

How to Protect Your Hotel in an Era of Terrorism

Today, doing everything possible to protect the safety of your guests is an absolute necessity. And while you may think that your property is an unlikely terrorist target, attacks on hotels and restaurants around the world prove that no hospitality provider can become complacent. This article offers sound advice about security measures that hotels can take to reassure guests, and also looks at what's behind terrorism's increasing focus on the hospitality industry.

[BY MARVIN CETRON, PH.D.]

Run a Google search on the words “hotel” and “bomb” and the Internet index site turns up some 11.8 million Web pages in which the two appear together. Searching for “restaurant” and “bomb” yielded nearly 6.6 million “hits.” In the first search, the number of hits had nearly doubled in less than a year; in the second, it had more than tripled. These are disturbing statistics, but not surprising. The hospitality industry has long been a favorite target of terrorists around the world, and the dangers it faces are growing with each passing year.

As the Iraq war continues, it is inspiring and training a new generation of terrorists, whose anger is only just beginning to be felt. When the war ends, they will be free to return to their homelands and set to work righting perceived wrongs there. American-owned facilities will remain a favorite target of the hate-filled, but it is likely to be home-grown companies that feel the greatest increase in danger, particularly in Europe and Australia, which also has a substantial population of disaffected young Muslims. Battle-hardened insurgents who grew up feeling alienated in the suburbs of Paris or Sydney may hate the United States, but are likely to have even more compelling grudges against their native land. Around the world, hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality facilities therefore will be in greater danger two or three years from now than they are today.

At the same time, those dangers will be harder to combat, because potential terrorists are becoming harder to recognize. Much as we instinctively dislike so-called “ethnic profiling,” the truth is that most international terrorists to date have been recogniz-





“Few terrorist schemes **could be easier** than planting a bomb or contaminating food in a restaurant.”

ably Middle Eastern and traveling on foreign passports. What happens when they were born in Britain, France, or Belgium—their target countries—and travel on their own passports? What happens when radical converts have European faces and no history of violence or crime to raise suspicions? As the danger grows, so too will the difficulty of effective security screening.

Of course, the problem of native-born radicals is not limited to Europe. Domestic terrorism has been so quiet since the Oklahoma City bombing of April 1995 that a report from the Department of Homeland Security early in 2005 did not even list white supremacists, militias, or antiabortion activists as domestic threats. Yet the United States still is home to a broad movement of hate groups with a powerful taste for violence. In fact, while the number of formal militias has fallen from a peak of about 900 to around 150 over the last ten years, the number of hate groups has grown; according to one count, there were 762 of them in the United States at the end of 2004. There is no reason to hope that they will remain quiet forever.

An even greater threat may be a few particularly vicious individuals linked to militias and hate groups, but acting largely on their own, as Timothy McVeigh appears to have done in Oklahoma City, Eric Rudolph, who pleaded guilty to the deadly 1996 bombings at the Atlanta Olympics and a local abortion clinic, was associated with the radical militias. And in 2003, a white supremacist named William Krar was arrested in Texas after some incriminating mail was delivered to the wrong address. His house contained half a million rounds of ammunition, 60 pipe bombs, and enough sodium cyanide to kill 6,000 people. What he intended to do with them has never been explained.

The older generation of supremacist

leaders has largely died off, and many of their followers left the movement because of the adverse publicity and attention from law enforcement that followed the Oklahoma City bombing. However, the ones who remain are less public about their views, less easy to identify, and probably much more hard-core. A hotel or restaurant chain could attract their attention by hosting a civil rights organization's regional meeting, granting spousal rights to the partners of gay employees, or for no clear reason at all. Strengthening security at hotels and restaurants in the world's obvious trouble spots is a step in the right direction, but heightened vigilance at home will be just as important in the years ahead.

What to Do?

For all too many hospitality industry firms, the answer might almost be, “Just do something!” When Forecasting International (FI) last looked at terrorist risks in this field, the most current study of the industry's response to the September 11 attacks had been completed by the Center for Hospitality Research at the Cornell School of Hotel Administration. It found that most hotels in the United States had done nothing to improve their security. A few had hired extra staff and made minor changes in their procedures—most in the luxury and extended-stay markets—but the majority had decided that no improvements were needed.

That situation is little changed today. Hotels in the worst trouble spots of the Muslim world have hardened themselves a bit by installing concrete barriers to keep cars at a distance, hiring armed guards, and even using metal detectors to clear everyone who enters the building. Elsewhere, however, most establishments have done little or nothing.

