

TERRORISM: what to do - and what NOT to do



Before September 11, terrorism was a blip on our collective radar screen. The attacks in New York and the nation's capital, the anthrax scare in our mail system, and subsequent events have generated a national level of anxiety not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis. The lack of consistent and reliable information from government and media hasn't helped. As with most hazards, advance information and preparedness not only can lessen the impact of an incident, it can lessen our anxiety as well. One of the primary goals of terrorism is to generate fear and uncertainty: if we can exert some control over how an incident affects us, we can lessen the impact even before something happens.

What can I do to protect myself and my family against terrorism?

Mostly the same things you can do to protect against effects of earthquakes, winter storms, etc.

- Learn about specific hazards where you live and work, and to which you're most vulnerable; don't forget to do this when you travel as well.
- Create and maintain a kit that will sustain you and your family for three days without much help from the rest of the world. A major event, whether seismic, meteorologic, or human in origin, can either directly damage your home or interrupt the infrastructure we rely on (utilities, roads, supermarkets, gasoline supplies). A functional 72-hour kit has food, water (one gallon per person per day), temporary bedding and shelter, clothing, tools, and personal needs (toiletries, medications). If you hike or camp you probably have most of the necessary ingredients, it's just a matter of getting them together, storing them in a sturdy container, and rotating perishable supplies.
- Disasters can happen without warning - you may be separated from your family. Establish a communication plan with your family-members, including out-of-area contacts and emergency meeting places.
- Keep up with local and national news.
- Avoid travel to high-risk areas.

Is there anything I DON'T need to do?

- Buy gas masks: they have to fit your face, have the right filters, and you need to be wearing them to have them work: unless you plan to wear them 24/7 this is an uncomfortable waste of money.
- Hoard medications: there's no guarantee that any single medication will be effective against potential bioterrorism, and medications are expensive (not to mention perishable). If you want to protect yourself against germs, be sure you children are current on their immunizations, get flu shots, and wash your hands more often.
- Line a room in your house with plastic: unless you live in an area already at risk for a chemical accident (e.g., near a large industrial facility or a major transportation route), this will do little or no good. Even if you do live in a high-risk area you're better off having the supplies on hand than "decorating" the room in advance.

Where can I find reliable information?

- TVF&R: http://www.tvfr.com/cs/ep/terr_prep.html
- US Department of Homeland Security: <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic>
- American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/hsas.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov>
- Oregon Human Services: <http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/bioterrorism/index.cfm>
- US Dept. of Energy cyber security (includes a link to "Hoaxbusters" site): <http://www.ciac.org/ciac>