The State of Alabama Active Shooter Response

Strategic Plan

February 2013

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Executive Summary

In the booklet *Active Shooter: How to Respond*, the United States Department of Homeland Security (US DHS) paints the "Profile of an Active Shooter":

> An Active Shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearm(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims.

> Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. Typically, the immediate deployment of law enforcement is required to stop the shooting and mitigate harm to victims.

> Because active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes, before law enforcement arrives on the scene, individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation. (http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf)

Although the history of the active shooter phenomenon dates back to the first recorded incident at the University of Texas Tower in 1966, the scale and frequency of active shooter events—most notably the December 14, 2012 tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School—have led elected officials to search for a strategic response to active shooters.

On December 17, 2012, Governor Robert Bentley tasked the Alabama Department of Homeland Security (AL DHS) with developing a strategic plan for mitigating and responding to active shooter events at various types of facilities. The Governor's request identified three priorities to guide the plan:

Priority 1: Continue and expand training for law enforcement in how to respond to and combat an active shooter event;

Priority 2a: Engage the private sector in sharing information;

Priority 2b: Educate the general public on how to respond to an active shooter event; and,

Priority 3: Continue work with the Alabama Department of Education, utilizing the Virtual Alabama system, which makes school safety plans immediately accessible to first responders.

This strategic plan documents the manner in which these priorities will be addressed. Specifically, this plan focuses on how law enforcement will be trained to respond to active shooter situations; what the private sector can do to be prepared if faced with an active shooter; what tools are available for schools when creating their safety plans; and how first responders and elected officials should work together during post-event management. A plan for sustaining

this document and its goals is presented in the Sustainability section. Finally, additional recommendations and information are supplied in three appendices that pertain to institutions of higher learning, media planning, and active shooter preparedness resources. A brief summary of each section follows.

Law Enforcement

Well-trained law enforcement officers are a critical component of the Active Shooter Response Plan. The State of Alabama has adopted ALERRT (Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training) as the standard methodology in which all law enforcement officers should be trained. The state's goal is to train 100% of law enforcement officers in this method.

Private Sector and Public Outreach

While no strategy can completely prevent an active shooter event, certain steps can be taken to decrease a potential shooter's chances of successfully carrying out his or her plan. AL DHS intends to engage private citizens as a first line of defense against potential and/or active shooters by promoting the "If You See Something, Say Something™" campaign to channel suspicious activity to the Alabama Fusion Center. For emergency situations, contact local law enforcement or 911. Furthermore, because being prepared is the best defense should a citizen find him or herself in an active shooter situation, AL DHS encourages the public to watch the instructional video *Run, Hide, Fight* and to review the materials at the US DHS Active Shooter Preparedness website to learn how to prepare, respond, and recover from an active shooter event.

Schools

AL DHS acknowledges that it is in the best interest of schools to keep decision-making authority regarding school safety at the local level. AL DHS also acknowledges that the different needs of K-12, post-secondary, and higher education regarding school safety do not lend themselves to a "one-size-fits-all" approach. However, the Alabama Board of Education and the AL DHS recommend creating and maintaining online school safety plans in Virtual Alabama so that these critical plans can be shared with first responders if an active shooter enters a school.

Post-Event Management

Regardless of the circumstances, all events are considered local events and will be managed through the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Elected officials, law enforcement, and all other first responders should refer to the local emergency management procedures or local emergency operations plan (EOP) for the county where the incident occurred.

Sustainability

Active shooter preparedness remains a priority for AL DHS; therefore, the department will seek State and Federal funds to implement, sustain, and enhance the programs and resources presented in this strategic plan. Currently, ALERRT law enforcement training is federally funded and is provided at no cost to the State. AL DHS will reassess the viability and usefulness of the strategies included in this document periodically to ensure the most accurate and useful information is being provided to the citizens of Alabama.

Appendix A: Active Shooter Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Best Practices for Post-Secondary and Higher Education

Because active shooter events are dynamic and college campuses are large and diverse, there is not a single set of best-practices. However, there are general recommendations to mitigate the risks of an active shooter event. Two useful techniques that are appropriate for a college campus are A.L.I.C.E. (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) and Run, Hide, Fight.

Appendix B: Media Plan Best Practices

In the case of an active shooter event, multiple groups of people will descend on the site. Staff members at the location need to be prepared to handle local citizens, family members, and especially local and national media. Effective preparation in how to deal with this likely chaotic convergence should begin *before* an active shooter event. Tips include having a "go-kit," deciding who is responsible for communicating information, determining where to stage media, and remembering useful phrases to help when communicating sensitive or stressful information.

Appendix C: Active Shooter Preparedness Resources

This section summarizes where to find all of the resources referenced in the strategic plan.

Law Enforcement

Priority 1: Continue and expand training for law enforcement in how to respond to and combat an active shooter event

Goal: Train or recertify 100% of Alabama law enforcement officers in ALERRT

Well-trained law enforcement officers are a critical component of the Active Shooter response plan. The State of Alabama has adopted ALERRT (Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training) as the standard methodology in which all law enforcement officers should be trained. This section discusses the ALERRT methodology as well as its associated training plan.

Methodology

What is ALERRT?

Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training, or ALERRT, was developed by Texas State University—San Marcos in 2002. The purpose of this federally-approved program is to train law enforcement officers to safely and effectively neutralize an active shooter. Officers in 37 states and counting have received ALERRT training since its inception. A common misconception about ALERRT is that it turns all officers into SWAT officers. However, this is neither true nor the intention of the program. ALERRT provides baseline methodology in active shooter response techniques for any first-responding officer. ALERRT training is good for all active shooter situations: schools, workplaces, malls, theaters, private homes, etc.

Alabama's ALERRT Program

Officers are given the 16-hour (two-day) course *Rapid Response to Active Shooter: Level I*. Day one focuses on the history of the active shooter phenomenon from the first recorded event in 1966 at the University of Texas Tower, through the dramatic changes brought about by the Columbine High School tragedy, to the Fort Hood shooting in 2009, to more recent events. Attention is paid to how the paradigm of the "active shooter response" has evolved from patrol officer to SWAT team to rapid response. Day two incorporates hands-on "force-on-force" training exercises typically performed at a well-suited training facility. Participants receive a training manual which includes lists of additional resources and are given "homework" to complete during the two-day session.

