

**Aurora Theater Shooting: July 12, 2012**  
**Personal Lessons Learned as a Police Executive**  
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1. Train, train, train. The “active shooter” threat is real and will become even more common. Your personnel need to believe it can happen anywhere, at any time.
2. Move to the threat as quickly as possible. Unlike other tactical situations, with an active shooter, cops and commanders must accept high risk and high exposure to get to the threat. Training must emphasize this.
3. Establish a hot-zone entry and evacuation protocol with your Fire Department/Emergency Medical Services. Practice it.
4. Take into “battle” the equipment you need. Consider a “go bag” for every officer, containing a gas mask, extra ammunition, tourniquets and emergency bandages. Train officers in tactical casualty care. (See Medical Kit)
5. The Incident Commander must command and lead from outside the combat zone/crime scene. His/her focus must be on 1) deploying responding officers to locate and eliminate the threat(s); and 2) immediate evacuation of the wounded by any means necessary.
6. Assume there is an explosive and/or chemical threat at the crime scene and at the shooter’s residence or in his/her vehicle. Request emergency response to the scene from at least 2 bomb squad/hazmat tech teams, including one that is immediately mobile to respond to the next threat.
7. Assign personnel to establish vehicle lanes of ingress and egress early on to avoid gridlock and for evacuation of the wounded and response by incoming emergency vehicles.
8. Cops will experience sensory overload. They will not hear important radio transmissions. Repeat messages as needed. Deploy runners to relay communications face to face. Confirm the receipt of critical instructions.
9. Request local mutual aid response as quickly as possible. Dispatchers should be trained to do this without prompting from field command.

10. Call out the FBI and ATF immediately. Bury them in every bit of work they can handle. Conserve your agency's resources for the other compelling demands it will face in the aftermath.
11. If your suspect lives, be thinking about criminal discovery issues immediately. If the case becomes a state capital murder prosecution, you must secure all evidence in the traditional manner for such a prosecution. Do not allow the storing of evidence in classified FBI or other federal systems just because it "might be" a terrorism case. Resolve this issue and obtain agreement with the FBI leadership as early in the case as you can.
12. Make sure your cops treat the suspect with dignity and respect. They have an ethical obligation to do so. In addition, as horrific as his actions may be, there is a huge potential payoff in what he might reveal in the immediate aftermath or later on if he is treated properly. He may make critical admissions and/or reveal undiscovered evidence or unknown hazards.
13. Regarding radio communication, true interoperability is not having everyone talk on one frequency. In a real-life multiple agency response, this could be disastrous. Having interoperable frequencies that are close to, or can be patched close to the primary frequencies on the radio dial, helps commanders work on different frequencies.
14. Once adequate staffing arrives, and commanders can get help, consider setting up at least three radio frequencies to function simultaneously in the crisis. Depending on the event, the frequencies may be designated: 1) rank-and-file operations; 2) tactical operations; and 3) command. Integrate Fire/EMS leadership into the command frequency.
15. Make training on communications an integral component of all exercises. Post-exercise debriefings should place as much emphasis on success in communication as on success in the field operations.
16. Allow your personnel time and space to prepare their post-event reports. Expect that some personnel may need to do supplemental reports later on, as they process and recall more of what occurred.
17. Make psychological services, peer support and chaplains/faith leaders available to all first responders as soon as reasonably possible. Offer group and individual debriefings with psychological professionals. Include 911 tapes and radio transmissions in these debriefings. Consider hospital reunions with cops, survivors and families. Rely on your front-line supervisors to lead in these efforts and to identify who is struggling to cope. Provide ongoing psychological and peer support for as long as it takes. Accept that healing and recovery for your personnel may take months or years.

18. Prepare for significant food donations for the first responders. Restaurants will start delivering food to your officers on post and at police facilities. Record who is making these donations early so that donors can be recognized later. Be prepared to deliver food to officers working long-term crime scenes, memorials and other sites connected to the event. These are tasks where citizen volunteers can be particularly helpful.
19. Value, honor and protect victims in the aftermath. Offer victims and families seasoned law enforcement professionals to help – PIO's (to assist with media), trained victim advocates and pre-vetted psychological services professionals. Avoid re-victimization by well-intentioned do-gooders, including faith leaders.
20. Getting families answers about their loved ones must be among the highest priorities. Tracking the victims – injured and deceased – is critically important in the early hours of the event. Assign a key contact (e.g., a detective) to this function at each hospital. Establish an early, direct liaison with the coroner. Remove the bodies, identify them and make formal notifications to the families as soon as possible.
21. Donations will pour in for the victims. Advise your government to set up a fund through a reputable non-profit charity. Do NOT allow your police department to be involved in the fund. In-kind donations of air travel and lodging may also come in. Be prepared for fraudsters to take advantage of the victims and willing donors.
22. Expect a makeshift memorial to spring up immediately. The community and victim families will expect the police to protect the memorial. Plan early on how and when to take it down. Obtain input from the victim families. Any items not claimed by the families should be carefully retrieved and archived.
23. Internet deniers and conspiracy theorists will spring up immediately, even on the first full day of the event. The worst of these will contact media with false accounts of what occurred. As victims are identified, they will contact families, causing terrible additional anguish and victimization. Your officers, victim advocates and the families themselves should be prepared for this possibility.
24. The value/importance of the media crush is in the opportunity to convey information. Share only the details the press reasonably needs. Convey reassurance and competence in the handling of the event. Press conferences should be carefully prepared and tightly scripted. Simple email and social media updates will suffice in between the formal press conferences. Keep the press conferences to a minimum. End the media circus as soon as you reasonably can.



## Medical Kit

Designed to carry:

Gas mask

Additional Ammunition

Tourniquet

Bandages

Tape

Scissors

Gloves

Still some room for individual items

