Terrorism Threat Awareness

Acts of terrorism can come from domestic sources, sometimes referred to as “homegrown” terrorism. Homegrown terrorism is when a person, or group, in the United States receives support solely from individuals and organizations, also in the United States, and commits attacks within the United States.

International terrorism involves attacks within the United States that are committed by individuals or groups that originate outside the United States or that are influenced or supported by foreign interests. Most terrorist incidents in the United States are perpetrated by domestic terrorists.

Terrorist Aims and Targets

Terrorists use violence and threats of violence to instill fear in the population for the purpose of forcing change. They aim to advance their position by killing as many people as possible and by achieving strong emotional responses from the population affected by their attacks. To achieve these goals, terrorist acts may be more likely to occur at locations where large numbers of people gather, or at a time or place where an attack would have a far-reaching or newsworthy impact.

Mitigating Terrorist Threats

The first step in guarding against and mitigating terrorist threats is to be prepared. This involves knowing about terrorism threat alert systems and how they may affect security procedures at your site and understanding procedures outlined in the facility security plan.

Terrorist Precursor Conduct

Certain kinds of activities are more likely to indicate that terrorist activities are being planned, especially when they occur at or near high-profile sites, at places where large numbers of people gather, or anywhere while a threat alert is in place.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has identified specific “precursor conduct” to watch for. Precursor conduct is suspicious behavior and activity that may signal terrorist planning.

DHS Categories for Terrorist Precursor Conduct

The DHS categories for terrorist precursor conduct are: Surveillance; Deploying Assets; Suspicious Persons; Suspicious Questioning; Tests of Security; Acquiring Supplies;
National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS)

In 2011, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) introduced the National Terrorism Advisory System, or NTAS, to replace the color-coded threat level scale that had been in place since 2002. Under NTAS, the DHS will issue detailed alerts to the public when the federal government receives information about a credible terrorist threat.

Other Terrorism Alert Systems

In addition to NTAS alerts, some facilities may also be affected by industry-related threat level systems. For instance, the Maritime Security System (MARSEC)—under the control of the U.S. Coast Guard—regulates sites located at ports or along waterways and facilities where products come in or go out by freighter, tanker or barge. The Chemical Facilities Anti-Terrorism Standards (CFATS) regulates various sites where chemicals are manufactured, distributed, stored and used. In addition, some organizations may employ their own site-specific threat level system.

Surveillance

Surveillance generally involves observing a target area over an extended period of time during the planning phase of an operation. Surveillance is conducted to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the target, to establish a strategy for the attack, and to assess the likelihood that the attack will succeed. Security officers should be alert for vehicles that repeatedly drive by the area—especially vehicles moving slowly and whose occupants seem to be unusually focused on the site. They should also pay attention to those who loiter at or around the site, or anyone who makes repeated short visits to the site, but does not seem to have a legitimate business purpose. Security officers should attempt to be aware of people recording or monitoring activities, taking notes, drawing maps, or using cameras, binoculars, or other observation equipment at or near the site. Being aware of suspicious surveillance activity is sometimes as simple as using common sense and being aware of unusual activities or things that do not appear to be normal objects at the site.

Reporting Precursor Conduct

If you see anyone that you think may be engaged in behaviors or activities that may indicate terrorist planning, report it immediately. Follow the procedures for responding to and reporting precursor conduct. This may involve alerting your supervisor, local law enforcement, the FBI or the nearest Joint Terrorism Task Force. If there is an emergency or an immediate threat, call 911.

The ability to recognize and report intelligence gathering activities and other precursor conduct may interrupt potential terrorist events, crimes, and other threats before they occur.

We will take a closer look at the remaining suspicious behaviors and activities in the upcoming June Security Spotlight.

For more information on this and other security related topics, visit the Securitas Safety Awareness Knowledge Center at http://www.securitasinc.com/en/knowledge-center/security-and-safety-awareness-tips