

**CRAWFORD COUNTY, ARKANSAS****'They Always Say It's Not Going to Happen Here, but...'****Terrified workers hit panic buttons and called 9-1-1. Guess which worked better.**

**O**n the afternoon of Sept. 14, 2011, Van Buren, Arkansas and courthouses across the country received a wake-up call about security. The messenger was James Ray Palmer, a troubled soul, seemingly angry at the world, but especially at the Crawford County circuit judge who presided over his divorce and child custody hearings in 2001.

Ten years after those divorce proceedings, for reasons that may never be certain, Palmer, 48, wearing a long trench coat in 90+-degree heat, walked into the front entrance of the main Crawford County Courthouse, and headed directly to the second-floor office of the Division 1 Circuit Judge Gary Cottrell.

Beneath the trench coat he was wearing tactical gear and carried three semi-automatic weapons, including an assault rifle.

At the judge's office, the secretary told Palmer that the judge was out sick that day (nursing a knee injury). Palmer then shot the judge's case coordinator in the leg. The secretary was able to escape to another office.

He then walked through the courthouse and fired about 16 additional rounds in shooting that continued for about eight minutes, including shots into historic photographs, walls and doors.

Some employees hit the WAVE duress alarm buttons mounted under their desks. The WAVE system instantly transmitted detailed alarm messages directly over the radios carried by law enforcement officers. Some employees also made 9-1-1 calls on their mobile phones.

Multiple agencies responded to the courthouse, including the Van Buren Police Department, the Crawford County Sheriff's office, the Fort Smith Police Department, Arkansas State Police and the Arkansas Highway Patrol.

Palmer exited through the front door and spent about four minutes on the lawn, never even attempting to leave on his motorcycle. As officers arrived, Palmer engaged them in gunfire.

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*-- Dennis Gilstrap, Crawford County Director of Emergency Management*

The whole incident lasted about 12 minutes before Palmer was struck fatally by two shots fired by the police. During the incident, Palmer fired an estimated 70-90 rounds, both inside and outside the building. Investigators later found that he could have done even more damage if his assault rifle hadn't jammed repeatedly.

**So, which worked better to alert law enforcement of the emergency: the WAVE direct-to-responders system or 9-1-1 dispatch?**

The secretary in Judge Cottrell's office was the first to hit the SecureTech panic button. She and some other workers also called 9-1-1 on their mobile phones. Unfortunately, the cell phone network routed those emergency calls to the operators in adjacent Sebastian County.

The emergency operators assumed it was their local courthouse under attack, not the circuit court in Crawford County. Emergency operators initially dispatched first responders to the wrong courthouse.

Fortunately, the SecureTech WAVE instantly provided a clear and detailed alarm message with the precise location of the emergency to all first responders: "Division 1 Circuit Court office needs assistance."

The first officer on the scene had been only two blocks away, and two more officers arrived in less than a minute, according to Dennis Gilstrap, Director, Crawford County Department of Emergency Management.

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Since the courthouse incident, Gilstrap said, the county Sheriff's Department and county Roads Department also have installed the SecureTech system or have added more panic buttons to their existing SecureTech system. And, in the courthouse itself, department directors who previously said they only wanted panic buttons at some desks now feel differently.

"After this, they wanted a button at every desk," Gilstrap said. "They have confidence in the system...They always say, it's not going to happen here. But it happens."