A 2004 survey of hotels, convention

centers, airlines, and cruise lines confirmed the extent of the problem. The poll found that 53 percent of responding hotel executives knew their facilities were vulnerable to terrorist attack. (See “What Hotel Guests Want: A Safe Haven in a Secure Property,” by Ruth Hill, *HSMAI Marketing Review*, Fall 2005.) Yet hotels in particular had done little to tighten their security. Some 55 percent of hotel general and security managers said their emergency plans could not handle a terrorist attack. Seven out of ten said their employees were not adequately trained to respond to such an emergency.

This does not just expose facilities to needless risk of a terrorist event. In an era when many travelers are highly risk-averse, being seen to have safety issues could send some guests to competitors whose hotels appear more secure. In the event of disaster, whether caused by terrorists or by nature, being caught unprepared also could expose the company to serious liability problems.

I have found no data on security measures taken by restaurants in the post-9/11 period, but it seems likely that significant changes have been rare. Restaurants are much more dependent than hotels on walk-in traffic and even less eager to do anything that would discourage trade or harm a relaxed, accommodating atmosphere. They also are burdened by a high turnover rate among unskilled, low-wage workers, many of them recent immigrants whose backgrounds are difficult to confirm. Few terrorist schemes could be easier than planting a bomb or contaminating food in a restaurant.

Lessons from Katrina

Basic emergency planning is critical to handling any crisis, whether made by man or nature. Hurricane Katrina tested the

Targeting Hospitality

emergency responses of New Orleans hotels. One that did many things right was the Marriott, next door to the refugee-crowded Astrodome. Their experience offers valuable lessons for anyone considering how to handle a future emergency.

When the power and inevitability of the hurricane became clear, hotel managers began to arrange the things they would need to weather the storm. They hired extra security guards to maintain order, ward off would-be looters, and assist guests who needed help. They laid in extra supplies of food and drinking water. They even hired portable bathrooms to make sure that no possible disaster would leave them unable to cope with an obvious necessity. Electricity, fortunately, was not an issue; the hotel had its own generators. Thus equipped, the hotel was able to maintain its guests in relative comfort for some two weeks. And when supplies began to run out faster than they could be replaced, the hotel hired enough busses to take roughly 2,000 people to safer accommodations.

The Marriott did something else as well that made a critical difference to some of its guests. When local residents booked rooms at the hotel to wait out the storm, they were allowed to bring their pets with them. In a time of stress, no one needs to be forced to leave valued family members to the threat of drowning or starvation.

In all, it was the kind of performance that satisfies guests in difficult times. This avoids possible liability problems and ensures that they will continue to visit a chain staffed by competent and caring people.

There are some other preparations worth making in anticipation of a prolonged interruption in normal services. One is to arrange for a doctor or two and several nurses to stay at the facility for the

Recent Major Terrorism Incidents

At Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, on July 22, 2005, a series of bombs, including at least two car bombs, killed 88 and wounded at least 200. Targets included the Ghazala Garden Hotel, the Hilton Hotel in Taba, and the old town market district.

In Bali, on October 5, 2005, bombs at Raja's Noodle House in Kuta and at the outdoor tables of a beachfront café in Jimbaran killed 26 and left 102 injured.

At the Traders Hotel, in Yangon, Myanmar, in mid-October 2005, a small bomb was detonated, without injuries.

On November 5, in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Somalia, pirates attacked the Seabourn Spirit with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades in an attempt to kidnap the 151 passengers and 161 crewmen on board. Although there had been 32 such attacks off Somalia in the first ten months of the year—up from only two in 2004—this was the first aimed at a cruise ship. The vessel escaped by putting on a last-moment burst of speed and using what is described as an ear-splitting “high-tech sonic weapon” on the pirates. It was the first attack on a cruiseship since extremists with the Palestine Liberation Organization hijacked the Achille Lauro in 1985.

In Amman, Jordan, on November 9, 2005, suicide bombers simultaneously attacked three hotels—the Days Inn, Grand Hyatt, and Radisson—leaving more than 50 dead and 300 injured.

In Karachi, Pakistan, on November 15, 2005, bombers killed three and wounded at least 15 at a Kentucky Fried Chicken across the street from the local Sheraton, which also sustained minor damage. It was the second KFC attacked in Karachi in recent months.