This class opens participants' eyes to their capability in responding during an active shooter event. At the end of the class, officers view a video tape of all the training scenarios they completed during the course to evaluate their performance. However, learning does not stop after the two-day training. Officers are encouraged to continue practicing what they have just learned

back at their own agencies. They are also encouraged to seek out more information to keep adding to their knowledge of response techniques.

A detailed course description provided by the Texas State University—San Marcos ALERRT Center is shown below.

> *Course Description:* This dynamic course of instruction is designed to prepare the first responder to isolate, distract, and neutralize an active shooter. The course will cover shooting and moving, threshold evaluation, concepts and principles of team movement (including solo officer strategies), setting up for room entry and room entry techniques, approach and breaching the crisis site, follow-on responder tactics, improvised explosive devices, and post-engagement priorities of work. The course will culminate with dynamic "force-on-force" scenarios.

> *Recommended Equipment:* Good attitude, open mind, pen and paper, duty gear, body armor, water, and appropriate clothing for "force on force" training on day 2 (i.e. long sleeve shirt, pants, groin protection). Head, eye, and throat protection will be provided by ALERRT. (http://alerrt.org/Course-Catalog/Level1)

Benefits of ALERRT

Although other active shooter response training programs exist, ALERRT has been approved for the use of US DHS grant funds, which is a great cost-savings to the State of Alabama.

Another key benefit of ALERRT is that the program creates a uniform response from all officers regardless of agency, background, previous experience, etc. The common training makes all officers equal which helps to build trust, which is critical when entering an active shooter scene.

Furthermore, several of Alabama's neighbors—the State of Mississippi and the City of Atlanta, Georgia—have also adopted ALERRT as their standard active shooter response, thus facilitating regional cooperation should the need arise.

Finally, all elements of the program are continuously evaluated. All evaluations to date have been positive.

Expected Outcomes

Law enforcement officers who have taken and passed the ALERRT course are trained to "win" upon entering an active shooter crime scene, that is, to find and neutralize the perpetrator(s) as quickly and safely as possible in order to save as many innocent lives as possible.

The expectation of the training is that officers will be instilled with the confidence they need to go into an active shooter situation and face the threat. This confidence is built by placing the officers in very realistic, stressful situations during the training. This training fosters the "non-

hesitant" mindset which is vital in ensuring the officers' safety and in subduing the active shooter.

Because the participants in an ALERRT class come from multiple agencies and jurisdictions, it is also expected that they will become accustomed to working with officers outside their own agency. The experience of the ALERRT training will unify all first-responding officers by giving them standardized tactics so that everyone who arrives at the scene knows what to do, thus reducing downtime. They will develop a common mentality and know that everyone has been trained as equals. The officers will learn to trust each other and work together using a common response. This type of teamwork simulates a real-life active shooter scene in which the first responders will likely come from different agencies and have different backgrounds and experiences (apart from the ALERRT methodology). Feeling that they are working with well-trained "equals" also builds the confidence of the officers.

In summary, as a result of their instruction, ALERRT-trained officers will

- Have the confidence to enter an active shooter scene and face the threat
- Develop a "non-hesitant" mindset
- Act in a unified manner to reduce downtime at the scene
- Trust other first-responding officers who have passed the ALERRT training, regardless of their background or affiliation

Special Considerations

Special attention may need to be given in preparing the law enforcement response in certain areas of the state. For example, many rural areas have limited numbers of law enforcement officers who are responsible for large geographic areas. In some of these locations, it is not uncommon to see private citizens responding to a crime scene with weapons. Local plans will need to be in place to address these types of situations.

Training Plan

Audience Participation and Completion Requirements

ALERRT classes are composed of mixed audiences and this diversity is encouraged because networking with different agencies is similar to what is really going to happen in an active shooter situation. This diversity also establishes trust amongst the agencies and builds their confidence to work together.

Participants must meet certain requirements to pass the class. Some have failed and were required to retake the training. Successful completion is not automatic. ALERRT teaches officers to "win" and to be positive in multiple situations, such as a weapon malfunction. To be successful in the course, officers should be prepared both mentally and physically and must commit to active participation in all training scenarios. ALERRT strives to create a learning environment that is "as real as it gets" without being in an actual shooting situation.

Instructor Training

It is necessary to have consistent, quality training to maintain the integrity of the ALERRT program. Since adopting the ALERRT standard, 150 Alabama law enforcement officers have received the "train the trainer" instruction that enables them to teach other officers. Spencer Collier, Director of AL DHS, created a 12 member advisory board to give input and help maintain the standards of the ALERRT program. These 12 officers teach on a regular basis and this appointment to an advisory board helps foster ownership to the ALERRT program. AL DHS is developing a "refresher" in-service for the rest of the previously-trained officers who would still like to serve as instructors. To date, 100 of these officers have indicated interest in the in-service.

Officer Training

AL DHS will take a "network" approach to officer training. There are seven homeland security regions in the State of Alabama. An instructor refresher in-service will be held in each region. Those newly re-trained instructors will perform ALERRT outreach to the agencies in their region to promote awareness and generate interest. These trainers will then train officers in their region.

The goal is to have 100% of Alabama law enforcement officers trained by making ALERRT training available to all law enforcement officers in the State. Opportunities to provide training will increase during the summer of 2013, as instructors will be more able to utilize training facilities during that time.

Furthermore, 100% of Capitol Complex officers will be trained by March 31, 2013.

Additional ALERRT Outreach and Partnerships

The Alabama Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (APOSTC) intend to immediately adopt and institute ALERRT in minimum standards and mandate for all Alabama law enforcement officers. Several police academies currently have ALERRT in their curriculum. For example, recruits in Montgomery and Huntsville, as well as all State Troopers, are taught the ALERRT methodology. The intent is to make this training a part of all the law enforcement academies in the State in order to guarantee that all new officers will receive ALERRT.

Recertification

In order to remain effective, all of the knowledge and skills gained through ALERRT should be periodically reviewed. AL DHS is preparing an in-service for recertification of all previously trained officers.

