

## Prepare To Be A Terrorist Target

by Robert Laford

"Terrorism strikes Anytown, USA." If you're a Chief Officer or line officer of a small or medium sized community fire department, be it serving two thousand, ten thousand, thirty thousand people or more, the thought of terrorists turning the streets of your community into a combat zone are probably laughable when you first consider it.

In most American communities, we feel that if middle-eastern terrorists were to drive down our main streets with a Ryder van full of explosives or automatic fire arms, that they would probably stick out and be seen. And besides, most of us are not protecting strategic military posts or political centers of our country. So why should terrorism and terrorist acts be of any concern to you or I?

Over the past several years we have all witnessed man-made tragedies that have affected not only the communities where they happened; but also the fire service and all emergency services around the country. One only need mention Oklahoma City and Atlanta and each of us can recall vivid images that played out in those communities.

But in most communities and probably yours is one of them, there are no large federal buildings housing offices of large federal agencies. And the chances of small communities, like those many of us serve in, hosting the Olympics are quite small. Terrorism, by definition, however, is not an act that strictly focuses on the large communities in our country.

Disgruntled workers after a lay-off or after a job action, students suspended from school or demonstrating an issue, and the many organizations and individuals that support different causes can all be a source of violent incidents that will involve the emergency services in our smaller communities as well as the larger cities.

The scale at which the probability of violent actions occurring may be quite different in our smaller communities; but the

possibility of violence that involves even the rural community is always there. A possibility as long as someone is upset with someone else.

Even though the probability of an incident occurring is very limited in most communities, we as managers of the emergency services within our jurisdictions hold a responsibility to be prepared. Preparation for responding to violence is no different than preparing for our day-to-day emergency response. The three priorities of Life Safety, Incident Stabilization, and Property Conservation are still the three priorities whether a standard emergency response or one precipitated by violence. We have to first protect our people, protect the public, and then mitigate the incident.

As with all our actions as emergency responders, success begins with planning. Every jurisdiction imaginable has the possibility of an emergency caused through a violent act. With this information it is the responsibility of emergency managers to work together to formulate game plans on how to react and operate during these emergencies.

Just as with natural emergencies, multiple casualty incidents, and other large scale responses, all agencies involved should have input into the planning process. If the agency will respond during an actual emergency they should be involved in the pre-incident planning. If we wait until the emergency to have all the agencies together, the confusion will overpower the proper management of the event.

No one can dictate how your department should operate or react to a situation in regard to the way you operate your strategic and tactical decision making, that responsibility is yours to decide. But by planning as a multi-agency force we can operate a safer more effective operation. Working together ahead of time, each agency will have an understanding of the

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needs and the resources of the other agencies. Instead of a situation governed by egos, it will be more effective to have a situation governed by cooperation and understanding.

Start simple. When meeting together for the first time, brainstorm with each other on the possibilities and probabilities of violent events occurring within your jurisdictions. Other emergency agency managers may have a different outlook or more insight to a particular area or neighborhood. An insight that you or others may have overlooked. By opening the lies of communications, we are not only opening the planning process to protect our communities but also forging better inter-agency cooperation for all our response needs.

First, make a list of reasons why people use violence as being discussed. Personal and professional grudges, employment issues, intimidation, and political causes may be a few. Once we see these different reactions, then we may be able to see how and where our community may be affected by this potential for violence.

Make a second list of locations within your jurisdictions that could be the target of these violent actions. Every response jurisdiction has some specific areas or buildings that can become targets, no matter what the size or location of the community. Courthouses, Police Departments, Post Offices, Schools, Businesses, Factories and Industry, and even private homes can be the target of "terrorism." Maybe not terrorism like we see on the world news each night; but violence induced tragedy that our agency will have to react to in an emergency.

A third list is for resources. What are some resources that may be needed in the event of a terrorist or violence induced emergency in the community? What is available through local mutual aid and local response agreements; ambulances, fire units, police units, crowd control, media control, additional manpower? What specialties are available locally;

bomb dogs, body dogs, bomb removal units, ammunition specialist, heavy equipment, structural engineers? What is available on a regional basis? A state basis? Where is the nearest Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) Office? What can the ATF offer in resources and response? What laws govern the emergency operations when explosives are involved? Who should be notified?

Operational guidelines should include information for procuring these resources and equipment under all circumstances. It's 3:00am on a Sunday morning what numbers are called compared to 2:00pm on a Thursday? All these questions should be answered and specific steps spelled out ahead of time to save time and avoid confusion when the emergency and response arises.

Risk analysis is the next step for your cooperative committee. Spelled out is a list of locations and a list of possible reasons for a violent attack on your community. Begin to prioritize the list to see if there are some more probable locations than others.

Just as we provide extended pre-incident plans for target hazards for violence. Some incidents listed may be more heavily influenced by police or EMS while others may prove to be more a fire related hazard or issue. As a group of emergency response leaders the plan should be able to pin-point areas of possible hazards and spell out the possible strategies developed to answer those specific hazard areas as part of the plan.

No plan will answer all the questions, or prepare our emergency responses for all the possibilities. But as a team of emergency response agencies we should be able to look at our communities and begin preparing for a response.. The morning after the incident has happened, your department members, local citizens, and political leaders will be reading about the event in the local papers and seeing it on the news. How you prepared for the event before it happened will parallel how well the incident itself was coordinated and executed.

The final consideration regarding the plan and the community's emergency preparation is practice. Just as training is

needed to be proficient in basic skills, training, drills, and practice is needed to hone all of the skills needed regarding the response plan to violent actions through the initiation of the emergency plan. Practice in management and control, practice in communication and inter-agency cooperation, and practice on specific strategic and tactical goals and objectives. Training and drills for this type of plan should also utilize all the agencies involved in the planning and all the agencies that would be involved with an actual event.

This practice scenario will help spell out problem areas in the plan that need to be further developed after the drill is complete. Drills also offer the opportunity for multi-agencies to practice working as a cooperative team and to see how other participants play out their roles within the plan. Practice drills can range from simple table-top exercises through large life-like drills involving receiving hospitals and the local mutual aid systems.

The need is apparent to put the formulated plan into action prior to an actual emergency. Any plan left unpracticed only to store dust on a shelf waiting for "the big one" is a plan doomed to failure.

In emergency management we must realize that injuries, deaths, and property loss caused by violent actions are not limited to large urban areas and government centers alone. Each of us must understand the potential and possibilities of our agency and our community becoming involved in the response to a terrorist associated emergency within our jurisdiction – whatever its population or location.

The key to a successful operation: Success in personnel safety, success in public safety, and success in a positive outcome of the incident is planning and preparation. This planning must begin with each of us. Planning that includes all other agencies and emergency management people that will be effected by a violence related emergency. Planning that is our responsibility as leaders and managers of our communities' emergency response agencies.

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