

Why Your Department Must Prepare for the Next 9/11

BY JERRY KNAPP

IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN FIVE years since 9/11. It's time to take a few minutes for a self-analysis to see where our fire service and your fire department are today. How prepared are you to respond to a terrorist attack? Before you answer, let's get down to the hard reality first. When something goes bang, people are hurt, buildings collapse and catch fire, or people are contaminated, who are they going to call for help? Your fire department, absolutely. If you are not prepared, what would you say—"Sorry, we have never done this kind of response before, so we're staying at the firehouse?" Or, worse yet, would you respond and become part of the problem? You have no other choice than to train today to be ready for a terrorism response tomorrow.

Maybe you have not prepared yourself and your department because you don't think a terrorist attack is likely in your area—in other words, you are hoping it will not happen in your community. On the other hand, it may be that all your training time and equipment purchases will be a waste of time. In 25 years you will look back and be thankful that the equipment dry-rotted and was never used. But think of how good you will feel and what accolades you will receive because your planning, training, and equipment saved countless lives if the unthinkable, a terrorist attack, happened. Think of how successful your department can be in thwarting the deadly blow of a terrorist. Additionally, this same training, planning, and equipment may be very useful at nonterror events such as industrial accidents and fires and incidents involving large-scale releases of hazardous materials.

Experts tell us this war on terror will last 25 years. After World War II, my generation was taught "duck and

cover" drills: When the Strategic Air Command notified the Civil Defense that the Russian bombers were en route with multiple thermonuclear weapons, we students were to dutifully duck under our school desks. We were to be completely protected from a 100-megaton thermonuclear blast by the ¾-inch plywood desktop. Surely, the plywood would have protected us from the blast, heat, and gamma radiation! Duck and cover made no sense then, and it makes no sense now, especially for fire departments.

The terrorists are skilled and driven enemies. The fire service is the first wave (counterattack) to a terrorist event, and we must be ready. We will defeat the enemy by responding effectively to attacks.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TERRORISTS

We can develop our strategies and promote responder safety more effectively if we recognize some of the traits of terrorists.

- Civilians are their targets.
- The enemy is imbedded in our civilian population.
- This enemy does not fear death. Human-guided/command-detonated bombs are difficult to stop. The enemy is driven emotionally, politically, and spiritually.
- Suicide attacks have proven effective and are a weapon of choice.
- Ambush is often the method of attack.
- Striking civilian targets causes terror among civilians and erodes their faith in their government's ability to protect them.

ATTACKS IN THE UNITED STATES

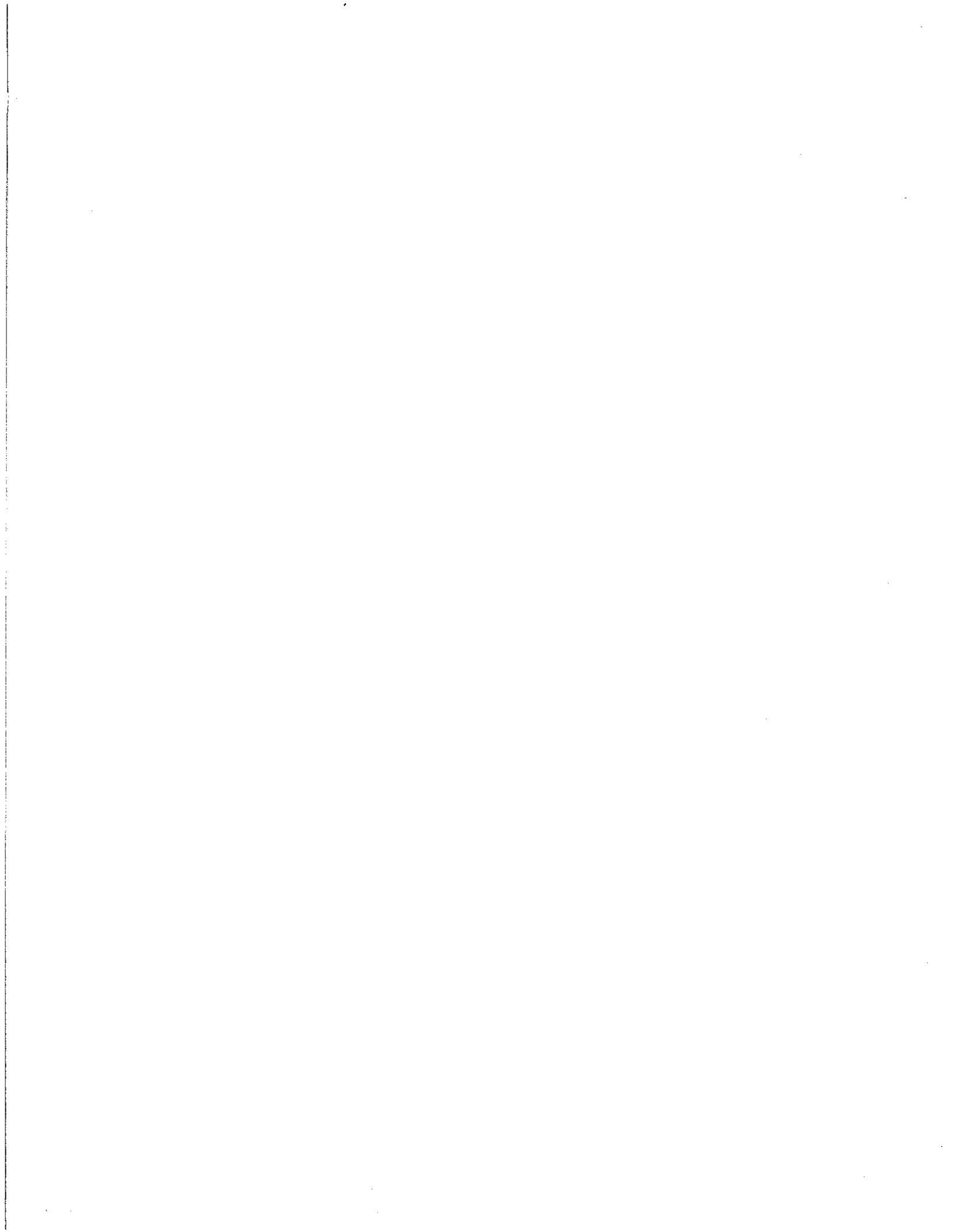
Here are a few examples of terrorist events that occurred in the United States in recent years, the types of

