



Terrorism

Key Points

- Terrorism is a bit different than the other hazards presented because it is a method that uses hazards. The actual damage is caused by explosions, shootings, fires, crashes, infrastructure collapses, computer failures and the release of harmful agents, be they chemical, biological or radiological. This chapter will concentrate on the unique aspects of terrorism while impacts will be covered in related chapters: biological hazards, infrastructure failure and hazardous materials incidents.
- Since 9/11 terrorism has been recognized one of the top risks facing the United States. Modern technology allows small groups to inflict high casualties. Large amounts of resources have been appropriated to reduce the threat of terrorism.
- Defining terrorism is somewhat subjective with multiple definitions. Most agree that it involves acts that endanger human life through mass destruction, assassination and kidnapping. These acts are intended to intimidate a population and influence government policy. Most agree that acts by individuals can be called terrorism. One of the major differences of opinion is whether terrorist acts are restricted to non-governmental actors.
- Seattle has not experienced a large-scale 9/11 or Oklahoma Bombing-type of terrorist act, but it has had several smaller incidents and has been connected to larger incidents.
- The terrorist threat in Seattle comes from multiple sources. Al Qaeda and related jihadism, the extreme right and radical environmentalism have been the most frequent causes.
- The targets of terrorism depend on who is doing the targeting. Target selection depends on ideology, strategy, resources and target protection. Many groups aim to kill as many people as possible, but eco-terrorists have focused more on property destruction. Most groups aim to destroy sites related to their ideology, but some sites seem chosen more for other reasons. Because of this dependence, it is necessary to understand the ideologies, beliefs and motivations of the groups involved.

Context

The U.S Code of Federal Regulations defines terrorism as “...the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”ⁱ While there are many different legal and scholarly definitions of terrorism, this is the one that is the most important domestically in the United States.

Terrorism is a strategy. This section focuses on this aspect of terrorism. The violence can be perpetrated using a wide variety of means, e.g., bombs, chemicals, firearms, computer attacks, biological agents, and as 9/11 demonstrated, vehicles. Because terrorist acts use such a wide variety of means, the means are covered in accompanying chapters. For example, bombs are covered under hazardous materials, aircraft under transportation incidents.

In the past, in comparison to other countries, the United States has had few terrorist acts committed within its borders. Between 1990 and 1997, there had never been more than four incidents in a yearⁱⁱ. This situation was completely changed by the attacks by Al-Qaeda terrorists on New York City’s World Trade Center and the



Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

Pentagon on September 11, 2001. In October-November 2001, several incidents involving anthrax spores placed in U.S. mail generated new and real fears about the use of chemical and biological agents. The creation of the federal Department of Homeland Security and the city's participation in the Top Officials (TopOff) anti-terrorism exercises in May 2003 underlined Seattle's need to confront the threat of terrorism.

While Al-Qaeda is the main focus of counter-terrorism today, it is important to remember that other groups that employ terror tactics have been active in the United States. These include racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and the Aryan Nations, radical environmental groups and groups with ties to foreign terrorist organizations like Hamas.

Hate groups are now espousing the "leaderless resistance" model for fighting the people they view as their enemies. This doctrine advocates independent actions by individuals or small leaderless cells. The strategy seeks to prevent authorities from connecting illegal activities to the organization's command and control structure. Individuals acting on their own perpetrate acts of "resistance" that support the espoused philosophy of the larger group.

Another type of terrorism experienced in Seattle is eco-terrorism. During the November 1999 World Trade Organization disruptions and again in 2001, suspected Earth Liberation Front eco-terrorist attacks occurred at the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture.

Finally, with the emergence of the Internet and the increasing dependence of the economy on information technology, the possibility of cyber-terrorism has materialized. Criminal and terrorist organizations are rapidly building their capability to attack the electronic and communications systems upon which the economy depends. It can be difficult to discern the difference between a criminal act and a terrorist act, but vulnerability to either is frequently demonstrated by worms, viruses and other cyber-threats.

Diseases can be intentionally spread as part of a bio-terrorism attack. In 2001, several locations on the East Coast were struck with anthrax. In 1984, the followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh spread salmonella on food items in restaurants in the Dalles, Oregon; there were no deaths, but 751 cases were confirmedⁱⁱⁱ. Bioterrorist agents are likely to be highly virulent and cause severe illness.

