



School shootings: preparing for violence

Ashland University updates its emergency communication protocol



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This massive candlelight vigil is for 32 people who lost their lives to Seung-Hui Cho on April 16, 2007, during what has been dubbed the Virginia Tech Massacre, the second deadliest shooting in U.S. history.

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Mass shootings are typically a sensitive subject, especially in schools, but being aware of how to respond in such a situation and knowing what resources will be around to help can help increase chances of survival.

David McLaughlin, AU's safety services director, said the safety committee is currently in the works of a plan to orient faculty better, should an emergency situation occur on campus.



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The memorial at Burruss hall represents a commitment to never forget the lives lost in a deadly shooting.

He said in the past Safety Services has held faculty meetings on the subject, but what they are working on now would go beyond that.

"We do new employee orientations for faculty and administrators and staff that come in through the HR office," he said. "But as far as things like emergency response for an active shooter, that's the one that we're working on right now."

As a part of these reworkings, the safety committee has been working to revamp the evacuation and shelter plans across campus.

"In fact, this is a project that we started a long time ago and we have it for every building on campus, including every floor too," he said. "So, our primary goal is to have this done before the Christmas break and have all the buildings have these posted."

Once this process has been completed, McLaughlin described another security measure that is in the works to update the locks in the classrooms across campus.

"All the doors will lock, but if you're a professor in a class and you don't have a key that door, you may not be able to lock it," he said. "We're looking at devices to help us in that regard too."

Once the doors have seen their overhaul, McLaughlin hopes to create a mock active shooter scenario around campus. He said that such an event has been orchestrated at AU before, but the university is overdue for another run of it.

The situation prompts people in the buildings to consider how they would react in such situations and promote a new way of responding to crisis scenarios than what has been taught around campus be-

fore.

Safety would also like to record the demonstration as a means to train future AU staff.

"The paradigm shift has been from you hunker down in a shelter place and you wait for the SWAT team," McLaughlin said. "But now in regards to this type of emergency, we've got all types of emergencies that we go over, but with an active shooter it's as simple as Run, Hide, Fight."

Run, Hide, Fight is the current procedure for public safety in an active shooter situation.

those in an active shooter situation until the police are able to arrive and take over.

In the situation of an active shooter at AU, McLaughlin said the emergency protocol would take effect immediately. This would put the Executive Director of Facilities Management and Planning in charge as the incident commander, who will coordinate the response to the attack. There are also other positions in place to advise the incident commander on policy, public relations, providing and finding out more information and giving

at your cell phone, that you're paying attention to your surroundings whenever you're out and about, especially if you're walking alone, see if you can walk with a friend, or call for a escort. We do escorts 24/7 here, and I encourage people to use that service. I encourage people to lock their doors."

He recommends residents take regular practice in locking their doors to prevent burglaries, to practice spatial awareness and most importantly, he said that if anyone ever sees anything suspicious or out of the ordinary, to contact Safety Services directly. Hearing about a problem from first-hand witnesses helps them to try and solve the problem a lot quicker.

Freshman Anessa Berry practices being prepared with her cell phone while walking across campus.

"Most people hold their phones nowadays," she said. "Everybody's been stressing that if you need help, put Safety Services in your phone so it's in there and you have it. They're doing what they can. They can put cameras in buildings, but that can only be a precaution."

In an emergency situation, McLaughlin said Safety would send out an Eagle Alert, which is AU's text message alert system, to update as many students as possible.

"In the event of an emergency, whether it's a disturbance on campus or, God forbid, an active shooter, or even a weather emergency, typically the first thing we do is send out the text," McLaughlin said. "They're great. They're like tweets, so you're limited to the number of characters you can send out, so sometimes we have to send

these Eagle Alerts because there have been times when people say 'Ah, I didn't get it,' but they didn't sign up for it, so we encourage everybody, including parents, to make sure that they sign up for the Eagle Alerts," McLaughlin said.

Students are not automatically added to the Eagle Alert register when they come to the university, rather they have to sign up through the AU Safety Services website.

Junior Cindy Karamol is not sure if she is signed up for the alert system.

"I don't know how to do it. I'm not going to lie, it sounds bad," Karamol said. "I feel like if I did it, I wouldn't know because I haven't gotten any texts, but I don't think that I've done it yet because I haven't gotten any alerts or anything."

To be added to the list, text 79516 with the location of the campus you would like to receive notifications from. The options of locations are: AUMain, AUSEm, AUCinci, AUClev, AUCols, AUEly, AUMans, AUMed, AUSTark and AUDet.

These text messages are not the limit of Safety's communication to the AU community, according to the university's Emergency Operations Plan.

The AU main campus and the Ashland Theological Seminary campus both have intercom systems in place to notify people in the area aware of news that needs to be delivered immediately. Buildings on the main campus with certain fire alarm systems also have intercoms built in.

Other means by which AU intends to spread information should the appropriate incident arise are through the university website,



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Virginia Tech had to pay fines of almost \$33,000 to the Department of Education because the university violated the Clery Act, a law requiring post secondary institutions to provide timely notification relating to campus safety.

In terms of what to do in any situation where a person on campus feels like they are not safe and secure on campus, McLaughlin encouraged people in the AU community to contact Safety Services.

"What I would tell students is to make sure that to make sure you have your cell phone handy," he said. "Make sure you're not looking

out a couple of them to get out a little bit more of a package of what's going on."

While the system is up-to-date, the Eagle Alerts still have their drawbacks.

"The limitation with Eagle Alerts is that it's one of those opt in programs that we're trying to get it where more people are getting

school email, electronic message boards on screens throughout campus, meetings, posters, television stations and radio stations.

"So have our number programed in it and of course, call 911 if there's an emergency," McLaughlin said. "But when somebody sees something suspicious, say something, that's the number one thing."