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## Ten Observations from the Fashion Place Mall Incident

As the highly publicized and unfortunate gang-related shooting incident at Fashion Place Mall unfolded on January 13, 2019 and continued to make news headlines for several days after, I couldn't help but make some observations about the incident in general. These observations/lessons learned may be somewhat influenced by my 31+ years of experience in the public safety arena, but here they are in no particular order:

- 1. We must never become apathetic and think that "it won't happen here."** We know from following local and national news that no community is exempt from violent acts regardless of the size, social class, or economic status of the area. Preparation at all levels is imperative.
- 2. Chaos will always be present initially.** Anytime there is an emergency involving many people it will be accompanied by initial confusion and fear. It's human nature for some people to react calmly while others react hysterically. According to Canadian psychologist Romeo Vitelli, "'fight or flight' is a natural human response when people think they are in danger, this instinctual reaction may lead us to make very unwise decisions, especially if we are part of a large group of people trying to do the same thing."
- 3. People want to know NOW! (and they can).** Because of social media, we can know almost immediately about a given situation. Unfortunately, inaccurate information can be posted and shared instantly. Even video can be misleading, as in the case of the mall incident when a video posted on social media gave the inaccurate appearance that the shots were fired inside the mall.



- 4. News outlets almost always report first and verify later.** In any high-profile event, the news media is in a frenzy to be the first to break a story. Almost every news source was quick to report the situation as an “active shooter” event, which was not the case.
- 5. Most people are good and want to help.** Video of people jumping in to help those who were injured demonstrates the willingness of people to “roll up their sleeves” and help how they can.
- 6. We can always do better.** At the conclusion of every major or traumatic event, it becomes time to evaluate what happened and how it was handled. No matter how good, we can always be better. The willingness to learn from tragic events is what will make us be better next time.
- 7. There will always be critics.** No matter what the event, no matter what the outcome, no matter how good (or bad) it is handled, there will always be those who will loudly criticize actions taken and/or decisions made, even if those people have no experience or expertise, or even first-hand knowledge.
- 8. It doesn't hurt to be lucky!** In the case of the mall shooting, there were at least 6-8 shots fired with no innocent bystanders being hit. There were no police officers injured. The only gunshot victims were those involved in the altercation. This situation could have been much, much worse.
- 9. Our first responders are outstanding.** I cannot overstate the appreciation I have for our police and fire personnel who are tasked with responding to these types of incidents. Dealing with individuals who have little or no respect for life is an increasing challenge for our public safety officers, yet they continue to protect us every day. For that, I am extremely grateful.



- 10. We need to take responsibility for ourselves.** Regardless of the procedures or systems put in place in any public place, each of us also needs to take accountability for our personal preparedness. Pay attention to the location of at least two exits, be aware of suspicious surroundings, and identify places you could hide. Additionally, there are training videos available online, including <https://www.dhs.gov/options-consideration-active-shooter-preparedness-video> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0>.

Above all, I'm grateful that no life was lost in the mall shooting incident (refer to observation #8). At the same time, I hope that we can all take a lesson learned from it and be a little more prepared for any future emergency event whenever or wherever it may occur.