History

Seattle has had activity related to terrorism, but it has never had a full-scale terrorist incident. There have been many smaller scale incidents that fit into terrorist mold and could represent the first step in a pattern of escalation. The incidents below include incidents occurring in the region. They relate to both domestic and international terrorist groups. Activity comes in cycles. In the 1960s and 70s, left wing radical groups were most active. In the 1990s, it was the extreme right wing and in the 2000s, it is al Qaeda and allied groups. Eco-terrorism has also been a periodic presence in the Pacific Northwest.

Besides committing acts of terrorism in the United States, many foreign terrorist groups use this country for fundraising and recruiting. News stories that feature Americans going to Somalia and Pakistan make it seem as if this is a new phenomenon, but it dates back at least to the early 20th century with heavy IRA fundraising in the United States.

1984. Seattle / Whidbey Island. Members of The Order, a racist Aryan Nations offshoot, robbed an armored car at Northgate mall. They fled to Whidbey Island and were subsequently killed in a confrontation with police.



Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

1993. Tacoma. Two bombs exploded in Tacoma in July, causing some property damage. A group calling itself the American Front Skinheads was responsible. They are also suspected of bombing a gay bar on Capitol Hill.

1996. Spokane. Members of the white separatist group Phineas Priesthood committed two bank robberies in Spokane. Both were preceded by bombings. The first occurred on April 1, 1996 and targeted the Spokesman-Review newspaper; the second occurred on July 12, 1996, targeting an abortion clinic. There were no injuries, but property damage was extensive^{iv}.

1996. Bellingham. Eight individuals were arrested near Bellingham. They had plotted attacks against a bridge, railroad tunnel and a radio tower^v.

1996. Seattle. Jason Sprinkle started a bomb scare when he parked his truck in the middle of Westlake Park, slashed the tires and walked away. His truck had a huge metal heart in its bed and the word "bomb" printed on its bumper. He intended the action as a protest to the reopening of Pine Street to traffic, but instead he caused a massive bomb scare. Nine blocks were evacuated during a busy weekday afternoon while the police investigated.

1999. Port Angeles / Seattle. An Algerian man with links to Osama bin Laden was caught smuggling bomb-making materials into the U.S. at Port Angeles. He had hotel reservations in Seattle close to the Seattle Center. The New Year's celebration at the Center was cancelled as a precaution; it was later determined that the actual terrorist target was Los Angeles.

1999. Seattle. Suspected eco-terrorist attacks at University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture.

2001. The Earth Liberation Front claimed responsibility for an arson attack against a University of Washington building. The fire caused \$6,000,000 in damage(<http://www.fbi.gov/seattle/press-releases/2011/fugitive-who-built-firebombs-linked-to-2001-arson-of-uw-center-for-urban-horticulture-arrested-following-expulsion-from-china>) .

2001. Nation-wide. September 11th attack on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon. Fourth terrorist-hijacked airliner crashes in Pennsylvania.

2002. Seattle. James Ujama pleads guilty to providing assistance to the Taliban government of Afghanistan.

2002. Seattle. Individuals opposed to a Seattle company's involvement with animal research entities released smoke bombs in major downtown buildings, causing substantial economic disruption and evacuations.

2003. Monroe. The Animal Liberations Front released 10,000 mink in Monroe, Washington, causing a loss of animal life and over \$40,000 in damages.

2003. Pullman. Two incendiary devices were left at the Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

2006. Seattle. Naveed Afzal Haq shot six people, one fatally, at the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle. Haq was not connected with terrorist groups, but his motives were political.

2011. Seattle. Two men were arrested for a plot to attack a Seattle armed forces recruiting center.



Seattle Office of Emergency Management Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

Until early 2001, the Aryan Nations maintained a compound in Northern Idaho not far from Washington and stated that it would like to create a white homeland in the Pacific Northwest. The Southern Poverty Law Center recorded 15 active hate groups active in Washington State in 2010^{vi}.

A review of the Seattle Police Department bomb disposal unit's incident log since 1995 shows two to six bomb hoaxes per year and a similar number of serious threats. Seven of them appear to be politically motivated. Victims included federal, county and city government facilities, women's clinics and Jewish organizations.

Likelihood of Future Occurrence

The pattern in the Seattle area has been a series of smaller scale attacks punctuated by the large arson attack against the University of Washington. At the same time, the international threat from jihadist extremists has been growing nationally. While Seattle has seen some of this activity, the focus seems to be elsewhere.

It seems very likely that Seattle will experience smaller scale incidents targeting property. There have not been as many incidents linked with right-wing or radical environmental extremists groups in recent years, but these groups are still in existence.

A large-scale attack seems like a low probability event but cannot be ruled out. Both domestic and international attackers have proven they can deliver devastating attacks. Tall buildings in Seattle were on potential target lists. As long as the capability and motives exist, the threat of an attack is real.