Private Sector and Public Outreach

Priority 2a: Engage the private sector in sharing information

Goal: Promote public awareness of the "If You See Something, Say Something™" program

While no strategy can completely prevent an active shooter event, certain steps can be taken to decrease a potential shooter's chances of successfully carrying out his or her plan. This section discusses the ways AL DHS intends to engage private citizens as a first line of defense against potential and/or active shooters.

Methodology

What is "If You See Something, Say Something™"?

The US DHS launched the "If You See Something, Say Something™" campaign in July 2010, to "raise public awareness of indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime, and to emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity to the proper local law enforcement authorities" (http://www.dhs.gov/if-you-see-something-say-something-campaign). AL DHS intends to leverage this campaign to encourage citizens to report all suspicious activity to the Alabama Fusion Center in an effort to detect or deter potential active shooters.

Per Governor Robert Bentley's Executive Order 13, "the mission of the Alabama Fusion Center is to promote the collection, integration, and evaluation of information that has an effect on detecting and preventing criminal or terrorist related activity" (http://fusion.alabama.gov/). It is the responsibility of the Alabama Fusion Center to share this intelligence with law enforcement officials, homeland security officials, first responders, and the appropriate private stakeholders. The Alabama Fusion Center is a true "intergovernmental bridge" and functions as the liaison between federal, state, local, and private interests concerning suspected criminal activity.

Reporting Suspicious Persons or Activity

The Alabama Fusion Center website (http://fusion.alabama.gov/) provides guidelines for the public concerning what might be considered suspicious behavior, as well as what details to report (figure 1). The online form contains areas to record the type of activity, date, time, location, county, and a brief description. If known, information about a suspicious person (such as name, alias, height, weight, hair and eye color, sex, ethnicity, and distinguishing marks) or about a suspicious vehicle (such as make, model, year, and license plate number) can be entered. If available, a photo of the person or activity may be uploaded as well. Although information may be submitted anonymously, a person reporting activity is encouraged to provide his or her

name, address, and/or phone number so that someone can make contact if follow-up or further information is needed. All information submitted including the identity of the submitter is kept confidential.

Citizens may always call local law enforcement or 911 directly if the situation is an emergency; however, they are also encouraged to contact the Alabama Fusion Center by using one or more of the following methods if they see suspicious persons or activity:

- Hotline: 1-866-229-6220
- Online Form: http://fusion.alabama.gov/Report-Suspicious-Activity.aspx
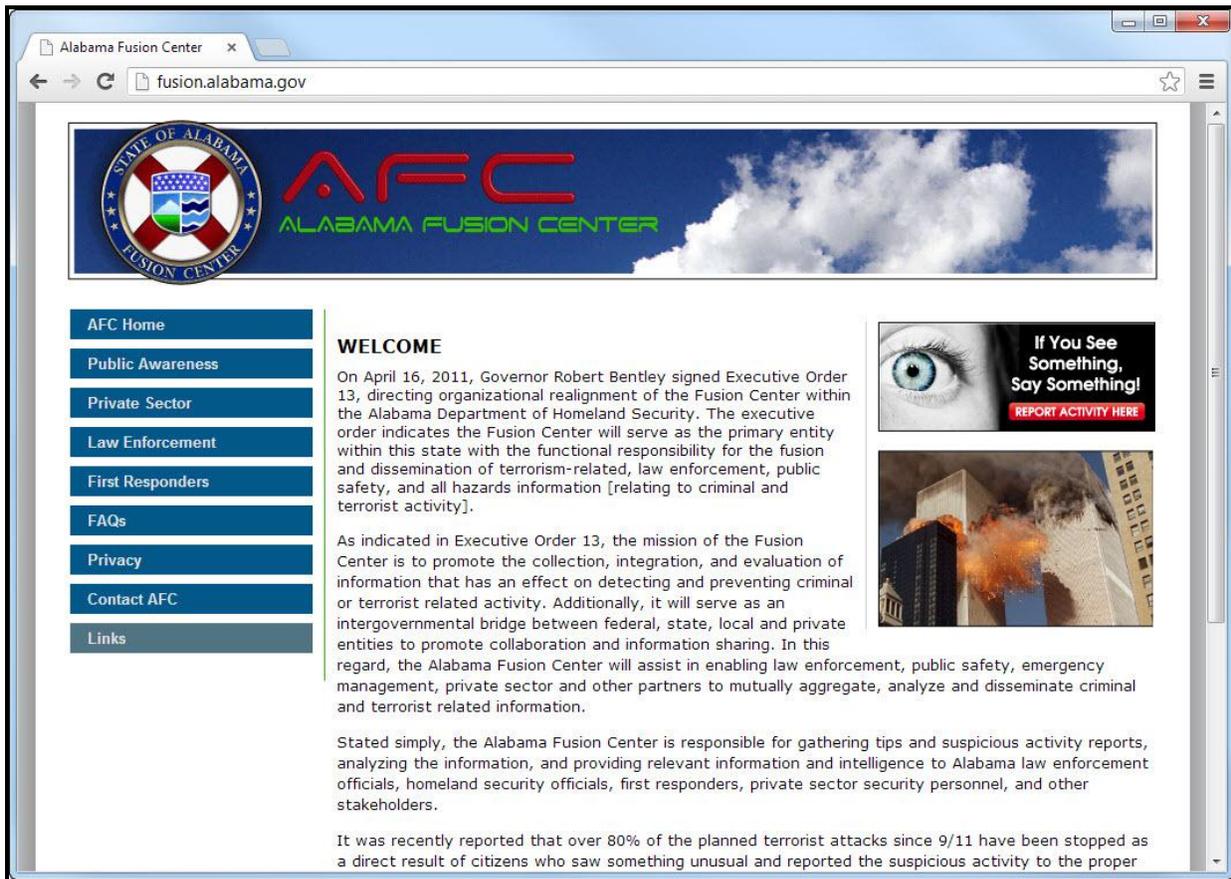
Figure 1. **Alabama Fusion Center Home Page**

Additionally, AL DHS is pursuing the implementation of a suspicious activity reporting "app" that would be available for both iPhones and Android devices. Based on a tool already developed and in use in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, this app would provide the same reporting capability currently available on the Alabama Fusion Center website. Geocoding (i.e., locational) information can be attached to photos taken with a mobile device and uploaded through this app. Another related app intended for the K-12 market is being considered for development that would provide students a means for reporting suspected gang, drug, and weapons activity. It is anticipated that these apps could be developed by summer 2013.