events that you and your department could be called to at any time.

- 1974: LaGuardia Airport, New York City—Croatian nationalists, bomb killed 11 and injured 75.
- 1983: U.S. Capitol Building—two left-wing radicals detonated a bomb in the cloakroom next to the Senate chamber in the capitol building; there were no injuries.
- 1993: First World Trade Center attack—Islamic extremists detonated a bomb in the parking garage; six were killed and 1,042 injured.
- 1995: Oklahoma City Bombing—domestic terrorists detonated a fertilizer bomb; 168 died.
- 2001: Attacks on the World Trade Center (2,749 killed) and the Pentagon (189 killed) by Islamic extremists.

Additionally, several recent open source news articles highlight the ongoing terrorist attack threat in our communities.

- "Two men already accused of discussing terror targets with Islamic extremists were indicted yesterday on charges of undergoing paramilitary training in northwest Georgia and plotting a 'violent jihad' against civilian and governmental targets, including an airbase in suburban Georgia." (Source: Associated Press report published in *The Journal News*, Nyack, New York, July 20, 2006.)
- According to a Department of Justice press release (December 20, 2006): "Following two weeks of trial, a federal jury in Brooklyn, NY, today returned a verdict convicting Khalid Awan of providing money and financial services to the Khalistan Commando Force, a terrorist organization responsible for thousands of deaths in India since its founding in 1986." When sentenced he faces a maximum sentence of 45 years



in prison. Although he did not carry out attacks in New York, he apparently had operated in the New York area for some time providing direct support to terror groups.

- According to a *Washington Post* article republished in the *The Journal News*, November 8, 2006, "An al-Qaeda operative who planned to bomb the World Bank in Washington and the NY Stock Exchange as well as other landmarks in the U.S. and Britain was sentenced to life in prison yesterday According to prosecutors who read from Barot's notes and computer files, Barot was pleased by the 9/11 attacks and planned to kill hundreds if not thousands of people in the U.S. and Britain to create 'another black day for the enemies of Islam.' "
- "A Pakistani immigrant was sentenced to 30 years in prison yesterday for hatching an unsuccessful plot to blow up a busy Manhattan subway station as revenge for wartime abuses of Iraqis. Shahawar Matin Siraj, 24, was arrested on the eve of the 2004 Republican National Convention. (Associated Press article by Tom Hays, printed in *The Journal News*, January 9, 2007.)

These examples, all from open sources, show how effective we have been in disrupting terrorist plots. Two important questions remain: How many plots have been interrupted that we have not heard about and are still classified, and how many "evildoers" are still out there?

DOMESTIC AND SINGLE-ISSUE TERRORISTS

Consider that it may not be an Islamic extremist that hits your community and causes you to respond. It may be a homegrown individual who is disgruntled about an issue or has a cause and takes it out in an extreme way.

Extremists may bomb an abortion clinic, animal rights folks may strike out at a farm or processing plant, disgruntled employees may take action against their employer, and there is always the possibility of a Columbine scenario to consider—all in your quiet little town.

