

An Increased Threat of Terrorism

Water suppliers are under an increased threat of terrorism. Documents captured in Afghanistan after the 911 attack show that Al Qaeda was very interested in United States water supply systems. These systems are still very vulnerable in several ways.

Many experts seem to be thinking that the probability of a terrorist attack on one of our nation's water supply systems is very low. They note that an attack would not kill enough people to make a notable splash in the nightly news.

In my opinion, they are missing the point of terrorism itself. As I note in my books and articles on water systems and terrorism, terrorism is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as:

the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion

Terror is defined as:

violence (as bombing) committed by groups in order to intimidate a population or government into granting their demands

In an American Water Works Association (AWWA) paper about 911, the threat of terrorism is noted:

America has long enjoyed the safest drinking water in the world and among the lowest rates of waterborne disease of any nation. Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control has said that waterborne disease is virtually undetectable in the health statistics of the United States. With respect to terrorism, most experts consider the likelihood of a successful terrorist attack on America through the water to be small. However, attacks against water systems are a known modus operandi of several terrorist groups. Materials relating to American water supply have been recovered from terrorist sites overseas. A damaging attack could affect water quality and public health, or it could involve water supply, affecting fire control, sanitation, and so forth. Clearly, water supply is critical to homeland security. We are not invulnerable to terrorism, and the consequences of a successful attack through the water could be catastrophic.

One of the major concerns with terrorism involving either the food or water infrastructures in the United States is not the number of deaths. Terrorism is essentially about the intimidation of a population and a disruption of their way of life. The psychological implications of such an attack, or rumored attack could be very devastating. As one of the readers of my book noted:

I was born in what used to be Rhodesia, and during the terrorist war there in the 1970s water supplies were poisoned and villagers died or suffered, so I am very aware of the huge risk to life.

SAA, Librarian, and Understanding Water and Terrorism book owner

The economic impact on our society would be particularly devastating, as noted in one notable paper, written by Donald C. Hickman, Major, USAF, BSC, of the United States Air Force Counterproliferation Center, Air War College, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, in September, 1999. This paper is entitled A Chemical and Biological

Warfare Threat, USAF Water Systems at Risk. It is part of the Future Warfare Series No. 3, and details the potential threat to the water supply systems of United States Air Force bases and facilities.

An attack to deny or disrupt water systems by terrorists could have a catastrophic effect on the United States economy and population. Water is particularly vulnerable as there are many cheap, easily available and deadly chemicals on the worldwide market.

At a July 28, 2005 water security conference in Texas, Dr. David McIntyre, a 30-year Army veteran and director of the Integrative Center for Homeland Security at Texas A&M University and former dean of faculty at the National War College, told attendees:

that water systems were part of the critical infrastructure of a community and are more vulnerable than most people know.

It doesn't take a large amount of a chemical or biological contaminant to ruin a small water system and disrupt a community, he said. Vigilance and awareness are the keys to water source protection.

That new technology has brought new challenges and demands for small water systems managers, including the fact that terrorists can use it to coordinate activities and educate themselves on how to contaminate a water supply.

Dr. Rony Berger, Director of Community Services of Natal, the Israel Trauma Center for Victims of Terror and War, noted in his report entitled America Under Attack: The Psychological Impacts of the Terror Attack on the Citizens of the USA that the following conditions tend to be observed following a terrorist attack:

- a. **Terror of death** - the shattering of the implicit assumption that we are invulnerable (Now I feel unsafe everywhere!)
- b. **Lack of control** - the arbitrariness of the terror attack (inability to properly prepare for it) as well as the sense of physiologically being "out of control" is extremely frightening (I was shaking inside so bad, I couldn't stop it.).
- c. **A sense of helplessness** - not being able to do anything to change the circumstances of the event coupled with the inability to help oneself or others during the event is a painful and often shameful experience affecting one's sense of self-esteem (It was terrible! I heard them screaming, but could not do a thing to help them.).
- d. **Dealing with uncertainty** - human beings aspire for predictability as it allow them to calculate their future steps and take appropriate measures to deal with upcoming threat. By its very nature, terror attacks are unpredictable and therefore, lead to stress and anxiety (I have no idea where they will strike again.).

- e. **Confronting the grotesqueness** - often victims of terror attacks confront grotesque pictures of dismembered human bodies, images that seem to be etched in their memories (I saw horrible pictures of limbs and body parts.).
- f. **Facing Loss** - victims of terror often lose loved ones, friends and colleagues and experience a great sense of grief mixed with survival guilt (I can't believe I could not do anything to help her and now she is gone.).
- g. **Experiencing inhumanity** - facing the terrorists' inhumanity shakes our sense of trust in others as well as confronts us with our own inhuman dark side (How can human beings be so evil?).

In the same paper it was noted that:

*Terror strategic goal is to **spread fear and panic** among the targeted population and thereby to adversely affect its citizens' life style as well as to have them influence policy makers in the direction favorable to the terrorists. In other words, terror is directed toward achieving political goals by using the pain and suffering of innocent civilians.*

Our water supply systems, ports and intra coastal water ways are all very vulnerable targets. The more aware and prepared the American public is to the threat, the better our chances to minimize the risk and cope if and when an attack happens.

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