Note: Law enforcement officers may also report suspicious persons or activity to the Alabama Fusion Center through a link available on the Alacop website (https://www.alacop.gov).

Public Awareness

A promotional campaign (figure 2) consisting of press releases, billboards, digital signage in Retirement System of Alabama (RSA) buildings, and public service announcements (PSAs) has been in place since September 2012, and will continue to be used to increase public awareness of "If You See Something, Say Something™" as well as to inform citizens of the different ways they can report suspicious persons or activity.

Note: For advice on how to effectively deal with the media in the event of an active shooter incident at a private or public facility, please see the *Media Plan Best Practices* section of this document.
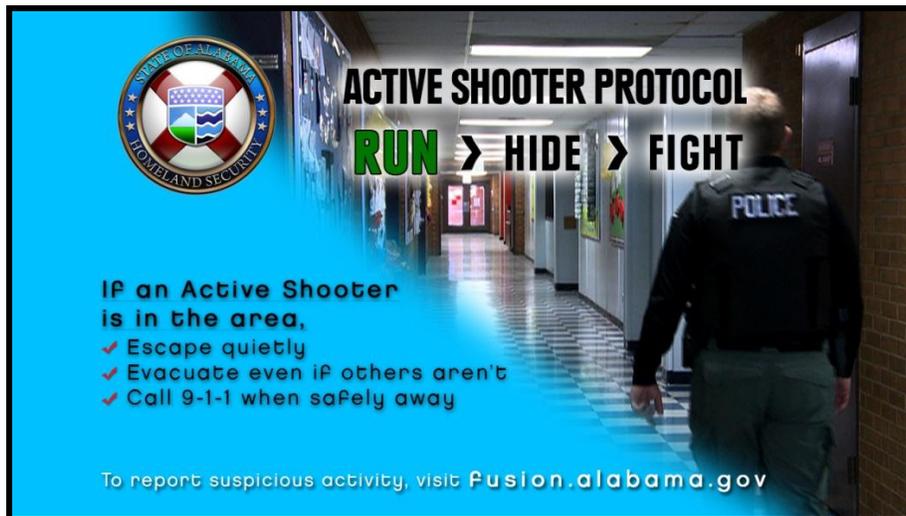

Figure 2. **PSAs for "If You See Something, Say Something™" and** *Run, Hide, Fight.*

Priority 2b: Educate the general public on how to respond to an active shooter event

Goal: Promote public awareness of effective active shooter response tactics through the Run, Hide, Fight video and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Preparedness website

Being prepared is the best defense should a citizen find him or herself in an active shooter situation. AL DHS promotes several resources that have been developed by the US DHS and other law enforcement agencies. This section discusses those resources in more detail as well as practical advice for citizens from law enforcement.

Methodology

What is *Run, Hide, Fight*?

Run, Hide, Fight is an instructional video that was originally produced by the Houston Police Department (figure 3). The purpose of this video is to teach the public what to do if faced with an active shooter. It provides a simple, yet powerful message that is reinforced through a realistic scenario. The "run, hide, fight" method employs three tactics:

1. Run—if there is an escape path.
   - Attempt to evacuate;
   - Evacuate whether others agree to or not;
   - Leave your belongings behind;
   - Help others escape if possible;
   - Prevent others from entering the area; and,
   - Call 9-1-1 when you are safe.
2. Hide—if you can't get out safely.
   - Lock and/or blockade the door;
   - Silence your cell phone;
   - Hide behind large objects; and,
   - Remain very quiet.
3. Fight—as a last resort and only if your life is in danger.
   - Attempt to incapacitate the shooter;
   - Act with physical aggression;
   - Improvise weapons; and,
   - Commit to your actions.

AL DHS has created a customized version of this video, which includes an introduction from Director Spencer Collier. It can be viewed on YouTube at this location: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ESNae7OoyM&feature=player_embedded.

Figure 3. **Scenes from** *Run, Hide, Fight*

Training Plan

AL DHS is developing a one hour course based on the *Run, Hide, Fight* video to train private and public sector organizations how to respond to an active shooter situation. This course is structured on a "train-the-trainer" model where managers or other leaders from an organization are trained on the *Run, Hide, Fight* technique and are given a lesson plan for the course, so they can bring these practices back to their workplace. It is anticipated the course will be developed and ready for delivery the first quarter of 2013. Course registration will be available through AL DHS.

The Active Shooter Preparedness Website

Another public learning resource that AL DHS encourages Alabama citizens to explore is the US DHS Active Shooter Preparedness Website (http://www.dhs.gov/activeshooter) (figure 4). This site contains useful information and instruction, such as the following shown in table 1.

Active Shooter: What You Can Do Duration: 45 minutes	This free online course covers the basics of how to prepare for and respond to an active shooter situation. As a workplace training tool, it is intended for managers as well as employees; however, the information presented can be applied to almost any setting. The course covers the following content: • The actions to take when confronted with an active shooter and how to assist responding law enforcement officials • Potential workplace violence indicators • The actions to take to prevent and prepare for potential active shooter incidents • How to manage the consequences of an active shooter incident This course is available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Emergency Management Institute.
Active Shooter Webinar Duration: 90 minutes	The purpose of this pre-recorded webinar is to educate the public and private sector about the importance of "developing an emergency response plan and the need to train employees on how to respond if confronted with an active shooter." Other topics presented include the three types of active shooters (workplace/school, criminal, and ideological) and how they differ. The webinar can be viewed "on demand" from a link provided at this website.
Active Shooter Workshop Series	These face-to-face, facilitated workshops have occurred and will continue to be held in cities across the country. The purpose of these workshops is to bring members of the private sector together with law enforcement to learn and discuss how to prepare for and respond to an active shooter situation. The workshop uses scenarios and exercises to guide participants in evaluating, planning, and coordinating their response. Contact information for requesting a workshop at a specific location is provided on this website.
Active Shooter: How to Respond Resource Materials	The US DHS has created several "download and print" materials that can be used to educate about, as well as to reinforce, how to plan for and respond to an active shooter situation. These materials come in various formats—booklet, poster, and pocket card—and present the following information: • Profile of an active shooter • Responding to an active shooter or other workplace violence situation • Training for an active shooter situation and creating an emergency action plan • Tips for recognizing signs of potential workplace violence

