

Terrorism and the Real First Responders in the United States

Part 3 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)

In Parts 1 and 2 we discussed how to help the authorities to identify and apprehend terrorists, as well as how to prepare yourself and your family before an attack may occur. In this article we'll talk about what to do if an attack actually happens in your area. We previously worked on getting a plan together, then insuring everyone knows what it is and when to apply it. They'll know where to go, the options for getting there, and how to let each other know the others are safe, as soon as practical. You have also gathered the essential materials to sustain yourselves for the minimum 72 hour period.

Depending on your proximity to, and the type of, an attack, many things will be happening in very short periods of time that will be challenging. The key concept here is to be able to remain calm and be able to think and assess the circumstances so you know what to do. As the circumstances of the event unfold, many people will be trying to get out of the area; many others will be trying to get in, creating a chaotic and often confusing situation. This movement by large numbers of people will complicate transportation systems and capability. One consideration you may need to make is whether to shelter in place temporarily – you must let your good judgment drive your decision. Do not stay in a damaged structure.

If you choose to leave the area, try to get to your pre-determined destination, and understand that the ability to communicate by phone or cell phone may not be available. If it is, try to remain off the lines as many people will be calling others and the ability of first responders to communicate with one another seriously deteriorates. Try not to contribute to the confusion, which will be present. Follow the instructions of emergency personnel. If it is possible, try to help others out of the area as well. One you are able to successfully leave the area, stay out. Do not return. There is nothing you need as much as your own safety. Those people who do return also compound the problems emergency services personnel are trying to handle. In most cases they do not need untrained volunteers.

Once you arrive at your destination and account for family members, which may take some time, engage your patience. It will take time, in some cases, considerable time, to stabilize the event, conduct rescue and recovery operations, initiate remediation strategies, and re-build.

If the incident is determined to have been a chemical, biological, or radiological attack, and you were in the vicinity, get out of the area and seek immediate medical attention. Know that medical facilities in the area will likely be extremely busy, so seek help near your planned destination. Do not delay, and understand some materials are contagious. Once you are with medical help, report to them where you were at the time of the

incident, so they may make appropriate medical decisions and be able to track the movements of potentially contagious victims if necessary.

Remember, stay calm and think. Watch what is happening around you. Make your decisions accordingly. Know that many people around you will be looking for someone they can follow, someone who can help them get to safety.

Finally, get involved in your community and be informed. Depending on where an attack occurs, and the type of attack it is, you and your family have enhanced safety by being prepared and following your plan. There is considerable information on preparedness and response that is freely available to you at www.ready.gov. The great people of this country have always known, and always will know, that they can depend on one another in a time of need. Act now – plan for an event and assure your family knows the plan.

For additional information Bill Cooper may be reached at bipd1@comcast.net.

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.