In Dahab, Egypt, on April 24, 2006, three bombs killed 23 people in the crowded resort town on the Gulf of Aqaba on one of the country's most popular holiday weekends. The Nelson Restaurant and the Aladdin Café were two of the sites hit. Two days later, two suicide bombers unsuccessfully attacked

Multinational Peacekeeping forces in the northern Sinai and a police checkpoint in the Nile Delta.

Of course, this list omits Iraq, where terrorists seem inclined to attack anything but their own homes. In just two months in Baghdad alone, a bombing at the Palestine Hotel on October 24, 2005, left 20 dead and 15 injured; a restaurant bombing on November 10 killed 42 people; and on November 18, the Al Hamra Hotel was damaged in the bombing of two nearby mosques.

These incidents demonstrate several trends in terrorism. They will affect both the hospitality industry and the environment in which it operates, and for better security they may require still more changes in the way hotels, restaurants, and cruise ships do business.

Soft Targets

One reason changes are needed is the terrorists' growing focus on the hospitality industry. FI suggested as early as 1994 that improved security at military bases, embassies, and other government facilities would lead terrorists to seek out softer targets. We have seen that trend gather momentum in the wake of 9/11, and some of the softest targets are operated by the hospitality industry. By their basic nature, hotels and restaurants especially must remain as open to guests as possible and thus find it difficult to exclude those with hostile intent. Hospitality businesses also gather the innocent into large groups, offering the kind of mass bloodletting that terrorists increasingly prefer. In the last half of 2005 especially, there was a big shift among terrorists in targeting the soft, vulnerable hospitality industry. Terrorism is a risk for hospitality providers that can only continue to grow in the years ahead.

Targeting Americans

The United States has long been the “Great Satan” for Muslim extremists of all stripes. Thus, it is no surprise that terrorists clearly prefer American targets. Setting aside Iraq, where American hos-

pitality companies were unable to operate until recently and hotels owned by them are not available for attack, no fewer than five of the seven hotels struck last year belonged to American chains. So did two of the four restaurants that were attacked.

Terrorism Spreads

The hospitality industry is under attack today in more countries than it has been in previous years. When we last discussed terrorism and the hospitality industry, Egypt had not suffered a major terrorist event aimed at tourists since November 1997, when gun-wielding extremists killed 62 people at Luxor. Since late 2004, there have been four serious assaults that were clearly aimed at foreign visitors:

In October of that year, terrorists bombed resorts at Taba and Ras Shitan, on the Red Sea, killing 34 mostly Israeli tourists and wounding more than 100.

The following April, a suicide bomber on a motorcycle detonated nail-packed explosives in a tourist-crowded marketplace, killing a French woman and an American man.

At the end of that month, three attackers, two with guns, the other using a bomb, killed two bus passengers (and themselves) and wounded seven others near the Egyptian Museum in downtown Cairo.

And on July 22, we saw the bombings at Sharm el-Sheik, described above.

Clearly, the Egyptian tourist industry once again is in the sights of the country's Muslim extremists.

The attacks in Amman are the other instance in which the extremist war on hospitality has reached new territory. Jordan has a long history of terrorist events, but nearly all in the past have been aimed at government facilities or personnel. Two Jordanian Prime Ministers have been assassinated by terrorists, Haza'a Al-Majali and Wasfi Al-Tal, as well as U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley in October 2002. According to a report by *Jane's Defence Weekly* in mid-2004, Jordan's General Intelligence Department (GID) thwarts an average of two terrorist plots each month. Yet our

research turned up only one plan aimed at the hospitality industry in the years before the Iraq war: In December 1999, Jordanian and American intelligence officials thwarted a plot to kill American and Israeli tourists on the eve of the millennium celebrations. Today, tourists and the industry that serves them clearly are on the extremist target list.

This may not be a coincidence. Terror experts have long speculated that Iraq would serve as a training ground for terrorists who would return to cause trouble in their home countries. In Jordan, at least, that forecast appears to be coming true. The leader of a thwarted attack on GID headquarters in Amman stated that he had been acting under orders from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born terrorist believed to head the insurgency in Iraq. The people who carried out the hotel bombings in Amman in November 2005 also were Jordanians trained and equipped in Iraq. It has been speculated, though not proved, that the Egyptians responsible for the Sharm el-Sheik bombings were connected to the Iraq insurgency. Whether this conjecture is true or not, the Amman incident makes it clear that the Iraq war has, as predicted, made the world less safe for the hospitality industry. Hospitality will have to be more on guard than ever.