Terrorist groups frequently target sites and groups that are both symbolic and easy to attack. Being a large, diverse and open city, Seattle has many such potential targets.

Vulnerability

Most of the same vulnerabilities that cities in general and Seattle in particular have for other hazards also apply to terrorism. One significant difference is that attackers are deliberately selecting targets. Some groups have focused more on property while others are targeting people. All aim to commit acts that are shocking and have a high media profile.

Many attacks occur in downtown areas. The high population in these areas is an inherent vulnerability, as is their high economic, political and cultural significance. Many of our transport linkages connect through downtown and would be impacted by a large attack. Many attacks target transportation systems. Seattle, with limited reserve capacity in surface transportation, has a vulnerability.

Terrorist attacks use a wide variety of weapons, each of which has its own specific vulnerability. The vulnerability to these specific means of attack is covered in other chapters. For example, bioterrorism is covered in the chapter on disease. The proliferation of the number of means of attack stretches the ability to mitigate the effects of an attack.

Dependence on networked computer systems is a growing vulnerability. Like other governments and businesses across the nation, Seattle relies heavily on computers and networks to conduct its normal business. Future terrorist attacks could target the computer systems and networks that control the electric power grid or water supply or those that are used to dispatch and manage police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians and utility workers.



Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

Preparation reduces vulnerability. After 9/11, all levels of government began efforts to better mitigate the effects of and prepare for terrorist attacks. Citizens have become more aware as well. The attempted 2009 Christmas Day bombing of a Northwest Airlines flight was stopped by alert citizens.

Consequences

While Seattle has never experienced a major terrorist attack with massive loss of life, the fact remains that there are groups in existence seeking to do harm to people and organizations. These groups have a presence in the Seattle community and the means to cause enormous harm.

On the other hand, such groups face a number of obstacles that limit their capabilities. Post-9/11 reforms have probably made it harder to act. Citizens are more alert and more likely to act. Institutions have tightened security.

Terrorism has a lasting psychological component. The community at-large can become traumatized both because they identify with the victims and because terrorists often target well-known public places. The sense of public trauma is further heightened by the overwhelming media coverage at terrorist incidents. Through the media, people watching the event on television feel personally attacked. If the place attacked is an important landmark, a community may feel its own identity is under attack.

It is probable that future attacks will be small-scale actions carried out by individuals or small independent groups. Most previous attacks, especially those carried out by radical environmentalists and animal rights groups, have targeted property, but the Jewish Federation Shooting suggests that future actions may target people. It is very difficult to detect individual actors; the expectation that all attacks can be prevented is unrealistic.

Another likely threat is an attack on city computer systems. Several Internet worms have already caused temporary outages. Cyber-attacks against computer systems could potentially shut down radio, telephone and computer-aided dispatch systems. In the most likely cases, the outages would be short and could be mitigated by workarounds.

It is possible that a large scale attack could occur in Seattle. Such an attack could come from either a domestic or international group. Given the number of potential weapons, it is impossible to predict what form such an attack is most likely. Terrorist groups are always seeking new means of attack. In the past, weapons have included bombs, aircraft as missiles, chemicals and firearms. Bombs have been most common. Most troubling is the potential for using weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons.

Bioterrorism is the maximum credible threat out of several possible scenarios due to the devastating impact a successful attack would have. An attack could cause hundreds or even thousands of deaths. Quick detection and surge medical capacity would be critically important. In the case of plague, treatment should start within 24 hours of first symptoms. Both anthrax and plague can be treated if caught soon enough. While the federal government maintains a large stockpile of antibiotics that can be shipped anywhere in the U.S. in 12 hours, distributing the medication would be a challenge. After the initial attack, the affected area may have to be decontaminated. It depends on the type of agent used. In the case of anthrax, clean up could take years, render the affected area uninhabitable during clean up, and cost millions or billions of dollars.

Most Likely Scenario



Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

Home-grown independent actors target animal research facility. After first releasing the animals they burn and bomb the facility. One guard is killed in the attack.

