

Opinion: Prevention can save lives

By Adam McGill

Like all of you, I am heartbroken about the mass murders that occurred in San Bernardino on Dec. 2. All of us were victimized. Of course, not at the same level of the victims' families, the San Bernardino community, or the courageous first responders, but nonetheless many of us sensed some level of security slip away and more fear crept into our lives.

The frequency and severity of these events is cause for serious concern. Despite what the federal government may ultimately determine in San Bernardino, one of the principal objectives of terrorism is to instill fear in people and that objective was easily accomplished.



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In Truckee, your police department and its public safety partners routinely plan, train, and drill for events such as Wednesday's. I am very confident our staff would rise to the occasion and courageously respond to one of these horrific events and perform with valor. Our response would be heroic like the countless other police officers across the country who run toward gunfire on our behalf, but our response would not be the first opportunity to be courageous. That opportunity is reserved for you.

The first opportunity to be courageous most often occurs long before the first 911 call is made that someone is actively killing innocent people. In nearly every case whether it was a mass shooting or the Boston Marathon bombing someone was suspicious of the perpetrator's activity before the event and those suspicions were suppressed by the witness(es) for one reason or another. The police can respond admirably and even save some lives, but the vast majority of the carnage will have already occurred before they arrive.

Police response and training for these events is critical, but the most important effort must be in the area of prevention. In addition to the police, this responsibility falls upon the shoulders of all of you.

For the last few years, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has used the slogan, "see something, say something". I believe we need to take it a step further – beyond "seeing" something. You must use all of your senses and instincts – report any questionable behavior whether we're talking about true terrorism, workplace violence, or domestic violence, all can be equally as deadly.

Trying to triage or risk assess suspicious behavior on your own is woefully inadequate. The police are trained and equipped with resources not available to the general public. We have access to intelligence information and other tools to perform a thorough threat assessment of the suspect or situation. A threat assessment by the police does not automatically lead to public disclosures, arrests, or other visible police activity. Most often these investigations are very discreet with action only taken in situations that are imminent.

Reporting your suspicions to the police gives us the best opportunity to intervene and prevent a tragedy before it's too

late. We prefer you identify yourself so we can get the most accurate information about your suspicions, but callers can remain anonymous. Tips can be received in person, by phone, via email, or through our **online** tip system.

Tahoe Truckee Unified School District also uses a **text a tip platform**.

Living with the consequences of not reporting something or someone suspicious is a heavy burden that can be minimized by passing the information on to the experts and not either ignoring your suspicions or “investigating” on your own.

If you find yourself in an active killing event, you must act. If you can run away, run. If you cannot run, try to hide, but if hiding is not possible or you’re about to be discovered, you must fight back.

Remember, run, hide, fight! A training video on this response can be found **online**.

Adam McGill is police chief of Truckee.