

## **Preparing for the Unthinkable: Auraria Campus Hosts Regional Active Shooter Drill for 250 First Responders**

From the beginning of their education, students regularly practice for what has become a sad and common trend: an active shooter emergency. Likewise, first responders must be extremely well equipped and prepared for a coordinated response to protect and preserve a community in the event of such a tragedy.

On Aug. 10 and 11, the [North Central All-Hazards Emergency Management Region](#) (NCR) and [Denver Urban Area Security Initiative](#) (DUASI) ran a large-scale training exercise on the Auraria Campus to build regional first responder capabilities for the inconceivable possibility of an active shooter incident.

Partnering with the Auraria Campus Emergency Preparedness Office and the Auraria Campus Police Department, NCR and DUASI spent over a year planning this two-day drill. Over 250 first responders from 35 Denver metro area law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical service agencies participated in the exercise. Unaware of the scenarios planned by the organizers, these first responders had to perform everything they would in a real situation, which included searching and securing rooms, locating the shooter, and attending to the wounded.

With the number of school and campus shootings on the rise, the Auraria Campus was a prime location to host the drill. Chief of the Auraria Campus Police Department Michael Phibbs said, "First and foremost, the campus was a great location because it provided a home-turf opportunity for Auraria Campus Police Department officers to supplement their ongoing active shooter response training."

The King Center for Performing Arts and St. Cajetan's Center, a former church renovated to be an event space, served as the backdrop for the exercise. Theaters, classrooms, offices, hallways, backstage areas, as well as the event space, were activated to provide realistic scenarios.

"Having the variety of settings in one location made for an outstanding training environment," said Chief Phibbs. "First responders were able to practice a range of response techniques designed for different types of settings."

If an active shooter situation were to occur, multiple agencies from across the Denver area would respond. "Aside from being critical training for our own Auraria Campus first responders, active shooter drills should always be trained and exercised as a multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction response," said Eric Leath, Auraria Campus Emergency

Preparedness Manager. Practicing how to work together is paramount in quickly ending an active shooter incident.

“Training for coordinated responses should greatly improve the outcome of future events,” said Chief Phibbs. “Historically, each public safety discipline has trained separately, and when real events have happened, the responses have been, at times, clumsy.”

The first responders used realistic, but inactive, weapons. Actors from a local talent agency played the parts of the shooter and injured victims. They wore full stage makeup for bullet wounds to aid in making the drill as realistic as possible. Each player had a specific injury that required unique aid by the first responders.

Leath contends that for a training like this to be successful, it must be realistic. “Train like you respond,” he said. “Any other way is a waste of time and effort and will put lives in jeopardy for future responses.”

After each scenario, the first responders debriefed on what went well, what didn’t, and what should change to end an incident as quickly as possible. While the 250 trainees hope they don’t ever have to respond to an active shooter incident, they are now extremely well prepared to work collaboratively, successfully, and quickly if the unthinkable should ever occur.