

# U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Protective Security Coordination Division  
Office of Infrastructure Protection



## Infrastructure Protection Report Series

# Religious Facilities

Hundreds of thousands of religious facilities serve millions of people of all faiths and denominations throughout the United States. Religious facilities are generally open-access public assembly venues and have been successfully targeted by terrorists on numerous occasions in the past.



## Potential Indicators of Terrorist Activity

Terrorists have a wide variety of weapons and tactics available to achieve their objectives. Specific threats of most concern to religious facilities include:

- Improvised explosive devices (IEDs)
- Arson/ incendiary attack
- Small arms attack
- Assassination/kidnapping
- Chemical/biological/radiological agent attack

Terrorist activity indicators are observable anomalies or incidents that may precede a terrorist attack. Indicators of an imminent attack requiring immediate action may include the following:

- Persons in crowded areas (e.g., reception or meeting areas) wearing unusually bulky clothing that might conceal suicide explosives or weapons
- Suspicious or illegally parked vehicles near facility or near places where crowds gather
- Unattended packages (e.g., backpacks, briefcases, boxes) that might contain explosives
- Suspicious package or letter received by mail that might contain explosives or chemical, biological, or radiological agent

- Unexpected or unfamiliar delivery or maintenance vehicles
- Evidence of unauthorized access to areas of the building containing heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) equipment

Indicators of potential surveillance by terrorists include:

- Persons using or carrying video/camera/observation equipment in or near the facility over an extended period
- Persons discovered with facility maps, photos, or diagrams with critical assets highlighted or listing of personnel
- Persons questioning religious facility employees off-site about practices pertaining to the facility and its operations
- Persons parking, standing, or loitering in the same area over a multiple-day period with no reasonable explanation
- Facility employees associating with suspicious individuals
- An increase in threats from unidentified sources by telephone, postal mail, or e-mail and/or an increase in reports of threats from outside known, reliable sources

## Common Vulnerabilities

The following are key common vulnerabilities of religious facilities:

- Significant numbers of people of like faith gathered in a single symbolic location at specified times
- Generally unrestricted access to religious services
- Unrestricted access to peripheral areas, such as contiguous parking areas and separate educational facilities
- Building systems that are vulnerable to fire, contamination via heating and cooling systems, explosives, and blocked emergency exits
- Access by workers and maintenance staff who may not undergo background checks
- Easy facility identification either by facility configuration, design, or signage
- Non-profit status, which may result in limited resources for security

## Protective Measures

Protective measures include equipment, personnel, and procedures designed to protect a facility against threats and to mitigate the effects of an attack. Protective measures for religious facilities include:

### • Planning and Preparedness

- Designate an employee as security director
- Develop a comprehensive security plan and emergency response plan for the facility
- Establish liaison and regular communication with local law enforcement and emergency responders
- Conduct regular exercises with facility employees to test the security and emergency response plans

### • Personnel

- Conduct background checks on all employees
- Incorporate security awareness into employee training programs
- Maintain an adequate security force using both employees and congregation volunteers

### • Access Control

- Define the facility perimeter and areas within the facility that require access control
- Limit access to congregation members and visitors to a level consistent with facility operations
- Keep vehicles away from critical assets and from areas where large numbers of people congregate
- Require that all illegally parked vehicles be moved or have them towed
- Provide adequate door and window locks, barred entryways, and fencing and gate locks to areas where access is to be limited; add intrusion detection systems and alarms as appropriate
- Train mail room and receiving personnel to recognize suspicious mail, packages, shipments, or deliveries

### • Barriers

- Evaluate the need for perimeter barriers (e.g., fences, berms, concrete walls) around the facility
- Establish a clear zone adjacent to sensitive or critical buildings; keep zone free of vegetation and other obstructions to allow for continuous monitoring
- Install barriers to protect doors and windows from small arms fire and explosive blast effects
- Install barriers at HVAC systems to prevent the introduction of chemical, biological, or radiological agents into the building

### • Communication and Notification

- Install system(s) that provide communication with all individuals at the facility, including employees, security force personnel, congregation members, and visitors
- Develop a notification protocol that specifies who should be contacted in emergencies

### • Monitoring, Surveillance, Inspection

- Evaluate needs and design a monitoring, surveillance, and inspection program that is consistent with facility operations and security requirements
- Provide visual surveillance capability for sensitive and critical assets at the facility
- Continuously monitor all people entering and leaving the facility; train monitors to detect suspicious behavior

### • Infrastructure Interdependencies

- Ensure that the facility has adequate utility service capacity to meet normal and emergency needs
- Secure dumpsters and other trash containers to prevent the hiding of explosives or other hazardous materials

### • Cyber Security

- Develop and implement a security plan for computer and information systems hardware and software
- Design and implement a secure computer network architecture
- Regularly review facility Web site to ensure that no sensitive information is provided

### • Incident Response

- Ensure that an adequate number of emergency response personnel are available at all times
- Check the status of all emergency response equipment and supplies on a regular basis
- Identify entry and exit points to be used in emergencies
- Ensure that employees are familiar with procedures for shutting off utility services (e.g., electricity, natural gas) in emergency situations

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