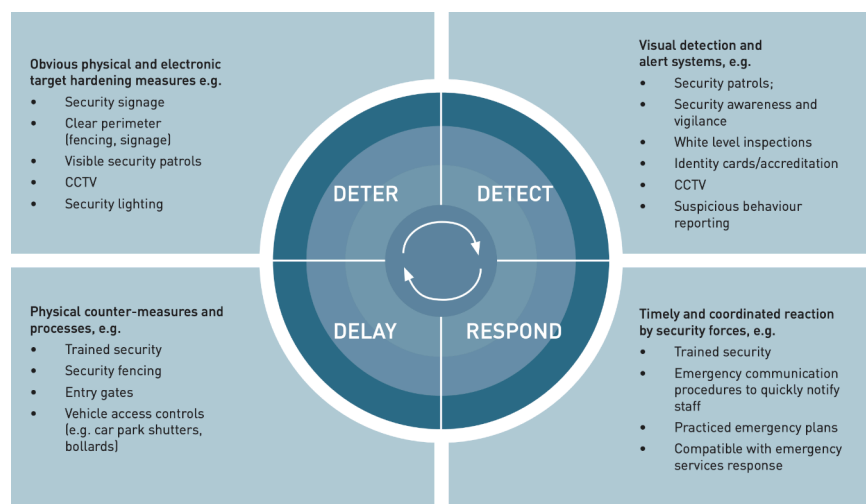


Figure. Deter, Detect, Delay, Response Cycle reproduced from Australia's Strategy for Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism (2023)

01. DESIGN OF YOUR PREMISES

Traditional security strategies such as target hardening and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) can significantly enhance the security of a specific site.

Active armed offenders can be attracted to a site when deterred by the robust security measures at their initial target; deciding to focus on a "softer" target with fewer security barriers.

While security hardening may not completely prevent an AAO attack, it can play a crucial role in assisting with response and recovery efforts. A well-designed physical security system can detect an attack early, slow down the attacker's progress, and provide valuable information to first responders, which can minimise the impact of the incident.

The following activities are recommended within the context of an organisations premises to determine the adequacy and appropriate design of physical protection measures.

Risk and Vulnerability Assessments

- A risk and vulnerability assessment specifically considering AAO should be undertaken.
- Assess the site and surroundings from an attacker's perspective to identify potential access points, crowded areas, and other vulnerabilities. Consider all operating modes (day/night, event/non-event mode etc)
- Consider the site's risk profile based on factors like location, symbolic nature, and crowds. Complete the ANZCTC Crowded Places Self-Assessment.

Detection and Event Notification

- CCTV systems should be designed to enable holistic protection of a premises perimeter and public areas.
- Detecting unusual behaviour such as sudden crowd surges, fall detection, and other events should be enabled through analytic technologies.
- Event detection processes should be reviewed for adequacy, an understanding of information flow from the system to the operator, and the operators escalation pathway should be clearly understood under a variety of operating conditions.
- Determine how these event detection and communication processes tie in with public warning and emergency systems.

- Ensure the Security Control Room is of appropriate configuration, size, and ergonomic design to enable effective operator response.
- The Security Control Room technology fit out should be easy to use, especially under high stress working environments.
- The Security Control Room should be physically secure to enable operators to focus on carrying out their duties.
- The PA-Emergency warning system should to be accessible and usable from the security control room.
- The electronic access control system should be configuration to allow site wide and configuration lockdown. Controls to enable this lockdown should be located in security control room.

Delay

- The use of physical barriers, such as bollards, gates, card readers, security doors, etc. should be used to restrict vehicle and unauthorised personnel access.
- Fences, walls, and other physical barriers to limit the movement of the attacker and protect crowds.
- Reinforced doors that can be quickly locked should be considered to allow people to quickly enter a room and lock the door.

Evacuation

- Have multiple evacuation routes that lead people away from the site, not to a single area.
- Ensure evacuation routes have adequate capacity for the crowd size.
- Use signage, maps, and visual cues to help people orient and find exits.

It is noted that this list is not exhaustive and should only be considered as key areas of consideration for initial investigation of your security arrangements.

Overall, the integration of physical design and security systems is crucial in reducing the impact of AAO attacks. Effective evacuation and response can only be supported through good design and early notification.

