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## **APRIL-MAY-JUNE NEWSLETTER- TERRORIST'S BOMB SEARCHING**

This newsletter was written as a response to the following email I received:

*Dear Chief Dunn,*

*I am a firefighter in Wisconsin. Recently we had an awareness class in incident response to terrorist bombings.....Our fire department has firefighters searching for suspicious packages or bombs. Should untrained firefighters be looking for bombs? Should we even be in that building if there are no employees and the public left the building?.....*

*I would really appreciate your views on firefighting responsibilities and guidelines at bomb threats.*

*Thank you for your help. Firefighter, Frank X*

My answer:



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*Dear Frank, The world has changed since 9-11 and so has our job. For my first suggestion I would ask the chief to push for more training funds from the Homeland Security Administration. However, until funding for training is forthcoming here are some guidelines for bomb searching from the book, Emergency Response to Terrorism, taught at the National Fire Academy.*

*Regards, Vince Dunn*

Today first responding firefighters across the country are being asked to take some lifesaving action at suspected bomb incidents. In some instances, firefighters are requested to search for bombs and to evacuate suspected terrorist bomb areas. This occurs most frequently in cities and towns where police or state bomb experts do not have the quick response time as the local firefighters. I strongly urge FEMA to insure firefighters receive training for operating at terrorist target bomb areas. However until we receive this needed training, firefighters should know some basic survival techniques for operating at bomb incidents.

## **Bomb Incidents**

Three situations at which firefighters find themselves operating at terrorist's bomb incidents where standard guidelines are needed:

1. When we respond to an explosion, fire and collapse and during the operation discover it is the result of a terrorist's bomb. This was the case in the 1993 World Trade Center explosion and the Oklahoma City Blast.
2. When we are called to the scene for help, or discover an unexploded bomb during the over-hauling stage, after a fire has been extinguished.
3. When a fire company is called to the scene for assistance in searching for a bomb and evacuating the suspected bomb area where the number of police on the scene are not readily available to do this or equipped to do this dangerous community life-saving action, and when the ATF or FBI response may be one hour or more.



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## **Situation #1**

Fire Caused by a terrorists Bomb When firefighters at the scene of an explosion, collapse and fire discover the incident was caused by a terrorist bomb they should notify the police department; evacuate injured people; and protect the exposed building against fire from a safe distance. Firefighters should use nearby buildings and vehicles as shielding when protecting burning exposures.

## **Situation #2**

Discovering a terrorist Bomb after a Fire. When discovering an unexploded terrorist bomb after a fire has been extinguished, firefighters must not disturb the bomb. Firefighters evacuate people and withdraw a safe distance out of sight of the potential explosion area; notify the police. Firefighters located at a safe area should prepare to protect exposure buildings from a fire; and if an explosion occurs firefighters may have to conduct a collapse and rescue operation; then prepare for a hazardous materials operation if the explosion is from a so-called “dirty bomb”.

## **Situation # 3**

Search and Evacuation of Suspected Bomb Area. When called to a terrorist’s bomb incident by the police department, firefighters must report to the police officer in charge; assist as requested. If the police request firefighters to search for the bomb or evacuate a building suspected with bomb placement and the incident commanders decides to comply with the request first, additional reinforcements should be called. These back-up firefighters prepare for an explosion. After the explosions firefighters may have to rescue trapped firefighters. A collapse search and rescue operation may be required. At the same times defensive firefighting operation will be required to protect burning exposures buildings. A simultaneous HazMat incident may also have to be started.



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## **Evacuating Bomb Buildings**

Firefighters do not order a building evacuated as a result of a suspected or reported bomb. The evacuation should be the decision of the person in charge of the building such as the business owner or the principal of the school. The fire department may recommend, but the final responsibility for evacuation rests with the person in charge of the building. When requested to work in a building with a suspected bomb, firefighters must realize when a bomb explodes, a great cause of injury from a bomb blast is flying glass. All windows will blow. Jagged, razor-sharp glass fragments will fly through the air with hurricane force. All protective clothing and masks should be worn, with eye shields down. Fire department radios may trigger a bomb explosion so mobile radios should be shut off 300 feet from the suspected bomb area and portable radios should be shut off during the search.

## **Procedures for Evacuation Stairs**

Procedure for evacuating people from a building containing a suspected hidden terrorist bomb is different from evacuating people from a burning building. This bomb search is considered a primary search. The fire officer in charge should limit the number of firefighters and it should be done quickly. There is no secondary search. A specific stair should be designated for evacuation. People leaving the building should be requested to leave by way of this exit. However, search this stair for bombs before the evacuation. Before evacuation search the entire exit path. Search the access corridors leading to the stair, the stairway and the discharge lobby into which the stair feeds. Firefighters should prevent people from lingering in the street outside the stair. Direct them out of the explosion area at least 2,000 feet away.

## **Instructions to People**

People being asked to leave a building in which a bomb is reported should be told to take all belongings with them, so there will be fewer items to search for the hidden explosives. Also,



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people should be directed to leave unlocked their desks, offices, and lockers. This too, will assist the bomb search and reduce damage to locks and doors. Leave lights on and windows open, and as long as it will not trigger an explosion, turn noise-making machines off. It will assist bomb searchers.

## **Decisions**

Firefighters generally are not requested to search for bombs, however, during these early undefined, stages of homeland security preparedness, if there are insufficient police officers on scene, and the fire department has personnel available, with protective equipment, the fireground commander may be asked by community leaders and/or officials to have the firefighters search for a terrorist's biological, nuclear, chemical, or explosive device. Bomb searching by untrained firefighters is not recommended. However, if it is a community life and death situation, and many lives are at risk, and we size up the situation, considering the priorities of incident management: life safety of our community residents first, incident stabilization second, and property protection third, the fire commander might commit firefighters to search for a terrorist device.

