

Terrorism and the Real First Responders in the United States

Part 2 of a three-part series on the potential for terrorist attacks in the United States, and how to prepare and react if one occurs.

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Recalling the first article in the series – what to watch for – the next step is how you prepare yourself and your family in the event an attack occurs in your region. Recent events in Canada, New York, and Florida serve as all too frequent reminders of the proximity and reality of the threat facing our people. The discussions are no longer about whether an attack will occur, but when it will happen, and where and what it will be. For all of us it is a matter of preparation and planning – steps many of you already have in place for such events as a natural disaster or even a house fire.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has built many excellent tools on its web site that will save considerable time and effort in your planning. They suggest having the ability to sustain yourselves for 72 hours. As the Chief of Police, public safety in my city was my primary responsibility, and I fully understood that given the number of responders available we would never be available for everyone. As a matter of fact, in a terrorist attack, government services may be unavailable for substantially longer periods of time. As one of the passengers on United Flight 93 on 9/11 stated, “No one is coming. We have to do this ourselves”.

With that in mind, let’s look at the possibilities. Terrorists are planning chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive attacks, each bringing a different set of consequences. Having already discussed pre-emptive strategies, our focus now is how to get ready if an attack actually happens.

First, prepare your home with an emergency kit. FEMA provides excellent guidelines for food, water, first aid, sanitation, and other essentials. Follow their recommendations closely. In addition, keep supplies available to facilitate shielding part or all of your home from materials deployed by terrorists. Second, prepare your vehicle and workplace with the same essentials in the event you are caught away from home. Note that most terrorist attacks occur during business hours. Third, and of critical importance, is to have a plan that everyone in your family knows. The more likely scenario is that an attack occurs while your family members are separated. What will each member do in different circumstances? Assume communication is unavailable. Where will you go to meet? How will you contact each other? Is there a friend or relative not in the immediate area that everyone can use as a primary point of contact to coordinate family members? Fourth, you must consider whether you will shelter in place or attempt to leave the area. Use good judgment in your decision making – it is premised on the type and magnitude of an attack.

Finally, be sure your relatives, friends, and neighbors are prepared as well. One of the greatest gifts this country has is its people, people who have always been there when help was needed, and will be there again.

Go to www.FEMA.gov for detailed information.

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.