

Travis County Emergency Services District No. 9
Westlake Fire Department
Standard Operating Guideline

Subject: Bomb Threats
Effective Date: October 5, 2000
Authorized By: Chief Paul Barker **Date:** Revised September 11, 2002

I. History

Acts of terrorism are not always designed to hurt or kill one person or one company. Terrorism is designed to disrupt government response or to show the public how vulnerable the government can be. Terrorists have learned that one of the best ways to cripple a society is to take out key figures of normal emergency response (i.e. Fire Departments or hospitals). In Texas, bomb threats and terrorist acts are the responsibility of law enforcement agencies. The role of fire departments is to assist law enforcement during these activities.

Terrorists have also learned that the most effective Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) device is one which incorporates a secondary device. In this scenario, a smaller device triggers panic or the response of emergency personnel. As the people nearby run away from the primary device or emergency personnel rush toward it, the larger, secondary device is activated. For this tactical reason, firefighters must resist their normal instincts and training to rush into harm's way. Entry to a WMD scene must be controlled and staged to minimize risk.

II. Purpose

To give guidance and orderly response to situations involving the use of explosives or explosive ignition-type devices as weapons of terrorism or mass destruction.

II. Policy

It is the policy of this Department to provide the highest level of safety to its members while delivering the mission of fire suppression, rescue, and emergency medical care to those in need.

III. Procedure

Notification:

- **Bomb Threat:** Upon receipt of a bomb threat, communications shall notify the Shift Commander via telephone and advise him of the incident. Communications will then

Alpha page the information to the Shift Commander. Radio use will be limited to avoid media attention. All "threats" will be a Code 1 response.

Device Found:

- In the event the reporting party advises that an actual suspicious device has been discovered, Communications shall notify the Shift Commander via telephone and give the location and name of the contact person. Communications will then Alpha page the information to the Shift Commander. In the event an actual device is discovered, the response will be upgraded to Code 3.
- For both responses, the Shift Commander will notify necessary personnel via radio or telephone.

Response:

- When responding to bomb threats, staging areas are extremely important in relation to the involved area. If at all possible, staging areas will be set up at least one city block (400 ft) from the structure involved. When possible, staging areas will be near another structure, on the far side of that building, away from the structure involved. Careful attention should be given to the height of the structure that you are staged behind to avoid being in the "collapse zone". In this area, a Command Post, an Aid Station, and Apparatus Staging Area will be established.

Communications:

- The IC will establish a Command Post and all units will report to the Command Post or Staging for assignments.
- In the past, common radio frequencies were used to detonate explosive devices and because of bleed-over from one channel to another, particularly when transmitting near an electronic device, it was critical to maintain radio silence within a large radius of a potential device. New technology and digital transmitter / receivers have made this practice unrealistic. There are so many cell phones, cordless phones and radios present today it would be hard to determine what type of frequency would be in the immediate area of a target. This fact could cause premature detonation even before the device is placed at the targeted location.
Regardless of this discussion of radio technology, it is still foolhardy to lean over a suspected device, press the transmit key, and say, "I think I have found it".
- A single Mayday Distress signal blast of an air horn will signal all members to return to the Command Post at once.
- The Department Accountability System will be utilized at all times.
- Communications shall be advised of the progress of the Command Post, Aid, and Staging Area set up. Communications shall also be responsible for notifying law enforcement of the location of the staging and command areas.
- In the event of the discovery of an actual device, Austin / TC EMS will be notified and the station location will be provided to A/TC EMS Communications. It will be the discretion of A/TC EMS to dispatch an ambulance and one will normally not be requested unless injuries occur or an actual device is found.

On scene duties:

- All personnel will report to the Command Post area and remain there until dismissed by the Incident Commander. All personnel are to be in the highest state of readiness in the event of an actual detonation of the device in question, this means that they are to stay at staging and perform the tasking assigned.
- Fire Personnel may be used for evacuation, crowd/scene control, and traffic re-direction as directed by law enforcement.
- At all times, law enforcement is in control of a threat situation. If actual detonation occurs, the Fire Department will then assume suppression control. All actions should be performed with the thought in mind that the effected area is a crime scene.

Specific Acts that will not be Performed by ESD #9 Personnel:

- Entry into structures involved in bomb threat operations
- Search for devices
- Removal of suspect devices

Points to consider During a Bomb Threat:

- Always be aware of your surroundings. Do not become complacent. You are the first line of responsibility for your safety.
- Consistently observe by-standers for unusual behavior or nervousness. Look for unusual “transmitters” such as someone holding a garage door opener, a radio-controlled car control box, etc. These simple devices can be utilized to trigger a secondary device once enough people are gathered or enough emergency personnel are vulnerable.
- Use time, distance and shielding to your advantage. When you have a choice, stand in front of a concrete or brick wall. Do not stand in front of large glass windows that you can be pushed through or that can fragment.
- Do not stand next to a trashcan or mailbox. Do not stand over a storm sewer inlet on the curb. Do not stand next to a car or any other vehicle parked near the event.
- Be aware of any abandoned packages / backpacks or any other container out of place for the surroundings.
- Always stand upwind and uphill from the event. Know the wind direction before you get near the scene and stay upwind.
- Your chances of not getting trapped in a panicked crowd are better on the edges than in the middle.
- Avoid mists, clouds, smells, or any chemical odor with no apparent source.
- If you hear an explosion or unusual noise, DO NOT move toward it and DO NOT move away from it – move at a right angle to the disturbance. A secondary device may be set near the first device or in the direction away from it where most people will run.
- Avoid clusters of police or EMS personnel – You might think it’s the safest place to be, but they (we) have a tendency to gather together and when they do, they make a bigger target. Consider multiple staging areas.

