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Terrorism and Civil Unrest

Over the centuries, virtually all civilizations have experienced times of uncertainty and turmoil. But until recently, most Americans had long assumed that our nation was all but immune to great crisis, at least on our own soil. That assumption changed dramatically on September 11, 2001. On that morning, it immediately became clear that the threat of terrorism in the United States is very, very real.

Many of the precautions that we've discussed in previous chapters—and I won't repeat them here—are perfectly suited to help your family remain safe in the event of a terrorist attack. But there are a number of additional considerations that Americans would face in proximity to an attack involving nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons—often referred to as “weapons of mass destruction.”



Nuclear and Radiological Attacks

Nuclear and radiological threats tend to fall into two categories—those posed by large nuclear bombs such as those that have been in the arsenals of many nations for several decades, and radiological dispersion devices often called “dirty nukes” or “dirty bombs.” This latter type of device is smaller and intended to cause destruction not by destroying buildings and structures but by scattering radioactive material over a large area.

During a nuclear or radiological attack, finding shelter is your best means of protecting yourself. While the prospects of surviving a direct hit from a nuclear attack are minimal, those who seek shelter, especially in a blast or fallout shelter, will have a better chance of survival. Blast shelters are specifically constructed to offer some protection against blast pressure, while fallout shelters are designed to minimize exposure to harmful radiation.

Preparing for a Nuclear or Radiological Attack

- *Make sure you know your community’s warning signals and what they mean.*
- Find out what local public buildings are designated as fallout shelters. Check with your local emergency management office for locations, and look for yellow and black fallout shelter signs (like those that were prevalent during the Cold War).
- Consider where you and family members would go if you could not get to a designated shelter—at home, at work, and at your children’s school. Consider basements, subways, tunnels, structures without windows, or middle floors of high-rises. Protection is best achieved by heavy, dense materials such as concrete, bricks, and earth. The more of these materials you have surrounding you, the better.
- *If you live in an apartment or high-rise, ask the building manager to identify the safest place to seek shelter and to explain to you what measures are in place to handle occupants of the building during and after an attack.*
- *Review your community evacuation plans.* Know evacuation routes, relocation sites, and transportation plans for those with special needs.

In the Event of an Attack

- *If a warning has been sounded*, take shelter immediately, preferably below ground. Stay put until officials have deemed it safe to go outdoors.
- *If you are outside* and cannot seek shelter indoors, protect yourself with whatever means possible. Cover your head, and lie flat on the ground behind anything that could serve as protection. Take shelter even if you are miles from the attack area, since radioactive fallout can be carried by the winds.
- *If you are at home*, stay in the area that affords the most protection, and monitor official instructions using the radio in your emergency supply kit.

After an Attack

Never exit a shelter until officials have deemed it safe to do so. Understand from the beginning that your stay in a shelter could last up to four weeks.

Chemical and Biological Attacks

Chemical weapons might include a variety of agents, including vapors, aerosols, liquids, or solids that have toxic effects. Potentially, they might be released by bombs, or from aircraft, boats, or vehicles. Some chemical agents may be odorless and tasteless. They may have an immediate effect (a few seconds to a few minutes) or a delayed effect (several hours to several days). While potentially lethal, chemical agents are difficult to deliver in lethal concentrations.

Biological agents include disease-causing organisms such as bacteria or viruses, as well as toxins found in nature.

Preparing for a Chemical or Biological Attack

In addition to your basic emergency supply kit, the following items may be helpful in the case of a biological or chemical attack:

- A roll of duct tape and scissors
- Plastic sheeting to cover your doors, windows, and vents in a designated room to be used for shelter

During a Chemical or Biological Attack

Many of the measures that were discussed in our chapter on epidemics and pandemics may be applicable and helpful, especially against biological attack. In addition, here are some guidelines to follow during a terrorist attack using chemical or biological weapons.

- *Monitor your radio* for updated information and instructions, including whether or not to evacuate or stay inside.
- *If instructed to stay indoors, close all windows and doors.* Place damp towels over door cracks.
- *Shut off all HVAC systems* including furnaces, air conditioners, vents, and fans.
- *Go to an internal room*, windowless if possible, and seal off the room with plastic and duct tape. Ten square feet of floor space per person (an area just 3 1/2 feet square) will provide enough oxygen for one person for up to five hours.
- *Remain in your protected area* until local officials deem it safe.
- *If you are in an unprotected area*, seek shelter immediately and try to stay upwind of the contaminated area.

After a Chemical or Biological Attack

Before assisting others, decontaminate yourself first using the guidelines below. Decontamination as quickly as possible after an attack is the best means to minimize health risks.

After a Chemical Attack

- Know some of the symptoms of exposure. These may include muscle cramping, difficulty breathing, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, eye pain or vision problems, and burning or red skin.
- All clothing and any other items that may be contaminated must be removed. Do not pull clothing over your head but cut it off instead.
- Decontaminate your hands with soap and water.

