

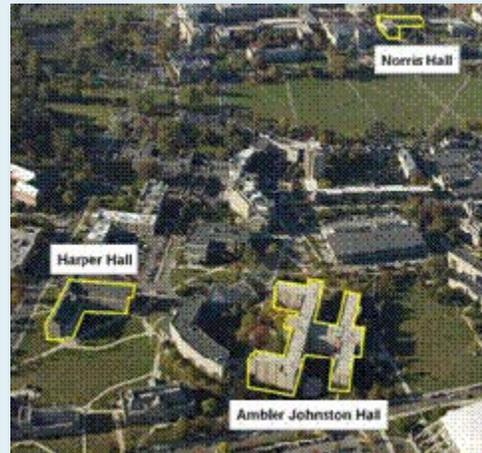
# VIRGINIA TECH UNIVERSITY

**Situation:** Mentally ill student kills 32 in university campus massacre.

On 16 April 2007, Seung-Hui Cho went on a shooting spree at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia. The heavily armed student killed a total of 32 people at two university facilities before taking his own life.

Cho was a mentally unstable individual suffering from multiple disorders including severe depression and social anxiety disorder. In the past, he had received treatment for his illnesses, but he was not undergoing treatment at the time of the attack.

The attacks on Virginia Tech, Columbine High School in Colorado, and the Chechen terrorist attack on a school in Beslan, Russia demonstrate that students may face risks in an educational setting.



*This incident does not meet the traditional definition of a terrorist attack. Cho was mentally ill and did not have a clear political objective. However, the Attack at Virginia Tech illustrates several important teaching points for response to an active shooter situation: attempt to escape, barricade yourself in a room, or seek cover behind a solid object.*



Cho began his attack at 7:15 a.m. in the West Amber Johnston residential hall. There he shot and killed Emily Hilscher in her room. He also shot and killed Ryan Clark, a fellow student and Resident Assistant, when he came to Hilscher's aid.

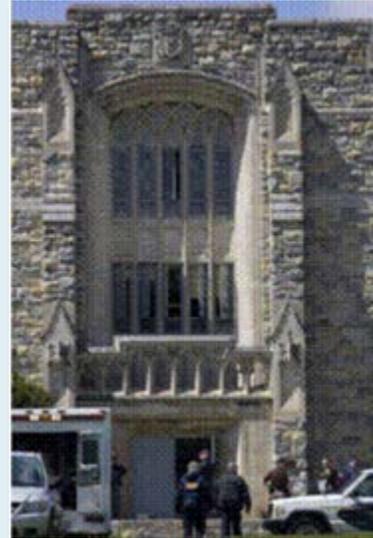
After these shootings, Cho returned to his own room in Harper Hall where he changed out of his bloody clothes, deleted emails from his computer, closed his university email account, and removed his computer's hard drive. He then went to a local post office and mailed a package to NBC news containing writings and video tapes.

Police and emergency medical services quickly responded to reports of these shootings. The initial investigation focused on Hilscher's boyfriend who friends described as "an avid gun user." At the same time, the University Policy Group discussed the shootings and how to proceed. At 9:26 a.m., over two

hours after the incident, faculty and students were alerted by email of the shootings. This notice came too late to alert the victims of Cho's second phase of attacks.

*First responders may not know the exact nature of an incident and appropriate warnings may be delayed. Comply with official warnings. In addition to suggested precautions, consider personal measures to reduce your exposure.*

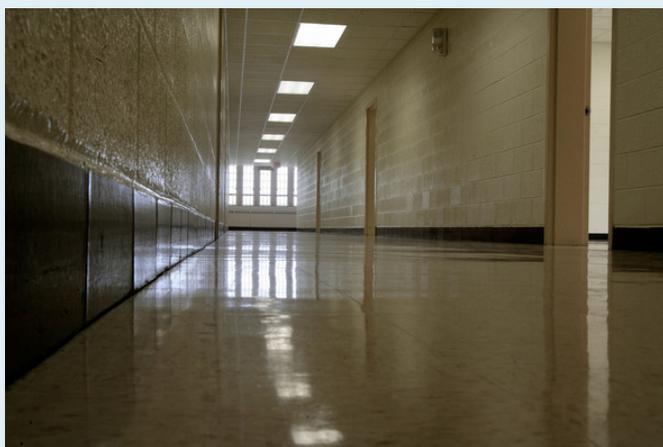
At 9:40 a.m., Cho entered Norris Hall equipped with two guns, nineteen 10 to 15 round ammunition clips, 400 extra rounds of ammunition, a knife, locks, chains, and a hammer. He chained shut three of the primary doors leading into the building, and hung a sign that said a bomb would explode if doors were opened.



