

Active shooter at Clackamas Town Center: What would you have done?



By [Stuart Tomlinson](#) | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

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Active shooter.



The term is self-explanatory. What's not so easily understood, however, is how you should act when you're in a mall, a school or a movie theater and someone opens fire.

But just as police have learned from past shootings that the threat must be immediately contained, experts say citizens also need to train themselves on what to do in such situations.

Shoppers at Clackamas Town Center Tuesday wait to be released from the REI store after a gunman opened fire, killing two and then himself. Experts say there are three options when confronted with an active shooter: Run, hide or fight.

Thomas Boyd/The Oregonian

And no matter who you talk to – the Department of Homeland Security, [FEMA](#) or the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office – the basic message is the same: Run, hide, or -- as a last resort -- fight.

Shaun Wik chose to run.

He was halfway through his Panda Express meal Tuesday afternoon at the Clackamas Town Center food court when the shooting began. It took a few seconds to process what was happening.

He looked over and his best friend and girlfriend were already on the floor "army crawling away."

Wik, 20, of Fairview, dove toward the floor, too, and remembers someone yelling "Get on the ground!"

But then Wik decided he was having none of that.

"I said, '(expletive) this,' and took off," and all three ran out into the parking lot. "I was just thinking of getting out alive."

Wik's response, and that of hundreds of others at the mall Tuesday was what law enforcement officials say was best choice -- run from the danger. If running wasn't an option, others found a place to hide, behind a locked or barricaded door. They turned off their cell phones and remained quiet.

And while there are no reports of anyone trying perhaps the least palatable response -- incapacitate the shooter by arming themselves with whatever was at hand -- some people undoubtedly did what experts says is the worst thing: They froze.

"You're either going to freeze, or survive," said Chris Grollnek, a former SWAT officer for the McKinney Texas Police Department and former U.S. Marine. "The best target for an active shooter is somebody that freezes."



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Grollnek is a consultant for the **Countermeasure Consulting Group** in North Dallas who wrote his masters thesis on the active-shooter phenomena. He has been in the middle of three active shooter situations – twice as a police officer, and once as a civilian on vacation in Florida with his family.

RUN. HIDE. FIGHT.® Surviving an Active Shooter Event - En...



During the first two incidents, he responded as a cop, taking cover and fighting back. But while driving in Cocoa Beach, Florida last year his 14-year-old daughter from the back seat said, "Daddy, look, there's somebody shooting."

"I instantly turned around and drove away," he said. He saw other people on the street or in their cars who stopped, either to watch or frozen in fear as bullets whizzed across the highway.

Grollnek's company conducts training for businesses around the country, teaching employers and employees how to best manage their "fight of flight" response when confronted with an active shooter.

He said people should prepare themselves ahead of time because otherwise no one knows exactly how they would respond.

"We don't want you to be combat ready, but combat aware," he said. "We teach people the same methods used by soldiers in combat, because an active shooter scenario is a combat situation. We're teaching you to evade and escape – get to cover and get your butt out of the danger area where a gunman won't find you."

Sgt. Adam Phillips of the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office said it's the same advice he gives his wife and children.

"When you hear gunshots, go the other direction," Phillips said. "Run away from it."

He said mall employees and managers did what they were instructed to do during the active shooter training earlier this year at the mall.

"They did well," he said. "They sheltered in place and made it difficult for the suspect to get to them. They left or they secured in place –they ran or they hid. One of those two things is the best you can do in those circumstances."

--**Stuart Tomlinson**

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Active shooter: Prepare and act

When in a public place such as a mall, theater, school:

* Be aware of your environment and any possible dangers. Have an escape route and plan in mind. Take note of the nearest exits in any facility you visit.

If caught in an active shooter event:

* Evacuate: Find an accessible escape path, evacuate the premises. Warn individuals not to enter area where the active shooter may be. Leave your belongings behind. Help others escape, if possible. Call 911 when it is safe to do so.

* Can't run? Hide out: If evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide. Lock the door. Silence your cell phone or pager. Even the vibration setting can give away a hiding position. Hide behind large items and remain quiet.

* If you can't run or hide, take action: As a last resort, and only when your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the shooter.

– FEMA/Countermeasure Consulting Group

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elduderino77 Dec 14, 2012
 I think it's pathetic and disheartening to post this question. You don't truly know how you'd react in this moment, until you're in the moment.

beervendor Dec 14, 2012
 I know several concealed weapon permit holders who imagined themselves having their "Dirty Harry" moment with the gunman had they been there. I'm not saying that's impossible. Maybe if he was right in front of you. Maybe if you could compose yourself enough to keep your hands from shaking as you took aim. Maybe if he stood still. Maybe if the situation wasn't total chaos with people running all over the place. And maybe some other concealed weapons permit holder or the police wouldn't mistake you for the gunman and shoot you instead..... Like I said, it's not impossible you could be the hero.

beervendor Dec 14, 2012
 And maybe if you were trained by the military..... although people like that are getting fewer and fewer and more are trained by video game these days.

