

Addressing shopping center security in a brave new world

By Ronald Lawson and Mark Slovensky of The Gold Shield Grp.

After 9/11 how long was it before you felt safe flying a commercial aircraft? How long was it before you felt safe within a government facility? It took awhile to give the entire population a comfort feeling and this was done only through change to the system. These targets through government intervention were beefed up with security personnel, electronic equipment and an overall facelift to the way of thinking that governed these facilities prior to 9/11.

Maybe it's time to focus on what are the largest examples of capitalism and American opulence in the minds of many people throughout the world. From a terrorist vantage

point it is our malls and shopping centers.

The American public would need to be reassured should a mall or shopping center be focused so it would be a wise move in protecting one's assets if mall security, shareholders and corporate investors begin thinking "outside the box." It is time to take a proactive approach regarding what is necessary to ensure that shopping center and mall security teams are trained in the procedures and actions necessary to identify a situation before it happens. Targeting and defusing a situation is a key element and cannot be gauged by "what fits into the budget". Trained personnel would be an excellent start. All of the hard targets, i.e.; airports and government buildings are secure. Next are the soft targets and terror-

ist will use whatever tools are most suitable and available to complete their missions against them.

Recent terrorist plots against shopping malls:

Washington

A Columbus, Ohio man has been charged with participating in an al-Qaida plot to blow up a shopping mall in Ohio, Attorney General John Ashcroft announced recently.

"The American heartland was targeted for death and destruction by an al-Qaida cell," Ashcroft said at a news conference announcing the four-count indictment against the man, Nuradin Abdi, a cellular telephone business owner in the Columbus area after he obtained military style training in Ethiopia. FBI officials in Columbus said there was no indication which mall was supposed to have been targeted.

Immigration document fraud also alleged

Abdi, who has been in custody since November 2005 on immigration-related violations, also was charged with fraud and misuse of documents by claiming that he had been granted valid asylum status in the United States. In fact, prosecutors say, he obtained that refugee document under false pretenses. There also were one count each of conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists and conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, in this case al-Qaida. Each count of terrorism-related charges carries a maximum penalty of 25 years, Ashcroft said.

Los Angeles

A terrorism task force was investigating an "uncorroborated"

threat to a Los Angeles-area shopping mall recently. "As of now the information is uncorroborated and the credibility of the source is unknown," Los Angeles police said in a statement. No specific shopping mall was named, but an anonymous telephone call to federal officials several days ago indicated a mall near the Federal Building in West Los Angeles, Police Chief William Bratton said.

Bratton calls for "eyes, ears" of public

The alert was "strictly precautionary," Bratton said at a news conference. "We need the eyes, the ears" of the public because such scrutiny can deter terrorists, he added. Lilianna Restrepo, who operates a jewelry cart in the mall, said she wasn't worried herself but was afraid the threat would scare away customers. "It will be a horrible day," she said.

4,000 similar threats

FBI spokesman Matt McLaughlin said that because the "reliability of the source is unknown" and exact details were "unsubstantiated," officials decided that as the date drew nearer and "out of an abundance of caution" they would enlist the public's help. He added that seeking public help is done "in cases all the time." The FBI says 4,000 similar, unsubstantiated threats have been received in the United States over the last year.

An advisory issued late Wednesday asks the public and mall security to look for:

- People or activities that don't "fit" into the mall environment.
- People sitting in parked vehicles for a long time.
- People sketching or taking notes, photographing or videotaping areas not normally associated with tourism.
- Someone wearing a heavy coat in hot weather.
- Anyone carrying unusually heavy bags or backpacks.
- Vehicles improperly parked or in spots not normally used for deliveries.

Synopsis

Shopping centers and malls should all have in place contingency plans for quickly elevating their security posture when necessary. All security personnel should have the proper training to be able to look for and identify situations and signs that could be possible threats. With regard to the general public it is unrealistic to believe that all contingencies have been planned for and illogical to believe that all safeguards are in place. We have a saying in New York, "If you see something, Say something."

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