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University massacre

Gunman kills 32 Va. Tech students before killing himself

BLACKSBURG, Va. (AP) — A gunman massacred 32 people at Virginia Tech in the deadliest shooting rampage in modern U.S. history Monday, cutting down his victims in two attacks two hours apart before the university could grasp what was happening and warn students.

The bloodbath ended with the gunman committing suicide, bringing the death toll to 33 and stamping the campus in the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains with unspeakable tragedy, perhaps forever.

Investigators gave no motive for the attack. The gunman's name was not immediately released, and it was not known if he was a student.

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“Today the university was struck with a tragedy that we consider of monumental proportions,” Virginia Tech President Charles Steger said. “The university is shocked and indeed horrified.”

But he was also faced with difficult questions about the university's handling of the emergency and whether it did enough to warn students and protect them after the first burst of gunfire. Some students bitterly complained they got no warning from the university until an e-mail that arrived more than two hours after the first shots rang out.

Wielding two handguns and carrying multiple clips of ammunition, the killer opened fire about 6:15 a.m. CST on the fourth floor of West Ambler Johnston, a high-rise coed dormitory, then stormed Norris Hall, a classroom building a half-mile away on the other side of the 2,600-acre campus. Some

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SWAT team members head to Norris Hall on the campus of Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Va., on Monday in response to reports that a gunman opened fire at a dormitory and, two hours later, in a classroom building across campus.

McNeese officials say they have plan in place

BY WARREN ARCENEUX
AMERICAN PRESS

McNeese State University says its has procedures, training and safety measure to address — or avoid — violent situations on its campus.

The university has a crisis-response team in place, and its police force is trained to deal with any crimes that could occur on campus, Police Chief Cinnamon Salvador

told the *American Press*.

Possession of guns and other weapons are prohibited on the school's campus, which is patrolled at all times, Salvador said.

McNeese State's 19 police officers receive the same training and certification as members of other law enforcement agencies, she said.

“We just had an officer attend a seminar on handling an active shooter situation.

All of our officers have received training on how to handle violent and nonviolent criminal situations,” Salvador said. “We also work in conjunction with other law enforcement agencies. We can call them in for extra assistance if there is an incident that requires more manpower than we would be able to provide.”

The most common complaints that campus police

handle are thefts of personal property from unlocked vehicles and dormitory rooms, Salvador added.

Toby Osburn, dean of student services, said the school is taking steps to make the campus safer.

“All of the new dorms feature swipe-card entry. Those cards are issued to residents only. The cards are the only

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Security measures questioned

BLACKSBURG, Va. (AP) — On a university campus of 2,600 acres, with more than 25,000 students, ironclad security is not a practical goal. Even so, tough questions swiftly surfaced as to how effectively Virginia Tech authorities responded to Monday's horrific massacre.

Why were campus police so sure the threat was a “domestic dispute” contained in one dormitory, when most of the killings occurred two hours later in a classroom building?

Why were they interviewing a “person of interest” off campus in regard to the first shootings at the very time the classroom killings were unfolding?

Why was there a lag of more than two hours after the first shootings before an alarm was e-mailed campuswide — around the time the second, more deadly burst of carnage occurred? And more generally, some security experts wondered, was the school's crisis planning and emergency communications system up to the task?

Bombarded with security questions at afternoon and evening news conferences, Virginia Tech President Charles Steger said authorities believed the shooting at the West Ambler Johnston dorm, first reported about 7:15 a.m., was a domestic dispute and thought the gunman had fled the campus after

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Construction worker crisis looms, industry officials say

BY ANN MCMURRY
AMERICAN PRESS

Lake Charles is competing with Baton Rouge, Beaumont, Texas, and Houston for certified construction workers — and a “shortage of resources across the area” is only making things more difficult, a local industry executive said.

“It's a major problem, and one that needs major attention,” said Larry DeRoussel, executive director of the Lake Area Industry Alliance. “If we don't address it, it will become a significant crisis.”

The Southwest Louisiana Construction Users Council, which helps recruit workers, hopes to head off that crisis. Council officials plan to talk up the construction industry to students starting next school

year, DeRoussel said.

“They will make high school counselors, teachers and students aware of the construction trade and what it has to offer,” he said. “The contractors are working in partnership with industry to do that. It is a very similar approach to what is being done to recruit students into process technology.”

The group has worked with high schools to set up courses that will allow students to enter a trade when they graduate and achieve certification within a year, DeRoussel said.

The parish school system's technical education program — which may add more trades courses — follows the same curriculum as Associated Builders and Contractors training centers, he said.

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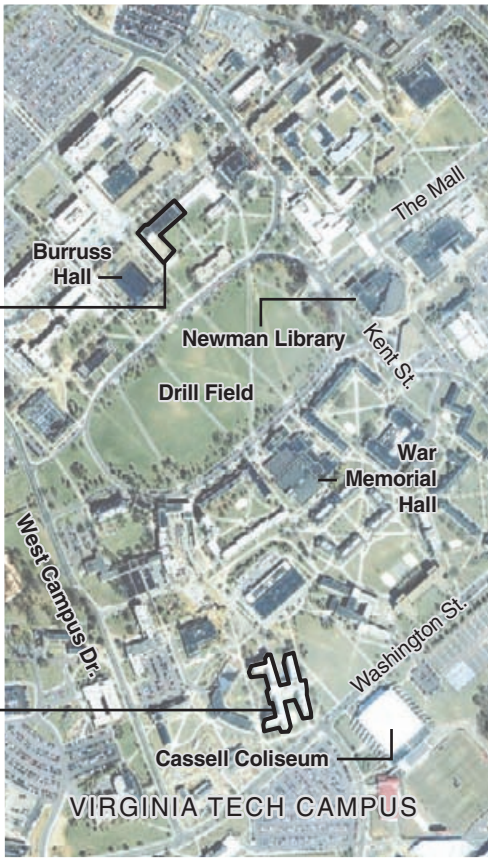
Mass shooting at Va. Tech

A gunman opened fire in a Virginia Tech dormitory and classroom building Monday, killing 32 people and himself in the deadliest shooting at a university in U.S. history.

About 8:15 a.m. CST
Norris Hall
31 people killed, including gunman

0 App. 500 feet
Satellite picture from March 26, 2004

About 6:15 a.m. CST
Ambler Johnston Hall
Two people killed



SOURCE: Virginia Tech; GeoEye

Federal jury to Allstate: Pay \$2.8M

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Allstate Insurance Co. must pay a Louisiana man who lost his home to Hurricane Katrina more than \$2.8 million in damages and penalties, a federal jury decided Monday in a case that hinged largely on whether it was wind or storm surge that wiped out his house.

Allstate spokeswoman Kate Hollcraft said the company will appeal.

“Allstate is shocked with the jury verdict in favor of the plaintiff. Allstate believes it acted in good faith throughout the entire claims process with the Weiss family,” Hollcraft said.

The jury found Allstate — which claims most of the damage was due to storm surge, an event its policy doesn't cover — did not pay Robert Weiss enough to cover wind damage.

The verdict included a \$1.5 million penalty for the company's failure to pay the claim quickly enough.

“Our intention was to get what we were owed and to send a message that we would not be intimidated,” Weiss said after the verdict was read.



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