

Aide-Mémoire
Suspicious Objects and Bombs

Terrorists, criminals and dissatisfied individuals continue to make use of bombs. These incidents involving shocking acts of violence are used by the perpetrator to further their particular aims. They often choose specific targets, but increasingly have shown themselves willing to carry out indiscriminate acts of violence.

In Hong Kong, criminals and individuals have in the past used explosive devices, while the ever-present possibility of their use by terrorist organizations cannot be ignored. Explosives are readily available within the region, as are cheap sophisticated electronic components and other bomb making materials. Information on bomb making is readily available on the internet.

It is therefore opportune to remind ourselves of the ever-present threat of bombs and suspicious objects. Bureaus and Departments should ensure that all staff are reminded of the possible threat, and that appropriate measures are taken to improve security.

Assessing the Threat

As bombs come in a variety of shapes and sizes, it is very difficult to give a precise assessment on the possible threats involved. Vehicle bombs, for instance, are likely to be anything from about 50 kgs of explosives in a small car up to 2 tones in a lorry. A bomb placed inside a building is likely to cause far greater damage and more injuries than if the same device were placed outside.

It is, however, possible to reach a valid assessment by applying common sense principles, in the light of general knowledge obtained from daily reporting of world and home affairs in the media, and from knowledge of departmental affairs.

In some cases, a threat warning will be received from government or police sources.

The Effects

The effects of bombs can be massive and at least three major factors need to be considered. Firstly, the blast pressures will be considerable. Buildings and people in urban areas are particularly vulnerable. Secondly, the 'cratering' under the seat of the blast may seriously affect subterranean services and facilities. Finally, fragmentation. This stems from primary and secondary sources, the former includes materials surrounding the explosive device, the latter are mainly made up of projectiles caused by the blast wave. By far the most serious and dangerous kind of secondary fragment is glass.

Physical Security

Physical Security is the first line of defense in preventing an incident. Intruder alarms, camera surveillance, security patrols and physical security barriers should be fully utilized.

Good Housekeeping Practice

Good Housekeeping Practice both inside and outside the premises will reduce the opportunity for an explosive device to be planted undetected.

All rooms, stairways, corridors, halls and outside areas should be kept clean and tidy. Unoccupied areas should be kept locked, extra attention should be paid to communal areas.

All staff should be encouraged to know their building intimately and to understand the importance of reporting anything suspicious or out of place.

Vigilance

Staff can do much to protect themselves by being alert to any suspicious object or behavior, incidents of which should be reported to security staff, or to the police where appropriate.

Planning

All Bureaus and Departments responsible for physical areas should prepare contingency plans for responding to bomb incidents.

Details will depend upon individual circumstances, but some general principles should apply to all.

- Appoint a single person at each physical location to take responsibility for implementing bomb security precautions (Bomb Security Officer).
- Create plans for checking your premises.
- Decide an evacuation strategy and make evacuation plans.
- Make plans for business recovery.

Background to Bomb Incidents

Most bomb threats originate as telephone calls from anonymous sources, although they may also be received through the mail or by other means of communication. Statistics show that the vast majority of threats are hoaxes. However, all threats must be treated seriously and carefully until proved otherwise.

Suspicious Objects

Suspicious objects may be found by members of the public who report to police, security staff, or departmental staff, by security officers or staff patrolling the facility, or as a result of a search following a bomb threat call.

Action to be taken on receipt of a bomb threat

In cases where a threat is received other than by police, you should -

- report to the police immediately;
- if possible, conduct an initial check of the premises for any suspicious objects before the arrival of police; and
- give consideration to commencing evacuation before the arrival of police.

All members of staff who have access to a telephone could receive a threat, and therefore should know what to do if they receive such a call.

- Keep calm.
- Try to obtain as much information as possible from the call.

- Keep the line open even after the caller has hung up.
- Report the call to the Bomb Security Officer in the office or to the police.

Checking of Premises

Following receipt of a threat, it is useful in appropriate circumstances to conduct an initial check of the premises prior to the arrival of police.

Upon the arrival of police, your staff should provide assistance to help identify anything which is suspicious and out of place.

- ANY SUSPICIOUS OBJECT FOUND DURING A SEARCH SHOULD NOT BE TOUCHED AND SHOULD BE REPORTED IMMEDIATELY TO THE POLICE.
- THE PERSON FINDING THE OBJECT SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW BY THE POLICE.

Evacuation

The decision to evacuate will normally be made by the police. However in exceptional circumstances the Bomb Security Officer may have to decide.

