

GUIDELINES FOR EMS RESPONSE TO TERRORISM

*Information contained in these guidelines have been extracted from the “**Emergency Response to Terrorism**” self-study program made available from the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. You may access the self-study course at http://www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/tr_ertss1.htm for further education and training.*

Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide service programs with a general introduction to the basic concepts of awareness at the scene of a potential terrorist incident. This information should also provide a foundation for policy and/or protocol development and implementation. The EMS Advisory Council for the Bureau of EMS is in the process of addressing the need for statewide protocols for terrorist incidents.

SAFETY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE!!

The EMS service program’s principal responsibility is to assure that that all EMS providers are able to recognize the need for and are fully aware of what special training resources are available and how to access those resources in an efficient and effective manner. These special resources may include, but not be limited to, training on hazardous materials, chemical, nuclear, and biological incidents.

What is Terrorism?

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in the furtherance of political or social objectives.” This definition includes three elements:

- Terrorist activities are illegal and involve the use of force.
- The actions intend to intimidate or coerce.
- The actions are committed in support of political or social objectives.

Types of Incidents

1. Biological

The four common types of biological agents include: bacteria (anthrax), viruses (smallpox), and toxins (botulism).

Indicators

- *Unusual number of sick or dying people or animals*
- *Dissemination of unscheduled and unusual sprays, especially outdoors and or at night*
- *Abandoned spray devices with no distinct odors*

2. Nuclear

There are three main types of nuclear radiation emitted from radioactive materials: alpha, beta, and gamma. Alpha are the heaviest and most highly charged of the nuclear particles, however cannot travel more that a few inches in air and are stopped by the outermost layer of dead skin that covers the body. Beta particles are smaller and travel much faster than alpha particles. Beta particles generally do not penetrate far enough to reach the vital inner organs. If the skin is exposed to large amounts of bet radiation for long periods of time, skin burns may result. Gamma rays are a type of electromagnetic radiation transmitted through space in the form of waves. Gamma rays are pure energy and therefore are the most penetrating type of radiation. They travel great distances and penetrate most materials. Gamma rays can attack all tissues and organs. Acute radiation sickness presents distinctive short-term symptoms: skin irritation, nausea, vomiting, high fever, hair loss, and dermal burns.

Indicators

- *Recognition of the DOT placards and labels*
- *Obvious accident or actual detonation*
- *Use of monitoring devices*

3. Incendiary

An incendiary device is any mechanical, electrical, or chemical device used intentionally to initiate combustion and start a fire. The three main types of incendiary devices include electrical, mechanical, or chemical. Only specially trained personnel should handle these devices. Proper handling is critical for safety and crime scene preservation.

Indicators

- *Multiple fires*
- *Remains of incendiary device components*
- *Odors of accelerants*
- *Heavy burning or high fire volume*

4. Chemical

These agents fall into five categories: nerve agents (disrupt nerve impulses), blister agents (burns to tissue), blood agents (interfere with ability of blood to transport oxygen), choking agents (severely stress the respiratory system), and irritation agents (often called riot control agents).

Indicators

- *Rapid onset of similar symptoms in large group of people*
- *Clammy skin and pinpoint pupils*
- *Mass fatalities without other signs of trauma*
- *Hazardous materials or lab equipment not relevant to the occupancy*
- *Unscheduled dissemination of an unusual spray*
- *Abandon spray devices*
- *Numerous dead animals, fish, and birds, absence of insect life*
- *Distinct pattern of casualties and common symptoms*

5. Explosive

It is estimated that 70% of all terrorist attacks worldwide involve explosives. Improvised explosive and incendiary devices are designed and assembled to explode and cause fires. These explosions rapidly release gas and heat, affecting both structure and people. Bombings are thought to be the most likely terrorist attack to be encountered.

Indicators

- *Usually obvious large scale damage to structure*
- *Blown-out windows and widely scattered debris*
- *Usually many civilian injuries and fatalities*

It is critical that EMS providers understand the implications of these modern threats and know proper response procedures and the limits of safe and prudent response.