# Terrorism



Terrorist Attack on the World Trade Center

**General Information**

Terrorism has been defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as "The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government; the civilian population; or any segment of it, in furtherance of political or social objectives." The devastation which occurred at the World Trade Center in New York and the Alfred Murray building in Oklahoma City points to the need to plan for potential threats within our own communities.

The state level Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis claims that the only two terrorist events occurring in Washington state between 1990 and 1994 occurred in Tacoma. Both were bombings that were attributed to a skinhead group. They occurred within three days of each other in July 1993 and caused only property damage.

Other events that could be classified as terrorist attacks are the recent bombing of a Seattle uniform company and a bombing of the Southwest District Court in Burien in 1995. Additionally, a bomb found at a Boeing plant in 1985 is believed to have been sent by the Unabomber.

**Vulnerability**

These events, as well as events in other parts of the country and world, give a glimpse as to what could potentially happen here. Non-local events include bombings at the World Trade Center in New York, the Alfred Murray Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Olympic Park in Atlanta and the hostage situation in Lima Peru. Additionally, the bomb scare at Seattle's Westlake Center in July 1996 helped illustrate Washington's potential vulnerability. The greatest number of injuries and casualties would result from the use of a weapon of mass destruction. These include biological and chemical weapons that can affect people living throughout a larger geographic area. The widespread nature of such weapons makes response difficult.

The Puget Sound region is vulnerable due to its geography. This area is easily accessible and perhaps more importantly, it allows easy exit after a terrorist attack. Proximity to waterways, interstate highways and the Canadian border increase its

vulnerability.

Potential vulnerable sites include: government institutions, dams, water supply sources, power distribution systems, communications terminals, and financial centers. Corporate headquarters of high profile businesses are also vulnerable to terrorist attacks such as Boeing, Starbuck's, Nordstrom and Microsoft. Random acts of violence such as the detonation of an explosive device in a public area are also within the scope of terrorism.

Potential occurrences could be the result of actions from domestic or international groups. The terrorist actions could be expected to come about as a result of grievances, real or alleged, toward activities of some government entity, or as retaliation for some governmental act.

Terrorist "groups" at play today include international and domestic political or religious groups, organized crime, drug cartels, militias, gangs and people acting according to their individual beliefs; and new groups are constantly emerging. Traditionally, small arms and improvised explosive devices have been the weapons of choice for terrorist entities as they are easy to acquire and use. They will probably remain the primary option for the immediate future. Chances are low but growing that weapons of mass destruction, including biological and chemical weapons, could be used by some groups as such agents are cheap to produce and easy to conceal as well as being relatively lethal.

**Effects**
Due to the variable nature of terrorist attacks, it is difficult to discuss all the possible effects. The effects of an attack at a dam and the resulting flooding would be drastically different from the effects of a bombing similar to that in Oklahoma City. Generally speaking, terrorist attacks can result in mass casualties as well as property damage to buildings or infrastructure.

**Conclusion**
All such terrorist potentialities remain difficult to predict and difficult to defend against. How should local governments approach hazards planning for these unpredictable events? King County uses an all hazards planning approach for emergency management. This type of planning provides one basic plan for all types of hazards. This is very helpful for disasters such as terrorist attacks that can potentially take many forms. It's important to remember that the emergency management, fire, and medical services focus of terrorist acts is on consequence management. Law enforcement agencies, on the other hand, are responsible for prevention of terrorism and apprehending terrorists if an event occurs.