

Published January 10th, 2018

Emergency response training at schools includes active shooter scenario

By Pippa Fisher



Teachers and staff listen to the police chief discuss how to handle an emergency at Lafayette elementary school. Photo Pippa Fisher

"You are not helpless. What you do matters." This is the main message from Lafayette police in their emergency response trainings, currently ongoing for all staff in Lafayette's public elementary and middle schools.

The trainings cover response to different emergencies but the focus is largely on active shooter situations.

"The intent is not to scare," said Lafayette police Chief Eric Christensen. "Just to be prepared."

For most people the idea of a school under gunfire is the definition of the unthinkable. But for Christensen his attitude is never that it can't happen here. And his argument is that it is exactly by thinking about it ahead of time that people can be better prepared, were they ever to be faced with that unthinkable situation, in the same way that regular fire drills at schools prepare for a fire situation.

The trainings are being held at the schools for all staff including administrative and janitorial staff.

"We have done one series prior to this for the administrators of all the campuses," explains Christensen. "Some of the smaller daycares had us do it with all of their employees last year. Last year, we focused a lot on making sure everyone had basic incident command training."

Christensen says that his department plans on doing more of these types of courses with local businesses and anywhere crowds gather. "We had a few churches mixed in with the various groups over the last classes as well."

Christensen, who presented the training himself along with Lafayette PD's Youth Services Officer Larry Seliga, spent much of the hour reminding the teachers and staff that their decisions and immediate response to a shooter on campus matters and will make a difference, saving lives.

With some specific strategies discussed, the message that students' lives are the teachers' responsibilities until the police arrive and take care of the situation was loud and clear. "You have the ability to save lives," Christensen told the audience.

"I think this type of training is important because like any team, everyone has to know what the basic plan is. Once everyone knows what the game plan is, then we start to work on practicing the plan," says Christensen. "By rehearsing and talking about what could occur in an emergency we are going to be much better prepared when anything happens."

Feeling part of a team is important to Christensen. "Meeting each other, shaking each other's hands is one of the most important things. They (teachers and staff) all now know Larry and me - we've had a chance to meet them. When something happens, it's no longer strangers meeting - it's people who have met and have a common foundation."

Christensen credits Lafayette Schools Superintendent Rachel Zinn for bringing this training in. "She is a driving force behind the programs within the schools," he says.

Vice Mayor Cam Burks believes this initiative is of the utmost priority. "In my opinion, nothing is more important than protecting our children. Chief Christensen's forward-leaning approach with our schools will enable our fantastic community of educators to be prepared in the event of a crisis. This is yet another example of how our police department's innovative emergency planning strategy is focused on the right things at the right time."

Reach the reporter at: pippa@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA