

Active Shooter Safety Training to Take Place at Durham Town Hall; Community Voices Echo Safety Training

Active shooter safety training will be led by the Durham Police Department at the Durham Town Hall in November

Sarah Donovan, New Editor

The safety of the Durham Town Hall staff is integral to Todd Selig, administrator for the town of Durham, New Hampshire. That's why with the help of his administration, Selig has set November 7 as the date when the Durham Police Department will lead an active shooter safety training for the town hall's staff.

Selig said that there were mounting safety concerns from staff, so in 2015 the Durham Town Hall worked with the Durham Police Department to develop an active threat response plan, modeled around ALICE training, the acronym standing for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate.



Panic buttons, shown here by Town Administrator Todd Selig, have been installed at various locations throughout the Durham Town Hall.

With those concerns in mind, in 2015 the administration installed 911 extensions at each desk in the building to ensure that the entire staff had a proper emergency helpline in place if need be. Additionally, they took a further step to install “panic buttons” at specific locations throughout the building as a silent safety feature that would enable staff to alert the police that their presence is needed without alerting the threat that they had done so.



Durham's town hall, where planning for active shooter drills has taken place.

Selig said that most of the time, people are not coming into the town hall to cause harm. Most community members utilize the town hall to register a dog, report the death of a family member, or discuss a policy with the town that they care about. But on the off chance that a disagreement occurred and a tense situation arose, the administration needed a plan to implement if such a situation occurred.

“The more practice we have and the more exposure we have to it, the more comfortable and level-headed we’ll be in doing it safely,” said Selig.

At least five trainings have been conducted for the town hall staff. The first set of trainings discussed how people could respond to an incident. In a following demonstration, the Durham Police Department created a simulation of an active shooter in the building. Selig said another training demonstrated individuals being



Todd Selig, Durham's town administrator, explains the active shooter drills set to take place.

hurt in the building and how the EMTs responded to the incident. Through discussion of the drills, the police, and administration fine-tuned the scenarios to have it be an educational experience.

Selig said that these trainings have been held every other year or so, the most recent training held last year, but Selig said he felt that it was necessary to schedule another training for this upcoming November as there are many new staff members who have not undergone the necessary training yet.

“We’re trying to approach it as more or less a routine training that takes place to make people aware and to empower them to be more at ease or comfortable,” said Selig.

When asked if the University of New Hampshire Police Department (UNHPD) would conduct similar training for UNH students, UNH Police Chief Paul Dean responded that he held active shooter response training weekly for students last year upon Student Senate request, but students didn’t utilize the training.

Chief Dean explained that the UNHPD follows a uniform active shooter training with other local police departments such as the Dover Police Department. Dean said that his force spends about 8-10 hours yearly on active shooter training.

Dean said that the trainings take place when school is not in session and students aren’t on campus to keep the confidentiality of their tactics when combating an armed person with the intention to cause harm.

“So we’ve been doing this [training] for years, honestly, because we’ve always known that these are threats, but these are threats to higher education more, more lately in the past couple of decades to K-12 schools,” said Dean.

Dean said that UNHPD is in a better place than most to be prepared if a violent situation occurs. He said that it’s really sad to have to talk about these topics, “but it’s real.”

Durham PD additionally has staff that train with the county SWAT team, and said those are the people that would respond to an emergency situation. Dean said that he invites law enforcement outside of Durham staff to assist in operating large UNH events such as Parents Weekend or Homecoming so they have a sense of the campus and are familiar in the case that they'd need to respond to an emergency on the UNH campus. He said that he feels that this fosters a sense of connection between officers here and officers from other communities. They know each other and are able to work together better than they would without knowing each other previously.

Chief Dean said that there are many resources that the UNHPD has created for students to try and ensure their safety when attending UNH. On the UNH Mobile app under the Health & Safety icon, a page detailing all UNH's health and safety resources is listed, including but not limited to the UNH PD phone number, the Durham Police Department phone number and the Sexual Harassment & Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP) number.

One of the main safety communication tools that the UNH PD tests and works to improve is the Rave Alert system. This is the program that sends text messages to all UNH students who are signed into the program to receive alerts. Dean said this system is one of the most essential tools for student safety, in the event of an emergency. For example, if there was an active shooter, an instant text message would be sent out community-wide to send an alert of the present threat.

Dean said that gun-related violence keeps him awake every night. To cope with that stress, he said "What I try to do is put things in place to minimize that threat; there is no research that any one kind of school is more susceptible than another to this kind of violence."

He explained many of the safety and training tactics that he and his force practice to ensure student safety in case of an emergency, or in case of an active shooter.



UNH Chief of Police Paul Dean has played an important role in planning active shooter trainings.