- Take out contact lenses, and soak eyeglasses in household bleach.
- Use large amounts of water to flush eyes.
- Face and hair should be gently washed and rinsed.
- Blot other areas of the body with a washcloth that has been soaked with soapy water. Do not swab or scrub.
- Put on clean clothes, preferably those in drawers or closets that are less likely to have become contaminated.
- Use gloves and a mask when aiding in the decontamination of others.
- Anyone potentially affected by a biological or chemical attack should immediately seek medical attention.
- In the event of a major chemical attack, monitor official instructions on radio and television.

After a Biological Attack

- Understand that individuals may not realize that they have been exposed to biological agents until symptoms appear.
- If you have reason to believe that you've been exposed to a biological agent, follow the decontamination procedures outlined above, and place clothing and personal items in a sealed plastic bag.
- In the event of a major biological attack, monitor official instructions on the radio and television.

Civil Unrest

From time to time over the past fifty years, and from place to place, we have seen moments in American history where civil authority almost completely breaks down. We saw vast rioting in the 1960s, and rioting and looting in Los Angeles in 1992 after the acquittal of police officers involved in the arrest of Rodney King. And despite the heroism displayed by many citizens after Hurricane Katrina, portions of New Orleans became virtual war zones where criminals preyed on innocent victims almost at will.

Although the possibility of civil unrest is very real, FEMA and other government agencies have provided very little information to the public about

protecting themselves and their families in the event of local or widespread riots. Because the threats we'd face during civil unrest would come not from natural causes or even from terrorist enemies but from people from within our own communities, this becomes a more difficult subject and one that requires us to rely more on our own values than would be the case in a natural disaster or terrorist attack.

If your loved ones, home, business, or employees are threatened in a riot, only you can decide whether to use force—including potentially lethal force—for protection. If you choose to own a firearm or have other defensive measures in place in your home or business, you'll find an in-depth discussion of these measures in Section VI of this book. Regardless of your decision when it comes to defensive measures, here are some ideas for diminishing the dangers that civil unrest might pose to you and your loved ones.

- Follow the guidelines outlined in previous chapters for assembling an emergency kit, establishing a family plan, and for evacuations.
- Know the location of your nearest police station.
- Stay abreast of the developing situation through news reports, keeping in mind that news reports will not have up-to-the-minute information.
- *During civil unrest, avoid subways and other areas from which you can't easily escape.*
- Secure your home and business as best you can, and remove small valuables to the extent possible.
- *Watch out for riot control chemicals since these affect criminals and law-abiding citizens alike.*
- If you're caught in a mob, move with the flow of the crowd until you have an opportunity to escape into a doorway, alley, or side street.
- *Do not stop your vehicle* unless it is absolutely necessary. If a crowd blocks your route, honk the horn, and carefully navigate through or around them. Keep your car moving if at all possible.
- Avoid the temptation to watch the riot from windows or balconies.
- Never drive toward police. Confrontations will likely be occurring in areas where police are stationed, and police will not be able to distinguish you from those breaking the law.
- Consider having a predesignated "safe room" in your home. For more information about safe rooms, see Chapter 14 of this book.

A Word for Business Owners

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, there was a great deal of concern among business owners and their employees about advance preparations for potential future attacks. In the years since, anxiousness about the next attack has faded. For the most part, we have gone back to our day-to-day work and lives. But the need for preparedness remains.

I've therefore decided to include some ideas for business owners in this section. Keep in mind that the responsibility of business owners to their employees extends beyond not just to preparing for terrorist attacks but to all of the other disaster situations that I talk about in this book. Many of the ideas can easily be translated from the home to a business setting.

I'll keep this section fairly brief. However, if you would like to begin putting in place a more detailed action plan for your business in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster, let me suggest that you start with the "Emergency Management Guide for Business & Industry," published by the FEMA. The guide can be found online at <http://www.fema.gov/business/guide/index.shtm>. This checklist is largely drawn from this FEMA guide:

- Appoint an individual or group to be in charge of developing your company's emergency management plan.
- Establish planning deadlines.
- Provide a budget for items that might need to be purchased, as well as for training for employees.
- Consider all emergencies, including fires, severe weather, hazardous material spills, natural disasters, terrorism, utility outages, and evacuations.
- Consider risks that might be unique to your business, including proximity to flood areas, earthquake fault lines, or potential disasters involving the products your company produces.
- Make physical enhancements as needed to improve your facility's safety and security.
- Make sure employees know where to find, and how to use, basic emergency equipment like fire extinguishers, First Aid kits, and automatic external defibrillators.
- Distribute an emergency call list to all employees with phone numbers for persons who would be involved in responding to an emergency. Include

numbers for your local emergency management office, utility companies, security companies, contractors, insurance carriers, and so forth.

- Conduct training, drills, and exercises to ensure that employees can respond quickly and properly in a crisis.
- Have a “shutdown” procedure in case your place of business needs to be completely evacuated.
- Have procedures to account for all employees, visitors, and contractors after an evacuation is complete.
- Train your employees in emergency management procedures, and provide additional training as your plan is improved or revised.
- Conduct a review of your entire plan at least once a year.