02. TRAINING AND RESPONSE

The response of staff on the ground during an AAO incident can be the major difference between limiting casualties and ending the event as quickly as possible, and losing control of the situation. Staff training to ensure their ability to respond in such an extreme incident is vital and can take many forms.

From incident detection and reporting, through to knowing where and how to evacuate, where to find first aid kits, and how to hide or secure a safe area can significantly reduce the impact of an AAO event.

During an AAO event, and under Work Health Safety Law, the interception or confrontation of an attacker by trained security officers is problematic. Employers cannot direct individuals to put themselves in immediate danger of harm. Training should therefore focus on how to preserve human life and reduce casualties until police arrive, without the need for direct intervention with the offender.

Promote a Strong Security Culture

- Encourage all staff to prioritise and take responsibility for security.
- Provide clear security policies and procedures and make sure staff understand them.
- Motivate staff to remain alert, report suspicious activity, and take quick action during an incident.

Regularly Practice Response Procedures

- Have specific plans for responding to an AAO, including evacuation, lockdown, communication, etc.
- Clearly document and communicate these procedures to all staff members.
- Conduct regular exercises to practice procedures and identify areas for improvement.
- Ensure staff are aware of the 'Escape, Hide, Tell' framework.

Train Staff to Recognise an Attack

- Pre-event awareness is crucial for preventing and mitigating AAO attacks.
- Implement proactive measures to identify threats and vulnerabilities and enhance security posture.
- Ensure staff members understand their specific role and actions to take during an AAO incident, e.g. the receptionist, security staff, and

general staff members. However, provide more in-depth training for security staff and those with key response roles.

Have a Lockdown Procedure

- Develop, train, and practice the lockdown plan/procedure regularly to quickly restrict access and movement within the site.
- Identify safe shelter locations and ensure they can be secured.

Enable Quick Notification to Police and with the Public

- Allocate responsibility for managing communication during an incident.
- Ensure all contact information is up to date and the receiver of the communication is aware of the reporting arrangements.

Evacuation Routes and Triage/First Aid Locations

- Ensure staff are familiar with emergency evacuation routes.
- Designate an area to quickly assess casualties and provide first aid.
- Keep necessary first aid supplies and train select staff members on causality assessment and trauma care.
- Ensure first responders are aware of where they should arrive on site.

Empower Frontline Staff to Make Quick Decisions

- Train and allow frontline staff to make critical decisions based on their immediate situation, rather than awaiting instructions.
- Provide clear decision-making guidelines but allow flexibility to react to dynamic circumstances.

Coordinate Response Plans with Emergency Services

- Involve local law enforcement and emergency services in developing and reviewing response plans.
- Understand the response procedures and capabilities of first responders.
- Establish communication channels and protocols to coordinate the response during an incident.

Review and Test Security Plans

- A security plan should cover prevention, detection, and response actions for various scenarios.
- Assign roles and responsibilities between staff members.
- Based on updated threat information one should regularly review and test the security plan through exercises.

Systematic planning and frequent, realistic training are essential to ensure that staff members can react quickly and take appropriate actions during a potential AAO attack. The response must be quick, decisive, and well-coordinated to minimise casualties.

Further considerations around business continuity, public relations and communication, site shutdown, investigation, and forensics should be built in to the organisations plans for AAO events. Desktop exercises, alongside live exercises can provide the most insight into where your organisation should focus it's attention to ensure resilience against these types of security events.

THE DYNAMIC AND UNPREDICTABLE NATURE OF ACTIVE
ARMED OFFENDER INCIDENTS MEANS THERE IS NO SINGLE
BEST PRACTICE.

PREPARING FOR AN ACTIVE ARMED OFFENDER CAN
PREPARE YOUR ORGANISATION FOR A VARIETY OF
SECURITY EVENTS.

PLAN, TEST, AND EXERCISE TO DETERMINE WHAT WORKS
FOR YOUR ORGANISATION.

***Plan Now.
Save Lives.***

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We are evidence led, built environment specialists who are committed to helping our clients enable and protect their business and operations.

Our aim is to simplify the complex security environment into actionable advice, allowing you to deliver successful and safe projects that address security threats, risks and vulnerability without sacrificing design aspirations.

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