Options for Consideration Active Shooter Training Video	Presenting a similar message as the *Run, Hide, Fight* video, this instructional video presents how to respond to an active shooter situation, as well as how to assist law enforcement at the scene. The video can be viewed from this website or on YouTube.
U.S. Secret Service Active Shooter Related Research	This website also provides links to research reports concerning active shooter incidents, such as: • Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education • Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack • Assassination in the United States: An Operational Study of Recent Assassins, Attackers, and Near Lethal Approaches • Protective Intelligence & Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials • Threat Assessment: An Approach to Prevent Targeted Violence • Threat Assessment: Defining an Approach for Evaluating Risk of Targeted Violence

Table 1. Available information on the Active Shooter Preparedness Website.

Figure 4. **US DHS Active Shooter Preparedness Website**

Public Awareness

A promotional campaign (figure 5) consisting of press releases, billboards, digital signage in RSA buildings, and PSAs will be used to increase public awareness of *Run, Hide, Fight* as well as the US DHS Active Shooter Preparedness Website. Still images from the video with supporting text bullets will be used to teach the public how to plan for and respond to an active shooter situation. PSAs will broadcast on both television and radio. It is expected that this campaign will begin in March 2013 and run through the summer.

Figure 5. **Scenes from** *Run, Hide, Fight*

Advice for the Public from Law Enforcement Officers

It is important for the public to understand that situations are assessed on the spot—there can be no "all purpose" advice because each situation is unique and constantly changing. In general, citizens need to do what the police tell them to do as the situation unfolds.

Upon entering an active shooter scene, the first priority of law enforcement is to neutralize the active shooter threat. This means that victims will not be treated or evacuated until the active shooter has been stopped.

During the course of public outreach, questions often arise concerning how the public can best "help" law enforcement during an active shooter situation. In light of recent events, this question is increasingly asked regarding schools. According to law enforcement officials, the best thing students and teachers can do to stay safe is to have a plan, make sure everyone knows the plan, and then execute the plan.

If a citizen or group of citizens is able to disarm, or otherwise incapacitate the active shooter, they should not attempt to hold on to the weapon as this could create confusion for first responders regarding the identity of the active shooter.

Finally, members of law enforcement offer the following suggestions as potential deterrents to criminal activity:

- Be unpredictable—this is the best deterrent to crime, and
- Don't develop patterns.

Educational Facilities

Priority 3: Continue to work with the Alabama Department of Education, using the Virtual Alabama system, which makes school safety plans immediately accessible to first responders

Goal: Provide recommendations and awareness of instructional resources for all learning institutions in Alabama (K-12, post-secondary, and higher education) regarding Virtual Alabama and school safety planning

AL DHS acknowledges that it is in the best interest of schools to keep decision-making authority regarding school safety at the local level. AL DHS also acknowledges that the different needs of K-12, post-secondary, and higher education regarding school safety do not lend themselves to a "one-size-fits-all" approach. This section discusses recommended best practices for schools to consider and explains how Virtual Alabama could be used to support school safety planning in K-12 environments and emergency operation planning in institutions of higher learning (post-secondary, college, and university) environments. Additional recommendations for post-secondary and higher education settings are provided in *Appendix A: Active Shooter Preparedness, Response, and Recovery: Best Practices for Post-Secondary and Higher Education*.

Methodology

What is Virtual Alabama?

Initiated in 2005, the Virtual Alabama program was developed by AL DHS (figure 6). Virtual Alabama is a 3-D visualization tool that allows users to view data and imagery on a globe. Although the system contains "massive amounts" of data, the easy-to-use interface enables both technical and non-technical users to quickly make sense of complex information by navigating to a location (such as a county, city, or neighborhood), viewing a photographic image of that location, and then layering specific data on top of that image (such as fire hydrants, utility lines, hospitals, and schools). Users can also "interact" with some of the data layers on the screen, such as traffic cameras. For instance, a user can click on a traffic camera icon and instantly view video from that camera in real time. One purpose of Virtual Alabama is to provide the "common operating picture and situational awareness needed by Alabama's first responders to protect lives and safeguard citizens before, during, and after a disaster" (https://virtual.alabama.gov). As of January 2013, there were more than 32,000 Virtual Alabama users representing 1500 agencies. The program contains imagery from all 67 Alabama counties.

What is the Virtual Alabama School Safety System?

The State Superintendent of the Alabama Board of Education requires all K-12 public schools in the state to have a school safety plan and to enter that plan into Virtual Alabama. Schools use the Virtual Alabama School Safety System (VAS^3) to enter their plans (figure 7). VAS^3 is a web-based tool used in conjunction with Virtual Alabama to make school safety plans and emergency operation plans immediately shareable with local first responders. It was funded by the State Homeland Security Grant Program and is a collaboration between AL DHS, the State Department of Education, the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center, and the Auburn University at Montgomery Center for Government.

How It Works

K-12 Schools and Institutions of Post-Secondary and Higher Education

Administrators from a school can request a Virtual Alabama account by going to the Virtual Alabama web portal (https://virtual.alabama.gov) and clicking the "Register" link at the top of the screen. Schools can call 1-800-392-8025 for 24-hour/seven-day Virtual Alabama support. Once approved, users are issued a Virtual Alabama user name and password for use in Virtual Alabama. School districts are issued school IDs and passwords for use in VAS^3 through the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center (ACJIC). School officials log in to VAS^3 at https://safeschools.alacop.gov/login.aspx. This website provides all of the tools a school will need to develop an online safety plan, including:

- The Floor Plan Annotation Tool (figure 8), a custom tool set designed for creating, maintaining, and managing information related to the physical location of infrastructure, equipment, and assembly points within the floor plan of a school;
- Step-by-step process flow for creating a safety plan with links to forms to complete for each step (such as Staff Skills Survey and Inventory, Statement of Commitment, List of Materials and Equipment, and Planning Committee);
- A place to store contact information, such as school administration, emergency management, and utilities;
- A place to store documents, such as the completed safety plan and photographs;
- Tips to guide users through the Emergency Management Cycle; and,
- Instructional videos.