There are four actions open to the Bomb Security Officer whose consideration will depend on the assessment of the threat which the situation presents. The choices are:

- to do nothing;
- to check and then evacuate if a suspicious object is found;
- to evacuate all except checking officers and then evacuate fully if a suspicious object is found; or
- to evacuate immediately without checking.

Evacuation Plans

Each physical location should have an evacuation plan with up-to-date drawings of evacuation routes. The purpose is to enable evacuation as quickly and

efficiently as possible, using all available exits, or where necessary selected exits, so that people can exit the building without passing or going near the suspected object.

Staff Training

Good training is essential so that in the event of a search and/or evacuation, all staff are aware of their duties and responsibilities. Regular checking and evacuation drills must be conducted to maintain staff's awareness, vigilance and effective response.

Postal Bombs

GENERAL

Postal bombs can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Although they may be large, they do not need to be bulky packages or parcels. Postal bombs of the size of paper-back books have been among the more successful.

It is not necessary to open the envelope or package in any particular way to initiate a postal bomb. It can be triggered off by any, even a slight, attempt to open the outer cover.

RECOGNITION OF SUSPECT LETTERS AND PACKAGES

Pointers to look for in determining whether a postal package or letter is suspicious include:

- Point of origin – e.g. from postmark or name of sender if given. If from an unusual point of origin or sender: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Type of envelope – if a 'Jiffy' bag or similar type of padded envelope: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Method of addressing – if dry transfer instant lettering (e.g. 'Letraset', or 'Uno Stencil') has been used to print the address and especially if this has been applied unevenly: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Manuscript of sender – if this indicates an unusual or foreign style

of writing: TREAT AS SUSPECT;

- Balance – if the package or letter is lop-sided: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Weight – if there seems to be excessive weight for size: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Protruding wires – even well prepared devices can come adrift in transit: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- A small hole – even a pin hole in the package wrapping or the envelope: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Grease-marks on the package wrapping or the envelope – possibly caused by the 'sweating' of the explosive: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- A smell like that of almonds or marzipan: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Appearance – if the appearance suggests a book (unless its receipt is totally expected): DO NOT PRESS: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
- Flap of envelope – usually there is an un-gummed gap of about 1/8 inch; if the flap of the envelope is stuck down completely: TREAT AS SUSPECT;

Additionally, in the case of a letter –

- The feel, WITHOUT PRESSING, will indicate whether there is only folded paper inside the envelope (indicating that the contents are not dangerous). If there is a stiffness indicating card or the feel of metal: TREAT AS SUSPECT.
- A letter usually weighs up to about 1 oz (about 28 g). An effective postal bomb weighs at least 2 oz (about 56 g): it therefore needs more than the usual value of postage stamps for its size; and it is usually thick for a letter, being at least 1/4 inch (about 6 mm). On receipt of a letter with these indications: Flap of envelope – usually there is an un-gummed gap of about 1/8 inch; if the flap of

the envelope is stuck down completely: TREAT AS SUSPECT.

- If, on opening an envelope, there is an additional inner envelope:
 - if it is tightly taped or tied with string: TREAT AS SUSPECT;
 - in any case, the letter should be scrutinised again for signs of any of the pointers in this and the foregoing paragraphs.

ACTION ON RECEIPT OF A SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE

If the sender's name and address is given, he should be asked to affirm his despatch of the letter or package concerned, and validate its contents. If such information is not available, then –

- Place the package on the nearest horizontal firm surface. Make no attempt to open it.
- Leave the room and close the door behind you. (If it is possible to open the windows of the room before you leave, do so.) Prevent other persons from going into the room. Lock the door if possible.
- Call the police or the security officer.

N.B. On no account should a suspicious package be taken to the police or the security officer. It should NOT be placed outside in the street or tampered with in whatever way such as putting it in a bucket of water or cover it with sand.

ACTION IF SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED WHERE A PACKAGE HAS BEEN OPENED OR THE CONTENTS REMOVED

If mail becomes suspect while it is in the course of being opened –

- Order any other staff present to leave the room as quickly as possible.
- Place the package, or the contents of the package if already removed, as gently as possible on the nearest horizontal firm surface. (If possible, keep the face and body shielded which can be achieved either by placing the suspect item behind a substantial object such as a steel cupboard or by leaving the room and using the wall as a barrier placing the item gently on the floor around the corner of the door.)
- Leave the room quickly and close the door behind you. Prevent other persons from going into the room. Lock the door if possible.
- Notify the police or the security officer.

Training

All staff who are likely to deal with possible postal bombs should be trained in appropriate response techniques, and regularly reminded.

Recovery

The final stage of responding to an incident is the recovery phase, i.e. getting back to normal. In the interest of your departmental business and the general public, you should develop and test appropriate recovery plans.