Here are a few examples of single-

issue terrorist attacks in the United States in recent years:

- 1995—A 12-car Amtrak train was deliberately derailed near Hyder, Arizona, killing one and seriously injuring 12. Four typed letters at the scene mentioned the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Ruby Ridge, Idaho; and Waco, Texas. They were signed by "Sons of the Gestapo."
- 1998—The Earth Liberation Front used arson to attack a Colorado ski resort, causing \$12 million in destruction.
- 1996-1997—Eric Rudolph bombed the summer Olympics, killing one and injuring 100 people, many permanently. He followed this attack with bombings at abortion clinics in Atlanta in which secondary devices were used to kill responders. Four responders were injured with shrapnel; 50 others were injured from the blast. Less than a month later, after a bombing at a nightclub, responders discovered the second bomb and evacuated in time. (*Terrorism Threat Handbook*, unclassified, June 2001.)

PREPARATION

Below are a few steps to consider in readying your fire department to respond to a terror or other extreme event.

- 1** Plan, plan, plan. Meet with your local and state police and EMS providers and develop a consolidated response plan. A terrorist event will not be your average house fire.
- 2** Train. There are more sources of help available to you than you have time to use. Search the Internet, meet with other response agencies, and train together. You can be sure the bad guys are working together.
- 3** Read the after-action review from previous attacks, such as 9/11 and the Oklahoma City bombing. Use the lessons learned in your plan so you don't make the same deadly mistakes.
- 4** Seek out formal training on terrorism response. The federal government provides a wide variety of free training—make use of it! Go to the Federal Emergency Management Agency

and your local state homeland security Web sites for information.

5 Think like a terrorist in identifying targets in your response area. Sure it's hard, but work at it. Imagine you want to kill as many Americans as possible, damage the economy, and terrorize the population. How would you do it in your community? After you develop these possible scenarios, prepare your response plans. The scenarios may not be exactly how the attack will happen, but the response actions required will be very close to what you will have to execute after the attack.

6 Rethink your response to an explosion. Are you going to send your members in as you would have done pre-9/11? Are you turning a blind eye to the fact that this could be a terrorist or an extremist event and hope it is just a gas explosion?

Here are a few thoughts to consider when preparing to respond to "an explosion."

- 1** If you are going to respond to this call, prepare yourself, your members, and your equipment for this response before it happens.
- 2** Decide how you will conduct air-monitoring operations or how you will operate without this critical equipment. At a minimum, you must monitor for ionizing radiation, oxygen concentration, combustible gases, and other toxic
- 3** Decide well ahead of time who and how you will accomplish decontamination for responders and civilians if required.
- 4** Purchase, train, and use some type of simple radiological detection device. If you don't, how will you know if there is a radiological component to the attack?
- 5** Decide on some simple air-monitoring equipment or other type sensors (ask your regional hazmat team or state homeland security for assistance).
- 6** Plan and train with your mutual-aid units for an "explosion" call. Specialty units such as the bomb squad, a military explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) unit, a hazmat team, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and others will be attending your call. You will



be much more effective if you have met with these agencies, know the principals involved, and understand what these units will be doing to assist you.

7 Understand how important it is to work as a team in a NIMS-compliant system at several command levels (scene and EOC for example) with many more agencies than you typically do. For example, at a bombing, some of the agencies that may respond by request

or spontaneously to your scene include the local police; fire and EMS; state police; FBI; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; Civil Support Team; local, state, and county emergency management and homeland security officials; local, county, and state political leaders; military EOD units; county and state bomb squads; disaster medical assistance teams; mortuary assistance teams; local, state, national, and international

press, including news helicopters and live scene reporting; local, state and federal departments of public health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; environmental protection; the U.S. Coast Guard (if incident occurs near a waterway); support agencies such as utility companies, heavy equipment contractors, volunteers, hospitals, engineering assistance from government and local firms; military forces; and many others.

For firefighters across our nation, our War on Terror began on Liberty Street in lower Manhattan on 9/11 and will end with the defeat of the terrorists. What is certain is that the American fire service will be the first called to the next attack. We are the first counterattack resource our nation has and undoubtedly will use. A solid response plan, trained responders, effective air monitoring, and well-schooled leadership will be key to thwarting the attack of our enemies. When we defeat the enemy's tactics by minimizing loss of life and property through an effective response, we defeat the enemy. In the darkest days, early in World War II, Winston Churchill said, "Never, never give up." It is your persistence and that of the entire American fire service that will ensure America's continued success in the War on Terror. Never give up, never forget. ●

I would like to thank Brett Martinez for his assistance in preparing this article.



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