When complete, school officials can choose to grant local law enforcement officers or other first responders viewing access to the annotated floor plans through Virtual Alabama.

Law Enforcement/First Responders

To view a school's safety plan in Virtual Alabama, law enforcement/first responders follow these steps:

1. Obtain a Virtual Alabama account (an Alacop user ID and password may also be used to access Virtual Alabama);

2. Contact the school's officials to request its user name and password; and,

3. Log in to Virtual Alabama and select "School Layers."

Note: There are two methods of logging in to Virtual Alabama depending on which version of the application is being used. Users accessing the "client" version, which is stored on their computer, will click the desktop shortcut for Virtual Alabama that was created when the client installed. Users accessing the "web portal" version will go to https://virtual.alabama.gov.

The Benefits of VAS[3]

VAS[3] provides schools and first-responders secure Internet-accessibility to school safety plans and color-coded virtual maps that include detailed floor plans indicating up to 51 items of interest such as

- Hazardous Materials;

- Evacuation Routes;

- Disaster Staging Areas; and,

- Video Cameras (including real-time camera feeds).

The system also promotes information sharing and planning between schools and first-responders. Although only schools enter information into VAS[3], the process of creating a safety plan brings school officials and first responders together (often for the first time) to discuss issues and collaborate on a plan of action.

Partnerships

Five organizations collaborate to ensure the continued success of VAS[3]. Table 2 lists each organization and its responsibility regarding the system.

Organization	VAS[3] Responsibility
	The Alabama Department of Homeland Security (AL DHS) is the functional proponent for Virtual Alabama, and serves as funding source and project management lead for this program.
	The Alabama State Department of Education is the functional proponent for school safety, and monitors school safety plans.
	The Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center (ACJIC) is the application host for this program, and manages all technically-related security matters.
	The Alabama Geographic Information Program Office (AGIPO) coordinates, promotes, develops, uses, and shares geographic information and geospatial data. It promotes the efficient use of GIS and related technologies for the long-term benefit of the citizens of Alabama.
	Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) is the fielding agent for this program, and provides outreach, training, and mapping services.
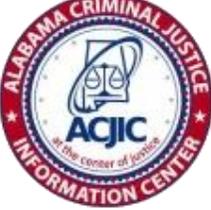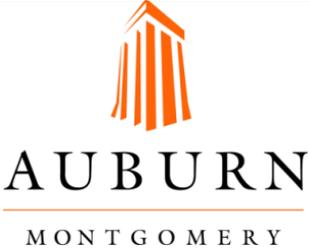
Table 2. **Virtual Alabama School Safety System Partners**

Training and Outreach Plan

As the education and outreach arm of Virtual Alabama and VAS^3, the AUM Center for Government provides briefings, training, and implementation assistance. In 2012, AUM staff held three-day training and information sessions in each of the seven homeland security regions in the state. Additionally, AUM regularly briefs schools, agencies, and first responders on the basics of Virtual Alabama and VAS^3 and has developed online training videos for registered users that can be accessed from the Virtual Alabama and VAS^3 websites. Since 2010, AUM has hosted the Virtual Alabama School Safety Summit annually to provide an opportunity for school officials and first responders across the state to meet and learn from the experiences of experts and their peers, as well as get the latest information about Virtual Alabama and school safety planning. For information on how to obtain a Virtual Alabama account or how to implement the system, see the *Appendix C: Resources*.

Strategic Plan

Figure 6. **The Virtual Alabama Web Portal**

Figure 7. **The Virtual Alabama School Safety System (VAS³) Home Page**
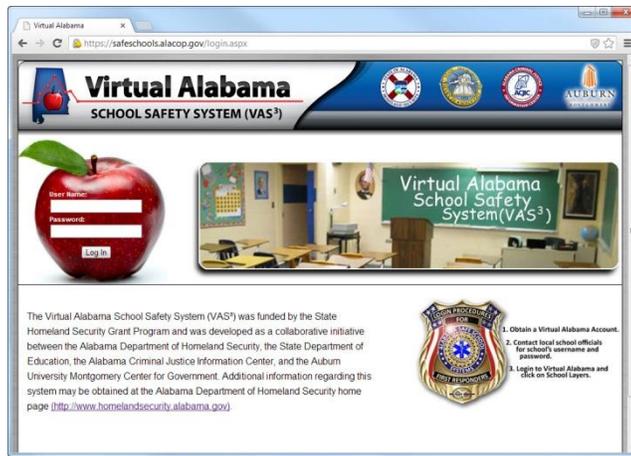
Figure 8. **The VAS³ Floor Plan Annotation Tool**

Post-Event Management

Regardless of the circumstances, all events are considered local events and will be managed through the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS provides

> a systematic, proactive approach to guide departments and agencies at all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to work seamlessly to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents, regardless of size, location, or complexity, in order to reduce the loss of life, property and harm to the environment. (http://www.fema.gov/about-national-incident-managment-system)

Elected officials, law enforcement, and all other first responders should refer to the local emergency management procedures or local emergency operations plan (EOP) for the county where the incident occurred.

Sustainability

Active shooter preparedness remains a priority for AL DHS; therefore, the department will seek state and federal funds to implement, sustain, and enhance the programs and resources presented in this strategic plan. Currently, ALERRT law enforcement training is federally funded and is provided at no cost to the State.

AL DHS will reassess the viability and usefulness of the strategies included in this document periodically to ensure the most accurate and useful information is being provided to the citizens of Alabama.

Appendix A: Active Shooter Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Best Practices for Post-Secondary and Higher Education

Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. Because active shooter events are dynamic and college campuses are large and diverse, there is not a single set of best-practices. However, there are general recommendations to mitigate the risks of an active shooter event. It is important to remember these recommendations are not a set of prescribed actions that must be followed when confronted with an active shooter. Survival is paramount in the situation. In addition to Virtual Alabama for educational settings, there are several tactical procedures that could be appropriate during an active shooter situation.

