


The Black Ops Blog

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Lessons from Lewiston: Preparing for the Unthinkable in Amusement and Game Facilities

On **October 25, 2023**, the small city of Lewiston, Maine, was shattered when a lone gunman opened fire at a local bowling alley and a nearby bar, claiming **18 lives and injuring 13 others**. The attack—carried out by an Army reservist with a documented history of mental health issues—left an indelible mark on survivors and the broader community. But within the tragedy are important lessons, particularly for those who frequent or operate **amusement and entertainment venues**, where large crowds and open layouts can create vulnerabilities.

What Victims and Survivors Taught Us

The most powerful takeaways don't come from police tactics—they come from the people who were there when it happened.

1. Know Your Surroundings

Many survivors in Lewiston instinctively sought exits, hid behind barriers, or escaped through back doors. Those who were most aware of their environment had a better chance of finding safety quickly. Familiarity with exits, cover, and communication devices can make a life-saving difference.

2. Action Saves Lives

One survivor at the bowling alley helped shepherd children and other patrons to safety while shots rang out. In chaos, simple decisions—like moving instead of freezing, locking a door, or silencing a phone—can be critical. Training staff and even patrons in the basics of emergency response can create more people who know how to act under pressure.

3. Help One Another

Stories emerged of patrons helping the injured, applying pressure to wounds, or comforting others during the lockdown. Having basic trauma response knowledge (such as how to stop bleeding) can empower civilians to save lives before medics arrive.

4. Be Mentally Prepared

The victims in Lewiston never expected violence to strike in their community. Survivors spoke of the disorientation and disbelief they experienced in the moment. Mental preparedness—thinking “what would I do if...”—helps override denial and speeds up reaction time.

5. Support Is Essential After the Incident

Survivors of the Lewiston shooting continue to cope with trauma. The emotional and psychological toll of such an event lingers long after headlines fade. Facilities need post-incident care plans in place—for both staff and guests.

How Amusement and Game Facilities Can Prepare

Whether you're managing a bowling alley, arcade, trampoline park, or family entertainment center, the lessons from Lewiston underscore the importance of planning ahead:

1. Emergency Preparedness Training for Staff

Train employees not just to “see something, say something,” but to act quickly—how to call for help, initiate lockdowns, guide guests to safety, and provide basic first aid.

2. Public-Facing Safety Tools

Install clear signage for exits, designate rally points, and create silent alert systems. Consider offering brief public safety instructions during orientation or check-in.

3. Physical Layout Considerations

Review floor plans with safety in mind. Avoid “dead ends,” and ensure exits are accessible, clearly marked, and unobstructed at all times. Install locks and blackout measures in rooms that could serve as shelter-in-place zones.

4. First Aid and Trauma Kits

Stock bleeding control kits (including tourniquets and gauze) in publicly accessible areas—and train staff how to use them. Seconds save lives.

5. Crisis Communication Plans

Develop a plan for internal and external communications during and after an event. This includes notifying families, coordinating with law enforcement, and managing public messaging.

6. Mental Health Resources for Staff and Guests

Offer access to grief counselors, support groups, and critical incident stress debriefing for anyone affected by an incident.

Black Ops Tactical Consulting: Your Partner in Readiness

The Lewiston tragedy reminds us that violence can erupt anywhere, at any time. At **Black Ops Tactical Consulting**, we help amusement venues and entertainment businesses nationwide strengthen their physical security, train staff for crisis response, and build comprehensive safety programs.

Our services include:

- Threat and vulnerability assessments tailored to your layout and clientele
- Active threat response training for staff and leadership
- Emergency action plan development
- Situational awareness and trauma response workshops
- Incident debriefing and post-event support

By learning from past tragedies—and preparing before the next one—your facility can create a culture of safety that protects guests, staff, and your community.

To learn more, contact **Black Ops Tactical Consulting** at **978-489-5092** or email **jon.cross@botcamerica.com**. Visit **www.botcamerica.com** to get started.