



A duty to stop the threat

Grand Rapids PD sponsors critical response training

BY PAM DOWELL

Editor's note: Pam Dowell, freelance writer, was not paid by the Herald-Review to cover the ALICE training but provided the following as a citizen participant.

On Sept. 21, 2022, a nationwide "pranking" trend referred to as "swatting" hit 15 areas in Minnesota, covering schools from rural to the metro. The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension reported the prank phone calls alleging the threat of violence in an attempt to bring a large law enforcement response to a particular location.

The Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) had been alerted that morning by the BCA to the specifics of the earlier calls that prompted panic and fear in the early morning hours for several schools around the

state. Within an hour of the notice, the GRPD received the same prank call that had manifested earlier in Rochester, Minn., where law enforcement arrived at Lourdes High School within four minutes, with full evacuation in less than 30 minutes.

Captain Andy Morgan, GRPD, said the department recognized the caller, assessed the threat, and engaged a modified response to verify prank vs. real-life. Morgan said with schools re-opening after the Covid-19 closings – the dept. decided to act rapidly in providing critical response training for new area officers and offer refresher training to other law enforcement officers and first responders.

The critical response/active shooter training was held on Sept. 27 and 29, with the academic portion held at the Grand Rapids Fire Department.

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The tactical field training was held at the (former) Southwest Elementary School, which had been staged for several practice scenarios. Members of the GRPD Police Citizens Advisory Board, area chaplains, and School District 318 representatives were also invited to participate in the training, as persons who may find themselves in a position to assist and/or rescue.

Sometimes referred to as the “duty to rescue,” the Minnesota Good Samaritan Law requires citizens to offer assistance to anyone facing grave peril or physical harm from any kind of emergency, a situation demanding immediate action. However, in contrast, perhaps confusing, the law does not require citizens to put themselves in harm’s way.

The US Supreme Court decided in 1981 in the case *Warren v. District of Columbia*, that the police do not owe a specific duty to provide police services to specific citizens based on the public duty doctrine. In short, the duty to provide public services is provided to the public at large (general public duty) but “no specific legal duty exists” unless there is a special relationship between an officer and an individual (for example, a person in custody). In 2020, the US Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit upheld a lower court ruling that police could not be held liable for failing to protect students from the Parkland, Florida, Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School shooting that took 17 lives. The Court determined the students’ constitutional rights had not been violated.

Local, statewide, and national,

the law enforcement community is keenly aware of what they, and the public, witnessed at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Criticized by the media, national outcry, and within the law enforcement system, blame was directed at early responders for not following their active shooter training. Critical response/active shooter training has been in practice for decades – one of the more recognized programs used for law enforcement officers, educators, churches, health care, businesses, etc. is ALICE (a solution of Navigate 360) – national training that helps educate, prepare, train, and empower people to make their own life-saving decisions in the event of a critical incident. The ALICE acronym is Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate.

Captain Morgan and ALICE Safety Consultant Officer Greg Lease Jr., introduced the training participants to ALICE by stages of the acronym. Lease explained that “alert” is situational awareness of your surroundings, understanding the danger, and knowing that your speedy response is critical. Secondly “lockdown” Lease said, was not just physical but also psychological in strategy and mental preparedness. He explained to look at your setting for barriers for protection or means to escape. Third, “inform” came as a reminder for the mobile device app: “See It, Say It, Send It” which aids the BCA in triaging threats against Minnesota schools and religious institutions. Lease recommended using clear identifiers and plain language when calling 9-1-1. Fourth, Morgan spoke to “counter” which encompasses using noise, distraction, and actions to offset an active shooter. Counter also includes creating distance and planning to move in patterns that divert

attention. The instructors closed with “evacuation” and a discussion on how, under great duress, a person can be safer while fleeing a critical incident scene.

The active training moved to Southwest School, where Training Officer Matt O’Rourke and Lease continued to map out “real-world” scenarios through the multiple hallways and classrooms in the retired elementary school. Non-law enforcement participants were actors, playing victims who were hiding, fleeing, or being held hostage. Itasca County area law enforcement officers, including the MN State Patrol, were provided training on entry, evacuation, movement techniques, and distraction using an OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) loop cycle.

Officer Michelle Norris described the training as vital to the area in providing a cohesive foundation for a rural county, where a variety of agencies may be the first responders, never having worked or trained with one another. Lease emphasized why organizing a multiple-agency response is so important, so officers can understand a group-think approach as they independently, or with partners, arrive at the first call. Lease said the training, after Uvalde, is that whoever arrives at the scene goes in, and they keep going until the threat is ceased. He and O’Rourke said that does not mean waiting for the tactical team to be formed.

“We will not be stopping to sanitize our hands, we have an ethical duty to stop the threat,” Lease noted.

For more information on the legal responsibility of police during a school shooting, visit:

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/are-police-required-to-confront-a-school-shooter-the-legal-answer-is-no/2022/06>