Methodology

A.L.I.C.E.
ALICE was developed by Response Options, "a critical incident response training company, specializing in active shooter and violent intruder response strategies" (http://www.responseoptions.com). ALICE is an acronym for five steps that can be utilized to increase the chance of survival in an active shooter situation. These steps are not sequential, but are presented as options. The situation will determine what steps make sense to follow. A combination of these steps can be used to keep individuals safe and modified as the situation changes. Video examples of ALICE are available including Auburn University's ALICE training video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=sYn5HMMSz6Y).

A: Alert
Various sounds, sights, and interactions will create awareness of the active shooter.

- Gunfire
- Witness
- Announcement
- Phone Alert

L: Lockdown

If evacuation is not possible, secure the room (figure 9). It is a starting point from which survival decisions will begin to be made.

- Look for alternate escape routes (windows, other doors, etc.)
- Lock the door.
- Tie down the door, if possible, using belts, purse straps, shoe laces, etc.
- Barricade the door with any object available (desk, chairs, etc.)
- Cover any windows.
- Move out of the doorway in case gunfire comes through.
- Silence or place cell phones on vibrate.
- Once secured, *do not* open the door for anyone. Police will enter the room when the situation is over.
- As soon as you are safe call 911.
- Gather weapons (coffee cups, chairs, books, pens, etc.) and mentally prepare to defend yourself or others.
- Put yourself in a position to surprise the active shooter if he or she enters the room.

Figure 9. **Securing a door from Auburn University's ALICE training video**

I: Inform

Use any means necessary to pass on real-time information.

- Use plain language.
- Provide "who, what, when, where, and how" information.
- Can be derived from 911 calls, video surveillance, etc.
- Can be used by people in the area or who may come into it to make common sense decisions.
- Can be given by "Flash Alerts," PA Announcements, or police radio speakers.

C: Counter

Use simple, proactive techniques if you are confronted by an active shooter.

(Disclaimer: In a _last resort_ situation, some simple, proactive techniques could increase chances of survival if you are confronted by an active shooter. ALICE is presented as a set of options for groups on college campus settings or various public areas.)

- Realize that anything can be a weapon (books, coffee cups, etc.)
- Throw objects at the shooter's head to disrupt his/her aim.
- Create as much noise as possible.
- Attack or swarm in a group.
- Grab the shooter's limbs or head, take him/her to the ground, and hold him/her there.
- Run around the room and create chaos.
- If you have control of the shooter, call 911 and tell the police where you are. Listen to the police commands when they arrive on the scene.

E: Evacuate

Remove yourself from the danger zone as quickly as possible.

- Decide if you can safely evacuate.
- Run in a zigzag pattern as fast as you can.
- Do not stop running until you are far away from the scene.
- Bring something to throw in case you encounter the active shooter.
- Consider if the fall from a window would kill you.
    - Break out windows and attempt to quickly clear glass from the frame.
    - Consider using belts, clothing, or other items as an improvised rope to shorten the distance you would fall.
    - Hang by your hands from the window ledge to shorten the drop.
    - Attempt to drop into shrubs, mulch, or grass to lessen the injury.
- Do not attempt to drive from the area.

Run, Hide, Fight

Run, Hide, Fight is an instructional video that was originally produced by the Houston Police Department. The purpose of this video is to teach the public what to do if faced with an active shooter. It provides a simple, yet powerful message that is reinforced through a realistic scenario. The Run, Hide, Fight response is documented in the Private Sector and Public Outreach section of this document.

Appendix B: Media Plan Best Practices

In the case of an active shooter event, multiple groups of people will descend on the site. Staff members at the location need to be prepared to handle local citizens, family members, and especially local and national media. Effective preparation in how to deal with this likely chaotic convergence should begin *before* an active shooter event. The following best practices can be used when dealing with media in this type of situation.

Preparing for the Media before an Incident

Have a "Go-Kit"

A "Go-Kit" is an assembly of "tools" that can be used to manage an unfolding situation. It should be easily accessible and mobile. Useful items to include are safety plans, cell phone, phone charger, tape recorder, batteries, business cards, vital documents, and a credit card.

Decide who is Responsible for Communicating Information

In an active shooter situation, information changes rapidly. Controlling the flow of information is crucial. Determine the answers to the following questions and inform staff of everyone's responsibilities before an incident occurs:

- Who will be in charge of the site? Who will be the back-up?
- Who will be the "mouth" of the organization?
- Who will be responsible for holding the media in the staging area?
- Who will be responsible for updating social media?
- Who will talk to family members?
- Who will be responsible for writing press releases?
- Who is allowed to talk to media? Who is *not* allowed to talk to media?
- If more than one person is addressing the media, how will consistent messaging be ensured?

Handling the Media during and after an Incident

Staging the Media

Having a pre-planned media staging area allows staff at the site more control over the situation and safeguards against media infringement. In the event of an active shooter event, law enforcement can help set the parameters and contain the media. Ensure the staging area does not interfere with the crime scene or the work being done. It should not be too close to sensitive

information. Finally, consider the visual parameters of the staging area: what should the media—and consequently the viewing public—be able to see?

Preparing to Communicate with the Media

Once information has been communicated to the media, there is no scaling back. Before addressing the media take a few moments to:

- Confirm the key message(s) and develop talking points. These comments should be short, easy-to-understand statements that reinforce the key message(s).
- Anticipate questions the media may ask and have prepared statements. Determine which information should be addressed as well as the information that should not be discussed.
- Prepare answers to awkward questions.
- Use language that is generic but answers the question.
- Request the presence of a law enforcement officer (if possible) to help answer questions during a press conference.
- Clear all information through law enforcement before addressing the media, for example
  - Avoid body counts and names until the scene is cleared
- Consider non-verbal communication, such as
  - Appropriate eye contact
  - Tone of voice
  - Expression (i.e., do not smile while describing something tragic)
  - Body position
  - Gesture
  - Movement
  - Attire

Addressing the Media

When addressing the media it is important to stay on task. During stressful situations, nervousness can cause people to "over talk." Be hesitant in guessing the answers to questions. *If an answer is unknown,* use comments like, "We do not know the answer at this time…" or "Once we have more information, we will let you know…" Do not be afraid to ask the media to wait for accurate information or to inform the media that information will be released at a specific time. All comments made to the media need to be done with intention and purpose. If conducting a live interview is a concern, gather questions from the media and issue a statement.