Junya Dec 14, 2012
 If I killed the shoot and saved life, vs not and he killed 20 more. By the cops shot me, thats fine.

Chuck Bartowski Dec 14, 2012
 Discounting for the fact that the mall is a posted gun free zone so no law abiding concealed carrier would have been armed inside the mall I can say that, as a concealed carrier I absolutely would not have stopped this attack unless I was directly in the line of fire. See, I don't carry my gun to protect other people or to be a hero. I carry to protect myself, my family, and my friends. If I was at the mall it would have been with my family and there is no way I'm leaving them unprotected. The reality is that, while concealed carriers defend themselves and others each and every day (see the November Defensive Gun Use Report here: <http://www.easybakegunclub.com/blog/1902/November-2012-Defensive-Gun-Use-Report.html>), it is not always the right choice to do so. Ultimately, my decision whether to draw my weapon is going to come down to: Is my family in danger? If I engage do I put them in danger? Unless those answers are both no, I'm getting the hell out of there and leaving the active shooter to SWAT teams and sniper rifles.

Burdenedbylogic Dec 14, 2012
 Run! And scoop up any stray little ones on the way out the door.

jij Dec 14, 2012

You'd do exactly what people did. If you were carrying a weapon, you'd be foolish to duel with someone with an AR15. People left, and hid. Read the recommended action box attached to the article. It's what you should do. The ONLY ones that should learn and change their behavior are the ones that merely panicked and shrieked. And note that even they may have helped by distracting the shooter.

 **Junya**

Dec 14, 2012

Cover fire.....

svengali223

Dec 14, 2012

Just because it's crap that doesn't mean we shouldn't acknowledge that it's crap.

svengali223

Dec 14, 2012

It's as likely a probability as an Oregonian staffer writing a worthwhile news story.

jgess6232

Dec 13, 2012

Being a military man, and someone who was there Saturday, and will be there this weekend again, I played this situation through my head several times. With my family, I would of made sure they were safe. Then contemplated what I would do. Honestly, there is an Excalibur store right there. Jammed gun, guy would of been done fore. Not that I am macho, I risked my life in Iraq to save others. Plain and simple, it's the thought and the drive to save innocent people and to remove the threat. Thank god that gun jammed. I know the damage an AR-15 can do. My one wish is that police would of finished him off, not himself.

 **mediocrity reigns**

Dec 13, 2012

Oregon is a "right to die" state. Further, Oregon opposes "capital punishment". As a bonus, USDOJ won't be able to investigate any police department for using force in this case.

 **merwinwfinzork**

Dec 13, 2012

oregon does Not oppose capital punishment. It is state law.

 **merwinwfinzork**

Dec 13, 2012

Why would USDOJ want to discuss excessive LEA force in this case at all? You so often make No sense at all with these little non sequiturs.

EschewObfuscation

Dec 13, 2012

Pandering to second guessers and macho wannabes. Is that the point of this second milking of the tragedy? Even the law enforcement professionals already said that the smartest things to do are either exit the premises ASAP, or hide until it's safe.

M1A1TC

Dec 13, 2012

It's called situation awareness -- Teach your kids, your spouse and always have a plan. Watch cops, military (warriors not clerks and jerks) and prior service military they will place themselves between loved ones and danger, their back is never to a window and they know where the exits are and most are packing

 **mediocrity reigns**

Dec 13, 2012

W-3, In this world of ipads, ipods, earjacks, I'm surprised people even realized anything was happening.

 **merwinwfinzork**

Dec 13, 2012

Yeah - boy howdy! There are a flock of distracted individuals wandering around out there whose mind is not where they are at the moment. It's strange!

 **merwinwfinzork**

Dec 13, 2012

There is no way for anyone to know whether prior military personnel are packing or not. Or anyone else ftm. Nor is there a way to know which were warriors and which were not within the prior military coterie. But those who were trained to react once under fire will first try to find Cover, if at all possible. (Which they were trained to know is better than Concealment, which is better than nothing.) From their vantage point, they may or may not attempt to assess the situation to see what further action they might choose or be required to take. The very Last thing they will do is seek a confrontation against an unknown number of armed individuals who are still shooting. It's like the guy at the AZ mass shooting who had a pistol with him at the time. He never pulled it. That, at the outset, is the smart ploy.

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