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Experts: Initial reports on San Bernardino shooting suggest 'coordinated attack'

BY STEPHEN LOIACONI
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WASHINGTON (Sinclair Broadcast Group) -- The information released so far about the mass shooting incident in San Bernardino indicates police could be facing a different scenario from other recent active shooter cases, according to law enforcement experts.

Police are searching for one to three suspects who initial reports say may have been heavily armed and wearing body armor. According to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, preliminary information is that at least 14 people are dead and 14 are wounded.

The preliminary information we have is 14 dead, 14 wounded. The wounded have been taken to area hospitals #SanBernardino (https://twitter.com/hashtag/SanBernardino?src=hash)

-- SB County Sheriff (@sbcountysheriff) December 2, 2015 (https://twitter.com/sbcountysheriff/status/672172978495291392)

The shooting occurred at a center for people with disabilities, but police say it is unclear exactly who or what was specifically targeted.

@SanBernardinoPD (https://twitter.com/SanBernardinoPD) has confirmed 1to3 possible suspects.Multiple victims. #SBCSD (https://twitter.com/hashtag/SBCSD?src=hash) &other agencies assisting. More info to come. #SanBernardino (https://twitter.com/hashtag/SanBernardino?src=hash)

-- SB County Sheriff (@sbcountysheriff) December 2, 2015 (https://twitter.com/sbcountysheriff/status/672137995919601664)

San Bernardino Police Chief Jarrod Burguan told reporters at a press conference that the suspects appeared to have been "well-prepared" for the attack and were reportedly carrying long guns. Police do not yet know whether this was a terrorist incident.

"They came prepared to do what they did, as if they were on a mission," Burguan said.

According to Chris Grollnek, a former SWAT officer and active shooter expert, if the details released about the suspects are accurate, "this was more than an active shooter event...This was a coordinated attack with specialized training."

"This was a very soft target, it was very unassuming," Grollnek said. He suggested it may have been chosen because it was far from police and fire stations, but he said local law enforcement officers were reportedly training nearby and were on the scene within minutes. Multiple other local and federal agencies have also responded.

FBI responding to shooting in San Bernardino w/resources to assist partners. SB has lead. Will provide add'l info as situation develops.

-- FBI LosAngeles (@FBILosAngeles) December 2, 2015 (https://twitter.com/FBILosAngeles/status/672168239779196928)

The suspects are believed to have fled the scene in a dark-colored SUV and are still at large. Initial information in cases like this is often contradictory or inaccurate, and investigators on the scene will be talking to witnesses and examining evidence to determine exactly what they are dealing with.

According to CNN, a bomb squad is inspecting a suspicious device found at the building. The ATF tweeted that an explosives enforcement officer and ATF K-9s are now on the scene and have unique training for this kind of scenario.

ATF Explosives Enforcement Officer & ATF K9s being utilized to investigate unfolding scene at #SanBernardino (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/SanBernardino?src=hash>) shooting.

-- ATF HQ (@ATFHQ) December 2, 2015 (<https://twitter.com/ATFHQ/status/672170418401378304>)

Chris Butler, an Army veteran and CEO of Butler Tactical, called the presence of a possible explosive device "a big game-changer" for first responders.

"That's going to be a very different kind of engagement," said Butler, who has extensive experience with explosives and insurgency tactics in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Authorities have not yet confirmed whether the device was actually an explosive, but a bomb squad would need to consider several possibilities in determining how to respond to the situation.

Depending on the size and location of the device and the potential explosion it could create, there are several reasons why the device may have been planted. It could be meant to cause mass casualties and overwhelm police, it could have been intended as a defense mechanism for the shooters, or "they could be trying to actually target the police and the first responders."

It also could change the way officers approach a suspect once they are located because it raises the possibility that they may also be carrying a suicide vest or other explosive device.

The public can call 1 866 346 7632 if they have any information or leads on the #ActiveShooter (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/ActiveShooter?src=hash>) incident in #SanBernadino (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/SanBernadino?src=hash>) @SanBernardinoPD (<https://twitter.com/SanBernardinoPD>)

-- SB County Sheriff (@sbcountysheriff) December 2, 2015 (<https://twitter.com/sbcountysheriff/status/672175614376345600>)

Grollnek, the executive director of the Safe2Safest strategic alliance, said regardless of the identity or motives of the shooters, the incident highlights the importance for the public of training and preparation for emergency situations.

After previous shooting incidents, Grollnek has urged people to research active shooter prevention programs and has advocated the "Run, Hide, Fight" response recommended by the FBI.

"We have got to break the mindset of shelter in place," he said. "This is not a tornado."

Facilities like this can be fortified with blast-resistant windows and security systems like biometric scanners, but ultimately civilians should not allow themselves to be "sitting ducks" while waiting for law enforcement to arrive, Grollnek said. Shootings are often over by the time police reach the scene.

Not every company or organization can afford advanced security systems, so Butler emphasized the need for situational awareness and training. People need to understand how their facilities are at risk and what their weaknesses are, and have a plan in place for what to do if a tragedy like this occurs.

"At the end of the day," Butler said, "there's no real silver bullet answer."



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