

TERRORISM THREATS

Managing Hospitality Risk



WHAT'S AT RISK?

Federal law enforcement officials released a bulletin on September 21st, 2009, urging police to be vigilant about possible terrorist interest in attacking hotels, among other large public gathering places. The warning came after investigations into possible bomb plots in Denver and New York, and was a painful reminder that terrorist threats remain a very real and current issue for the country at large and the lodging industry in particular. While there were no specific targets mentioned, hotel managers should remain alert and review their security procedures.

Generally, neither the operator nor the owner would be held liable for any injury or death caused by terrorist activities, unless the owner or operator has failed to exercise reasonable care for the safety and security of their guests. Therefore, to make sure that the reasonable-care standard is met, owners and operators should take reasonable and necessary steps to protect the safety of guests, including implementing appropriate security policies and measures and providing crisis-management training to all employees.

WHAT ARE YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS?

All hotels should have a basic Emergency Response and Evacuation plan that allows for notification of appropriate authorities (police, fire department, etc.) and the safe evacuation of guests and employees during an emergency. In addition, for the specific threat of terrorism, hotels should:

- Routinely review their security and crises management programs
- Work with local law enforcement agencies to ensure programs are in line with the community's plan to address possible terrorist activities
- Incorporate relevant aspects of the community's plans into their own
- Make sure local law enforcement agencies have current blueprints of their property

Hotel managers should also review available resources such as Department of Homeland Security's DHS Active Shooter Response Booklet.

HOW CAN YOU BETTER PROTECT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

For some suggestions designed to assist you in developing sound policies and procedures for your organization, please turn this document over and review the attached checklist.

For more information about this and other hospitality risk management topics, please contact:

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Checklist: Preparing for Terrorist Threats

How far you take your security measures will depend on many factors, including your location, likelihood as a target, and your financial and risk management resources. For every hotel, the answer may be different, but the core mission of building owners in the event of a terrorist attack should be to limit loss of life and property for as long as it takes law enforcement to control the situation. Three issues hotel managers must address: communications, target hardening, and training.

Building owners and local first responders should establish communication channels with local authorities. Two model programs are New York City's Project Shield and London's Project Griffin.

Managers can institute security procedures that adjust to changing threat environments. Marriott, for example, instituted a crisis management program several years ago including a threat-condition approach to help allocate resources efficiently. When the three-tiered threat scale reaches red, or the highest level, Marriott security officers screen vehicles as they drive up to the hotel, inspect luggage and direct visitors through a metal detector before entry into the hotel.

Because building security officers are unarmed and lobbies are usually open to the public, owners must also come up with plans to keep terrorists out of building towers. As in a fire, elevators should quickly be recalled, lobby fire doors locked from the outside, loading dock gates in place, quick release buttons implemented and notification to the tenants to advise of an evolving situation.

While it is against every instinct of hoteliers to appear unwelcoming, hotels that are a likely target may want to focus on protecting the exterior of a building from vehicle-borne threats by using tactics such as:

- Strategically placed concrete planters
- Denial of access for unauthorized vehicles (or at least restricting access to 50 meters from the hotel entrance)
- Denial of parking against or in the front of the building

- Traffic spikes to prevent rapid unauthorized vehicle approach

- Vehicle or bag inspections; metal detectors

This is only an abbreviated list of the many steps that could potentially be taken to "harden" a hotel if necessary.

Emphasize knowing who's in your building and recognizing that the attack may be initiated from inside the facility.

Perform thorough background checks on all employees, and especially those with access to rooms and food.

Armed guards can be an effective deterrent.

Prevent access to outdoor air intakes.

Prevent public access to mechanical areas and building roofs.

Apply anti-shatter film on windows (at least in front lobby windows).

Install and monitor high-quality CCTV cameras, covering all access points.

Make sure any on-site restaurant is not in an open lobby area or easily accessible from street.

Install adequate lighting surrounding the hotel.

Test your plan. Have employees and security officers perform table-top exercises regularly.