After looking into several classrooms, Cho entered Room 206 where he shot and killed the professor and nine of thirteen students in the room, wounding two others.

Cho then proceeded to Room 207 where he shot and killed another professor along with four students, wounding six others. After hearing gunshots, occupants of Rooms 211 and 204 attempted to barricade the doors, but Cho was able to push past the barricades and killed and wounded several others. In Room 204, Professor Liviv Librescu, a Holocaust survivor, held the door closed while his students jumped from the window; however, he died after receiving multiple gun shots through the door. Cho then reloaded and revisited several rooms to attack previously wounded victims.

*Events in an active shooter incident occur rapidly. You may have to make a split second decision to try to escape the area, shelter in place, or attack the perpetrator.*



In response to the shootings, many faculty members and students decided to attempt to escape from the building or to barricade themselves in their classrooms. Cho returned to Room 207, but was unable to enter due to four students holding the door shut. Other students inside the room attempted to administer first aid to the wounded. Another professor led a class of students to another floor of the building where they could barricade themselves in an office with a locking door. As

mentioned above, Liviv Librescu, bravely sacrificed himself by holding his classroom's door shut to give time for the majority of his students to escape through the windows.

The incident at Norris Hall concluded eleven minutes after it had begun. At 9:51 a.m., police used shotguns to shoot through the chains Cho had used to seal the exits. Cho heard the shotgun blast and ended his own life as police reached the second floor. Police then began the process of securing the building and evacuating the wounded and other survivors.

*It is very important to cooperate with first responder instructions. Remember, first responders may not know all the details of the incident. They may even handcuff you and detain you while they confirm identities. You should follow their instructions and provide them with information you feel would assist them, but you should not try to actively assist them in any way.*

Cho displayed troubling signs over many years. He was a quiet and withdrawn child. Before the seventh grade, he was diagnosed with selective mutism, a condition of extreme shyness and inability to speak in uncomfortable social settings. In the eighth grade, his writings reflected suicidal and homicidal tendencies. Cho received anti-depressants, but was taken off medication as he improved. In high school, a special educational program helped him deal with his shyness, and he was generally a good student and caused no problems.



Due to federal privacy laws, Virginia Tech officials were not notified of Cho's history of mental illness. His writings alarmed some of his instructors and one had him removed from her class. He was referred to counseling, but did not attend the sessions.

Fellow students reported Cho to the Virginia Tech Police Department for harassing behavior including unusual text messages and emails, using an alias, and dressing in a disguise. He made suicidal remarks to one of his roommates and was taken to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation; however, the evaluating psychologist did not feel he was a threat to himself or others. Additional treatment for Cho was ordered, but there was no follow-up to see that he received it.

*If you observe behavior that could indicate a threat, warn security personnel, your supervisor, or your sponsor. Recognizing and reporting unstable behavior in others may get them the help they need and prevent a dangerous incident.*



The carnage at Virginia Tech was horrific. In all, between both attacks, Cho killed 27 students and five faculty members. In addition to those killed, 17 more persons were wounded by gunfire and six more injured as they jumped from windows in an attempt to escape the attack. During the brief attack, Cho expended at least 174 rounds of ammunition.

In the aftermath of the Virginia Tech massacre several changes were instituted to help prevent a similar incident. Included in these changes was an Executive Order passed by Virginia Governor Tim Kaine designed to close gaps between federal and state laws that allowed a person deemed mentally ill to purchase a handgun.