Burqha Brigades

Terrorism specialists once discounted the idea of female suicide bombers, particularly women sent out to die by Al Qaeda. After all, the Muslim extremists' view of women is the closest thing in the modern world to Medieval chivalry: Women are to be closeted away from the world, their virtue protected—and their lives rigidly controlled by men. Something about having them go out and blow themselves to bits seems to fit poorly with that ideal.

Nonetheless, on relatively rare occasions, Muslim women have participated in terrorist activities. Most have come from relatively secular cultures, such as Palestine and Chechnya, and although the first female suicide bomber struck in Lebanon some 20 years ago, most have acted as con-

duration. In an emergency, they are almost sure to be needed—and if not, guests will find their presence reassuring. A defibrillator should be on hand, and hotel shops should be well supplied with over-the-counter drugs, and perhaps a limited selection of prescription drugs that might be needed in an emergency. Also, lay in a supply of cell phones and portable radios—and extra batteries for both—so that patrons without them can maintain contact with the outside world. Reducing their uncertainty about what is happening to their friends and families will go a long way to ease their worries and maintain their morale.

This is not an exhaustive list of preparations for disaster, but it is a good place to begin. In general, think about how you would prepare to wait out a disaster on a ship or an island, where help could be a long time in coming. Then prepare to meet those needs for your guests.

Not all of the measures cited above are suitable for terrorist events, which generally occur without specific warning. If you are going to hire extra security guards to deal with that kind of crisis, they will have to remain on staff, not be contracted at the last moment from a service. Yet the emphasis must be on preventing terrorist incidents, not recovering from them.

Advice from the Pros

Late in 2005, representatives from some of the top American security firms met to discuss how best to help their corporate clients, many of them in the hospitality industry, defend against the threat of terrorism. Some of their recommendations were straightforward hardening of targets. For example, add lights to dim areas of the grounds and cover windows with bulletproof plastic; it will not block machine guns or rocket propelled grenades, but it will keep your guests and staff from being

hit by ordinary pistol or rifle fire.

However, like FI, the security experts concluded that one factor stood out above all:

By far the greatest risk of trouble comes from your staff and suppliers. One disgruntled employee with a handgun, though not technically a terrorist, can cause a hotel or restaurant all the problems it will ever need. But the threat of a true terrorist act by someone who applied for work to gain access to the facility may be the most serious threat that any hotel or restaurant faces, this side of a suicide bomber.

This is one case where preparation is all, the security consultants advised. That means thorough background checks on all employees, and especially those with access to rooms and food. Check out your suppliers and services as well. Those who deliver food could contaminate it on the way by. Those who work on ventilation or other systems could use their access to plant a bomb or to lace the air or water with germs or poisons.

Carrying out adequate background checks is an arduous job, especially for an industry that relies on many low-wage employees with high turnover rates, many of them recent immigrants from other lands. It is not enough to look for a criminal record, a history of mental illness, or other obvious warnings of potential trouble. Where was the applicant born? Does he or she have relatives in troubled lands? Could terrorists use those relatives to blackmail an otherwise conscientious employee to plant a bomb or contaminate the food supply? Blackmail victims have been forced to commit serious crimes before.

Personnel risks are likely to be especially troubling for restaurants and hotel food services. No one checks a dishwasher's credentials. They are too glad to have anyone for the job, and there is not much chance that he will still be around by the time a

ventional fighters. Yet Al Qaeda and its fellow fundamentalists never exposed women to the bloody deaths that its male adherents routinely seek.

In the last year or so, that has changed. At least three female bombers have killed themselves in Iraq, one disguised as a man in a gathering of military recruits at Tall 'Afar near the Syrian border, another in an attack on an American patrol in Mosul, the third attacking Iraqi police near Mosul. All three were recruited by Musab al-Zarqawi, a leader who has shown that he is not afraid to break taboos when it will serve the causes of publicity and recruitment. Zarqawi reportedly has been using female "martyrs" as a tool to shame men into joining his jihad.

Suicide bombing has become a more attractive option for many women as well. As the battle between Muslim extremism and the West has intensified, particularly in Iraq, many women have lost husbands and family members. Their motive is revenge. Sajida Mubarak al-Rishawi, the Jordanian woman who survived the November 2005 attacks in Amman when her bomb refused to explode, had lost three brothers and a brother-in-law to the anti-American war. For widows, too, suicide can seem an honorable way out of an intolerable situation; Muslim society offers unmarried women no viable role in which to carry on. