



# **TERRORISM AND THE FIRE SERVICE: ANALYZING THE PROBLEMS**

BY RAY DOWNEY

The first worldwide conference on strengthening the fire and emergency services response to terrorism was held November 6-10 in Berryville, Virginia. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, in partnership with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, sponsored the conference. Attendees included many federal, state, and local law enforcement and fire service personnel, some of whom presented informative lectures. The conference was by invitation only. Attendees included the chiefs and an additional ranking member of the 75 largest fire departments in the United States.

U.S. Fire Administration Administrator Carrye B. Brown and International Association of Fire Chiefs' President P. Lamont Ewell delivered the opening remarks.

Various presentations and exchanges from the audience relative to national and worldwide trends in terrorism—past, present, and future—effectively set the stage for many of the attendees, who themselves personally have not had to deal with an incident involving terrorism or whose departments have not had to respond to such incidents.

Of great importance is that many of the attendees learned for the first time of the num-

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**DOMESTIC TERRORISM:** The unlawful use of force or violence committed by a group(s) of two or more individuals 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.

Example: The Pedro Albizu Campos Revolutionary Forces (PACRF), a violent domestic Puerto Rican separatist group dedicated to achieving total Puerto Rican independence from the United States, directs its terrorist activities at the United States and receives no foreign direction or financial assistance. In the 1990s, the group was credited with committing four terrorist acts in Puerto Rico.

**INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM:** The unlawful use of force or violence, committed by a group(s) or individual(s) who is foreign based and/or directed by countries or groups outside the United States or whose activities transcend national boundaries. Their acts against persons or property are committed to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in the furtherance of political or social objectives.

Example: A prime example of an international terrorist group that has been active in the United States is the Iranian Mujahedin-E-KhalQ (MEK), which opposes the current Iranian regime. This group is foreign-based, and its activities transcend national boundaries. On April 5, 1992, five MEK members forcibly entered and seized control of the Iranian mission to the United Nations in New York City. No injuries resulted, and all five members were subsequently arrested. ■

ber and types of terrorism threats and incidents that have occurred around the country.

One such event was the "Harbor Incident," of which most of us had never heard.

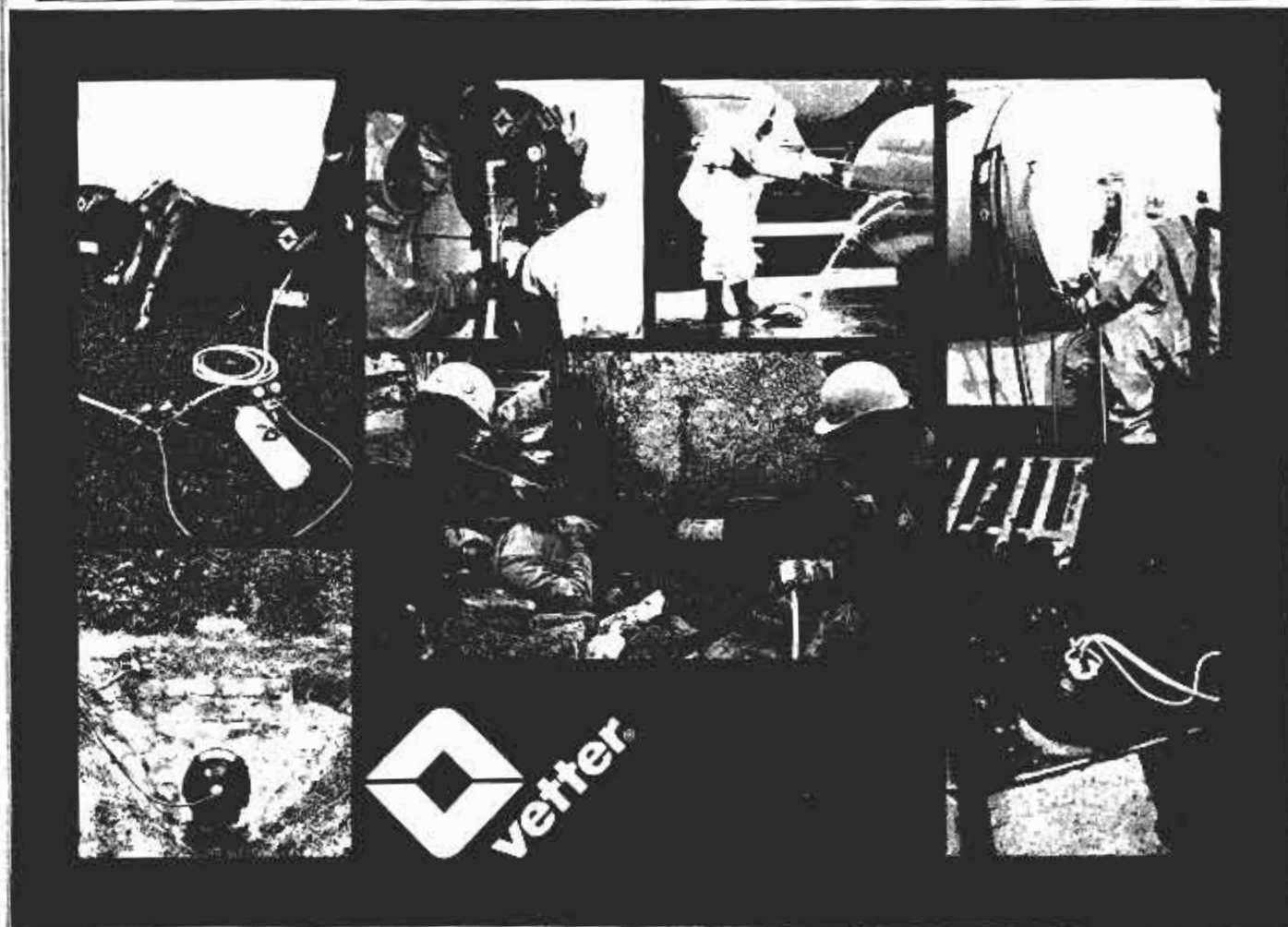
This involved a threat of a release of the poisonous gas Sarin in one of the major amusement centers in the United States. The local fire department had been made

aware of it only hours before the threatened time of release. The public heard about it weeks later when the President of the United States mentioned it during a press conference. The local fire chief was hard-pressed to institute a timely action plan to deal with the potential nerve-gas release. As usual, his fire department came through and was equally as prepared as the federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies that had been prestaged and readied even before the fire department had been notified.

Sound familiar? This scenario was common for most of the fire departments in attendance. In many cases, the fire departments are never notified. Fortunately, the Harbor Incident ended as a threat only—a threat serious enough to have a large federal and local response but one in which the fire department was required to "react," which it did in a timely fashion.

In these types of incidents, the fire service must be able to "proact." That can happen only when the agencies (federal, state, and local) involved provide the necessary information to the fire service well before (as soon as it is available to the agencies) the potential incidents occur.

What types of terrorist activities can be



expected? The bombings of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City are excellent examples of how destructive and deadly "bombs" can be and how unexpected these incidents were for the fire service. What about chemical and biological agents? Is any fire department fully prepared to handle these incidents?

#### TERRORISM NOT NEW FOR FIRE DEPARTMENTS

Looking back, we know that responding

to terrorism isn't new for the fire service. During the '60s and '70s, fire departments around the country were faced with attacks from a few select revolutionary groups such as the Weathermen, Black Panthers, and FALN. At one point, the Weathermen took credit for 25 terrorist bombings during one five-year period. Most of these incidents involved bombings directed at government buildings, large corporate offices, armories, and police department headquarters, to name a few. Loss of life occurred in

only a few of these incidents. Most bombings occurred when the buildings were closed, and warnings were telephoned to local authorities. The World Trade Center and Murrah Federal Building bombings, however, occurred without warning. Six lives were lost in the World Trade Center Bombing, which involved international terrorists; and 169 lives were lost in the Oklahoma City Bombing, alleged to have been the work of a domestic group of terrorists.

The case studies presented by representatives from the Tokyo (Japan) Fire Department: "The Tokyo Subway Sarin Incident"; the Paris (France) Fire Department: "Terrorist Bombings in Paris"; Israel's Haifa Fire Department and Israel's Border Police: "Terrorist Bombings in Israel"; Northern Ireland Fire Brigade: "Bombings in Northern Ireland"; and London (England) Fire Brigade: "Bombings in London" highlighted the weeklong conference. In addition, the City of New York (NY) Fire Department reported on the World Trade Center Bombing, and the Oklahoma City (OK) Fire Department reported on the Alfred P. Murrah Bombing.

#### TERRORISM IN ISRAEL

In Israel's presentation of terrorism both from a domestic and international perspective, it was mentioned that 100,000 Arabs cross the border daily to work in Israeli territory. In 1992, the Israelis experienced 3,600 terrorist attacks that resulted in more than 200 deaths. Car bombings and suicide bombers are the most prevalent types of incidents in that country. Cars with bombs are strategically placed in locations where a large number of people work or gather and then are detonated by a timer. Another method used is the driving of cars that detonate on impact into buses, buildings, or crowds.

A suicide bomber poses a much more serious threat. He boards a crowded bus and, when the time is right, detonates the bomb, killing scores of people and himself. Much more frightening is the fact that, at times, a second suicide bomber will be on the same bus at a different location and survive the original blast. This bomber then will repeat the scenario when rescuers arrive at the scene and are involved in assisting or removing victims of the first blast. Operational plans for these types of incidents highlight the possibility of secondary explosions. The bomb squads receive numerous calls each day and make extensive use of their robots, which were specially designed for these types of operations. Fighting terrorism in Israel is a daily chore.

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and deployment of the various agencies involved is needed. International cooperation and multiagency coordination are priorities. Exchange of information plays a key role in this fight against terrorism. Equally important is the need to develop effective techniques and equipment for investigating and mitigating these incidents.

#### NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland is no stranger to terrorist attacks. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Kenneth Harper, of the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade, explained some of the various techniques, including the following, used by terrorists in Northern Ireland.

- The blatant attack (blast incendiary) uses a mechanism designed for a small explosive device, such as a detonator and a short-term timer usually attached by plastic tape to a thin metal container filled with gasoline. The device then is attached by a hook to the security gate outside a window. On detonation, a huge ball of flame cascades into the building as the glass is shattered by the explosive device. In one incident, this type of device was responsible for killing 12 people and seriously injuring dozens of others.

- The secret attack (small pocket-size incendiary devices). Cassette-type devices usually are planted in stores that carry large quantities of flammables. The terrorists pose as shoppers, usually on busy shopping days. Often, women conceal the devices in large pocketbooks or shopping bags. These women usually are working-class housewives who make from \$75 to \$100 per device and generally are not part of the bigger organization. The devices can be planted almost anywhere in the store without being detected.

Another means of placement was discovered during a Christmas season when serious fires occurred at several toy and fancy goods stores in Belfast. It was discovered that toys were purchased and taken to a location where the devices were installed. The toys then were returned to the store for a cash refund. The returned goods normally were taken to a storage area for eventual inspection before being displayed. The fires occurred deep in the storeroom in the early hours of the morning. One tragedy involved a doll that had been returned with an incendiary device implanted that had been put back on the store rack. It was purchased later the same day by a mother, who gave it to her little girl. The doll was placed in her bedroom and burst into flames sometime during the night, starting a fire and killing the child.

The devices used are sophisticated, dependable, and accurate—almost fool-proof. The timing mechanism can be set to within seconds of accuracy by use of printed circuitry and extended time devices. The devices can be programmed weeks in advance of ignition time. At times, firefighters responding to these bombings were exposed to secondary devices specifically meant to impede and harm rescue workers.

#### PARIS REPORT

The Paris Fire Brigade faced many of the same problems when dealing with the rash of bombings aimed at its transportation systems. The department's "Red Plan," an emergency operational plan designed to better equip its organization in the aftermath of these terrorist activities, provides a threefold course of action that takes place simultaneously—that is, fighting the disaster itself (bombing and resulting fire), evacuating the victims from the scene, and providing assistance to the injured. The brigade established a well-coordinated and unified command system to manage terrorist-related incidents.

#### TOKYO

Terrorists in Tokyo didn't select a single site for their attack; they chose 15 stations in the city's three subway lines. The terrorists released the poisonous gas Sarin, which killed six people and injured more than 1,500.

Again, the media were able to present graphic videos of the effects of this chemical release. Many problems were encountered while attempting to control the situation. Fortunately, the Tokyo Fire Department had the manpower and equipment to effectively deal with this situation. The major problem at this incident was trying to identify the poison used, which was accomplished through a coordinated effort of the various agencies involved. More than 100 firefighters had been injured rescuing and treating victims.

Will this be the tool of the terrorist in the future? Is the fire service prepared to handle "NBC" (nuclear, biological, and chemical) incidents? Does the fire service have the necessary equipment? What type of training is required for these incidents? Will law enforcement interface with the fire service and keep it informed of possible incidents? Is sharing intelligence and information regarding terrorism among agencies the rule or the exception to the rule? What have we learned from terrorist incidents, and how have we applied these lessons? *To be continued.* ■

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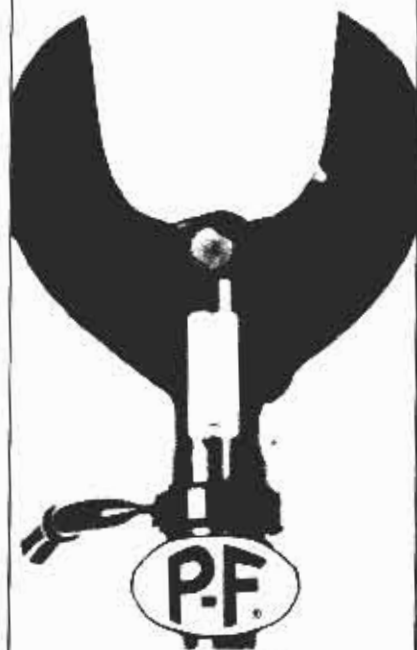
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