Helpful Phrases

During stressful situations it is vital to choose words wisely. Having several "helpful phrases" on hand may ease the anxiety of staff that have to make statements to the media. For instance, answering a question with "No comment" may imply that information is being hidden or that the speaker is unprepared or uniformed. Likewise, speech that lacks verbal connectors may make it difficult to communicate key messages. The following sample statements can help staff in these situations.

Useful Alternatives to "No Comment":

- "The matter is under investigation and that information is not available at this time."
- "We will provide updates as more information becomes available."
- "Those details are covered by the Privacy Act and I cannot discuss them, but I can give you this general information"
- "We are still assessing the situation."
- "We are waiting for law enforcement to verify that information."

Transitional Phrases to Help the Speaker Focus the Media on the Key Message(s):

- "What is most important is…"
- "What we should focus on is…"
- "What the public should know is…"
- "The point (or goal) is…"

Drafting a Media Plan

The suggestions above are designed as a guide for developing a comprehensive media plan. There is no "one plan fits all" approach for every type of emergency situation. Since every active shooter incident is different, responses will vary and flexibility is important.

Issue a Media Plan Annually

If a site already has a media plan, it should be issued annually to local media to help mitigate the chaos that may occur during an active shooter event. The plan should inform the media that only those with press badges will be allowed on site, provide directions to a potential media staging area, and list the initial point of contact.

Appendix C: Resources

Law Enforcement

Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training, or ALERRT, is being used to train law enforcement in Alabama. The purpose of this federally-approved program is to train law enforcement officers to safely and effectively neutralize an active shooter.

- To schedule ALERRT training contact the AL DHS: http://www.homelandsecurity.alabama.gov/

Private Sector and Public Outreach

"If You See Something, Say Something™"

A campaign to "raise public awareness of indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime, and to emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity to the proper local law enforcement authorities."

- Hotline: 1-866-229-6220
- Online Form: http://fusion.alabama.gov/Report-Suspicious-Activity.aspx
- "App" for iPhone and Android could be available by mid-2013

Run, Hide, Fight video

The purpose of this video is to teach the public what to do if faced with an active shooter. It provides a simple, yet powerful message that is reinforced through a realistic scenario.

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ESNae7OoyM&feature=player_embedded

Active Shooter Preparedness Website

A public learning resource that AL DHS encourages Alabama citizens to explore is the US DHS Active Shooter Preparedness Website (http://www.dhs.gov/activeshooter). This site contains useful information and instruction, such as the following:

Active Shooter: What You Can Do course

This free online course covers the basics of how to prepare for and respond to an active shooter situation. Approximate duration: 45 minutes.

- http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/IS907.asp

Active Shooter Webinar

The purpose of this pre-recorded webinar is to educate the public and private sector about the importance of "developing an emergency response plan and the need to train employees on how to respond if confronted with an active shooter." Approximate Duration: 90 minutes.

- https://connect.hsin.gov/asaware2011

Active Shooter: How to Respond Resource Materials

The US DHS has created several "download and print" materials that can be used to educate about, as well as to reinforce how to plan for and respond to an active shooter situation.

- Active Shooter Booklet
- Active Shooter Poster
- Active Shooter Poster (Spanish)
- Active Shooter Pocket Card
- Active Shooter Pocket Card (Spanish)

Options for Consideration Active Shooter Training Video

Presenting a similar message as the *Run, Hide, Fight* video, this instructional video presents how to respond to an active shooter situation, as well as how to assist law enforcement at the scene.

- http://www.dhs.gov/video/options-consideration-active-shooter-training-video

U.S. Secret Service Active Shooter Related Research

This website also provides links to research reports concerning active shooter incidents, such as:

- Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education
- Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack
- Assassination in the United States: An Operational Study of Recent Assassins, Attackers, and Near Lethal Approaches
- Protective Intelligence & Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials
- Threat Assessment: An Approach to Prevent Targeted Violence
- Threat Assessment: Defining an Approach for Evaluating Risk of Targeted Violence

K-12, Post-Secondary, and Universities

Virtual Alabama

Virtual Alabama is a 3-D visualization tool that allows users to view data and imagery on a globe. One purpose of Virtual Alabama is to provide the "common operating picture and

situational awareness needed by Alabama's first responders to protect lives and safeguard citizens before, during, and after a disaster."

- https://virtual.alabama.gov/Default.aspx
  - In order to access Virtual Alabama users must request permission and have a valid government email address.

Virtual Alabama School Safety System

The State Superintendent of the Alabama Board of Education requires all K-12 public schools in the state to have a school safety plan and to enter that plan into Virtual Alabama. Schools use the Virtual Alabama School Safety System (VAS[3]) to enter their plans.

- How to develop an online School Safety Plan: https://safeschools.alacop.gov/login.aspx
  - Administrators and teachers from a school can request a Virtual Alabama account. Once approved, they are issued a Virtual Alabama user name and password for use in Virtual Alabama, and a school ID and password for use in VAS[3].

- Law Enforcement/First Responders can view Safety plans in Virtual Alabama
  - Obtain a Virtual Alabama account. https://virtual.alabama.gov
  - Contact the school's officials to request its user name and password.
  - Log in to Virtual Alabama and select "School Layers."

More detailed information about Virtual Alabama or the Virtual Alabama School Safety System, please reference the Schools section in this document. For questions or inquires about VA or VAS[3] contact Auburn University at Montgomery's Center for Government at 334-244-3050.

A.L.I.C.E.

ALICE was developed by Response Options, "a critical incident response training company, specializing in active shooter and violent intruder response strategies." ALICE is an acronym for five steps that can be utilized increase the chance of survival in an active shooter situation. http://www.responseoptions.com/ALICE-Program.html

A: Alert
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I: Inform
C: Counter
E: Evacuate