## **Bomb Searching**

Bomb searching is different from fire searching. Bomb searching begins outside the building. First, vehicles parked in the street around the building are examined. Owners are requested to move vehicles. Any vehicle not identified by a local resident and not moved must be considered a potential vehicle bomb. Next, the outside sidewalk around the perimeter of the building is examined for the bomb. Window sills on the first floor are often the site of a package bomb. Then the building's interior is searched, starting in the cellar and working upward. Pay attention to areas where a bomber could gain access inside the building and easily place an explosive package and set a timing device unnoticed. Bathrooms, stairways, refuse containers, storage areas, and supply closets are places in which a bomb may be hidden. According to the



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Emergency Response to Terrorism, manual, page 4-39, the following are a few warning signs of a bomb. Note: If a suspected bomb is discovered, do not touch or disturb. Note the location, floor, and room. Report this to the incident commander. Do not use portable radios that may trigger an explosion during a search.

## **Bomb indicators:**

1. Unusual device attached to a pressure of flammable container or cylinder
2. Unusual looking or misplaced mailing containers leaking oil or wired
3. Abandoned vehicles that do not appear to belong in the area
4. Strong chemical odors
5. Any unusual container out of place
6. Obvious bomb-making pieces such as blasting caps, wire, or clock- timers
7. Rugs hanging on hooks inside restroom stalls
8. Bombs

Several common types of explosive devices are used by terrorists, to kill or destroy. There are:

## **Pipe bomb**

A pipe bomb is a fragment bomb; it kills and injures by exploding pieces of flying metal. This type of bomb can be identified by a section of pipe capped at both ends. A fuse may extend from one end. Do not touch a pipe bomb discovered at a fire.

## **Bottle bomb**

A bottle bomb is also called a Molotov cocktail, named after a Russian government official. It was a World War II anti-tank weapon. A bottle filled with gasoline and sulfuric acid is capped and wrapped in a sock soaked with potassium chlorate and sugar. When thrown, the bottle breaks and the mixing of the sulfuric acid and potassium chlorate causes the explosion and resulting fire.





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## **Vehicle bomb**

A vehicle bomb creates a large powerful explosion. Two most famous vehicle bombs are the New York City World Trade Center 1993 bombing and the Alfred P Murrah, Federal Building bombing in Oklahoma City.

## **Satchel (bag) bomb**

Several sticks of dynamite placed in a shoulder-strap bag with one or two small liquid propane cylinders can create a tremendous explosion and fire. This type of bomb is more powerful than a pipe bomb and it can be thrown. It can also be packed with antipersonnel material such as nail, bolts, and screws to inflict fragment casualties. could be found hanging on a hook inside a restroom stall or inside a locker in a train or bus station. The Centennial Park terrorist explosive incident in Atlanta was a satchel type bomb.

## **Mail bomb**

A package or letter bomb sent through the mail often kills or injures the wrong person. The secretary or co-worker of the intended victim may open the mail bomb. A mail bomb can sometimes be identified by excessive weight, oil stains, lopsided or uneven packaging, excessive postage or foreign mail, airmail or special delivery indicators or the return address may be missing.

## **Explosion Withdrawal Area**

If a bomb is discovered the area should be evacuated to a distance of at least 2,000 feet (610 meters).



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## **Fire Department Preplanning for Terrorism**

1. Identify terrorist targets in the community
2. Train for pre bomb blast procedures –Locate water supply, stretch hose line, supply sprinkler and standpipes. Use time, distance, and shielding, for protection of firefighters at the scene. Position fire forces and apparatus upwind and uphill.
3. Train for post bomb blast: Collapse search and rescue operations, defensive fire operations-protecting exposures with large-caliber streams, and hazardous material procedures may be necessary.
4. Train for evacuation procedures during suspected bomb incidents





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5. Train for bomb searching techniques until homeland security provides us a better response of bomb experts. The fire service expert on bomb searching, Mike Pickett. Austin, Texas, has held bomb searching training drills. He states most bomb packages planted during training session are discovered by building employees who are familiar with the search area, Use them if you can.
6. Lobby your community leaders for homeland security training funding.

## Questions

1. Which one is a correct answer regarding when firefighters may be required to operate at an incident with a terrorist's bomb?
  - A. At a fire caused by a bomb
  - B. Discovering a bomb after a fire is extinguished
  - C. Search and evacuate a building containing a bomb
  - D. All of the above

Answer\_\_\_\_\_

2. When evacuating people from a building before a bomb search which one is not a good Action?
  - A. Have people take their belongings
  - B. Leave windows open
  - C. Leave lights on
  - D. Leave noise-making machines running

Answer\_\_\_\_\_



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3. Before directing a building evacuation which area of the egress is not searched before the evacuation?

- A. Access corridors leading to stairs
- B. Stairs
- C. Stair discharge areas (Lobby)
- D. Rooms leading from stairs

Answer\_\_\_\_\_

4. Which is not an indication of a bomb?

- A. Strong chemical odor
- B. Back pack bag on hook of a bathroom stall
- C. Device attached to a pressure cylinder
- D. A container found in its usual location

Answer\_\_\_\_\_

5. True or False - A satchel bag bomb can be thrown.

Answer\_\_\_\_\_

**Answers:** 1, D; 2.D; 3, D; 4. D; 5. True