

Terrorism and the Real First Responders in the United States

Part 1 of a three-part series on the potential for terrorist attacks in the United States, and how to prepare and react if one occurs.

Bill Cooper, Chief of Police (ret)

With the devastation and tragedy of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 receding from our memories, it is necessary to reflect on the possibilities the future may bring to us. By watching or reading the news, on almost a daily basis we are reminded of the proximity of terrorism to us, and that planning for an attack is happening and is a real threat.

The FBI defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives”. Their key is spreading fear and intimidation. By merely threatening an attack they cause a significant reaction that is both costly and counterproductive; they accomplish a goal. We combat fear by confronting it, by emphasizing safety, not fright, and by understanding and preparation.

The truest first responders of America are the good people of the country, its citizens, neighbors, and friends who always have and always will step up to help each other. This series of articles is directed to you – with some basic information on what to watch for, when to contact the authorities, then how to plan for and react to an attack if one occurs. In this article we’ll discuss suspicious activities and potential pre-attack indicators.

The Department of Homeland Security has prepared a brochure entitled “The Seven Signs of Terrorism”. After reading the signs you are encouraged to call your local police or the FBI immediately if you observe or hear about any one or more of these signs.

1. Surveillance – prior to an attack, often weeks or months before, terrorists will conduct surveillance and scouting operations. Such methods include photography, videotaping, diagramming, mapping, measuring, observing security, or other out of the ordinary practices.
2. Elicitation – terrorists will attempt to gather and obtain information about a place, person, or operation that is likely a critical infrastructure. They may ask, they may obtain plans or blueprints, or other information.
3. Test of security – terrorists will test security and law enforcement by entering or attempting to enter secured or essential facilities or locations, and/or will time responses and routes of response.
4. Acquiring supplies – they will purchase weapons and ammunition, explosives or the components of explosives, chemicals, equipment, or military or law enforcement identification and uniforms to allow easier access into areas.
5. Suspicious people who don’t belong – profile behaviors, not people. Terrorists are not all of one race, color, or gender.

6. Dry runs – prior to the actual attack the terrorists will conduct one or more dry runs to look for flaws or unanticipated problems. This is an essential time where they may be identified or apprehended.
7. Deploying assets and getting into position – this is immediately prior to the attack and is the last opportunity to stop the attack.

It is critically important to understand that no matter how insignificant an incident may seem, call the police immediately. If possible, and without endangering yourself, try to capture as many details as possible – about the incident, the people involved, vehicles, and actions. There are numerous cases of people observing and calling that have resulted in the identification or apprehension of possible terrorists. Law enforcement depends on its community partners to protect our country and its people.

As the Chief of Police in my city we enhanced Neighborhood Watch programs by training the neighbors on the above seven signs. We additionally contacted the neighbors near our critical facilities and provided them the same information, as well as the contact names and phone numbers of the local police and FBI. You are strongly encouraged to get involved by being aware of your surroundings and anything suspicious. You may be the catalyst to preventing another attack.

Part 2 of the series will discuss preparedness for you and your family for the various types of attacks that may occur.

Part 3 will discuss your necessary reaction to an attack if one occurs in your region.

Bio



Bill Cooper is the retired Chief of Police for a suburban city near Seattle. He spent nearly 30 years in policing, working for large and mid-size cities. Chief Cooper is recognized for his terrorism training programs, designed specifically for First Responders. He has prepared curricula intended to enhance the safety and ability of responders when reacting to various types of terrorist attacks. Chief Cooper speaks to multi-agency response capability and step by step response and deployment operations. He has taught terrorism response for several dozen law enforcement agencies, fire departments, local and state governments, and the private sector.

Chief Cooper has also managed security for a major transnational corporation and has been involved with terrorism and intelligence in the company's worldwide operation. He helped create a wide network of intelligence and information sharing between law enforcement and several Fortune 500 companies in the Seattle area.

Chief Cooper holds a Masters Degree in Business Administration, and a Masters Degree in Public Administration. Chief Cooper is a graduate of the FBI National Academy and the Washington State Law Enforcement Executive Command College.

Chief Cooper served as a command level evaluator for the TOPOFF II Terrorist Exercise in Seattle.