Category	Impacts 1 = low 5 = high	Narrative
Frequency	4	Seattle has experienced major extremist violence on two occasions in the past twenty years. Even more violence has been prevented. Most of the events that occur do not require activation of Seattle Emergency Management system.
Geographic Scope	1	One facility is attacked with consequences for the surrounding area.
Duration	1	Incident response is over in less than 24 hours, but investigation takes longer.
Health Effects, Deaths and Injuries	2	One person is killed in the attack in the fire.
Displaced Households and Suffering	2	The fire spreads to surrounding buildings one of which is an apartment. Most residents find shelter with friends and family but four households need assistance.
Economy	2	The attack destroys valuable research that cannot be easily replaced for any amount of money.
Environment	2	The lab contained drugs and biological samples that are released into the environment.
Structures	2	The research lab and the neighboring apartment are destroyed. Four other buildings are damaged.
Transportation	2	Traffic in the surrounding area is halted during response.
Critical Services and Utilities	1	The attack does not inhibit critical service delivery or utilities.
Confidence in Government	3	The public wishes the government had prevented the attack and wants facilities that are likely to be attacked out of the city.
Cascading Effects	2	The attack causes a fire that spreads to surrounding buildings.

Maximum Credible Scenario

One kilogram of aerosolized anthrax is dispersed throughout the Seattle downtown area. The media describes in detail the potential for mass death. This, combined with a general lack of faith in government’s ability to provide the needed antibiotics in time, contributes to a general panic. Disturbances occur at many locations where antibiotics are dispensed. Police are unable to respond to every incident and several large scale riots break out in several locations. Although authorities are quick to dispense antibiotics 1300 people die.

Category	Impacts 1 = low 5 = high	Narrative
Frequency	1	An attack of this magnitude has never occurred in our region and a bioterrorism attack of this magnitude has never occurred in the world.
Geographic Scope	4	Downtown Seattle is attacked, but because downtown is the hub of the community, the whole city is affected directly and indirectly.



Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

Category	Impacts 1 = low 5 = high	Narrative
Duration	3	The attack is over in less than 24 hours, but it takes a week for public safety and health officials to stabilize the situation. Short term recovery will take months and long term recovery will take years.
Health Effects, Deaths and Injuries	5	Based on CDC estimates, 1300 people would die if 1kg of aerosolized anthrax were spread in a dense urban environment. 12,000 people become severely ill and require medical attention.
Displaced Households and Suffering	5	20,000 people are displaced from their homes due to possible contamination of their buildings. The attack centered mostly on the financial center, but also targeted Belltown on a weekend summer night.
Economy	5	Many buildings remain closed pending inspection and / or cleaning. Businesses cannot retrieve vital records. Those without adequate business continuity plans suffer severe hardship. In all 167 businesses are forced to declare bankruptcy. Many more relocate their operations. 50% of downtown ceases operating for eight months while recovery occurs.
Environment	5	The attack itself constitutes catastrophic environmental damage from the standpoint of human health. The anthrax also affects animals living in the area. It is washed into the wastewater system. Some spores survive spreading damage to other parts of the Seattle area ecosystem.
Structures	5	Although no buildings are physically destroyed, 1251 are rendered inoperable. 5423 probably clean inside but are not accessible due to contamination in the surrounding area.
Transportation	5	The entire downtown area is shut down. Initially I-5, I-90 and SR 99 are closed. Mass transit systems have to adjust routes. They open to limited traffic a week later. Some people remain afraid to travel near the affected area.
Critical Services and Utilities	5	The incident overwhelms public safety. The headquarters of the Fire and Police departments are contaminated as is City Hall and the Seattle Municipal Tower. Waste water systems are contaminated. Maintenance cannot be performed on power, water and communications infrastructure increasing failures. As a precaution, service is stopped in affected areas.
Confidence in Government	5	The public is angry that government did not prevent this attack. They are suspicious of government claims that buildings areas are clean and safe for re-occupancy.
Cascading Effects	3	Although the attack does not physically damage infrastructure the depopulating of the downtown area makes infrastructure harder to maintain increasing the likelihood of failures.

Conclusion

While we cannot predict the next target of terrorists, it is clear that the pace and severity of attacks are increasing. The quest by terrorists to obtain weapons of mass destruction is relentless, and they have already acquired crude capabilities in this arena. Seattle has become a major economic and cultural center, increasing its symbolic value and therefore likelihood of being targeted. Seattle's downtown areas in particular are densely



Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

populated and thick with attractive targets. Much of Seattle's economic and social life is concentrated in these areas and vulnerable to disruption. Also, Seattle is a transport hub and transportation systems remain vulnerable.

ⁱ 28 C.F.R. Section 0.85.

ⁱⁱ FBI, 1997.

ⁱⁱⁱ Center for Disease Control website. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/vol4no3/mcdade.htm>. Accessed 3/3/2010.

^{iv} FBI, 1996.

^v FBI, 1996.

^{vi} Southern Poverty Law Center web site, May 2010.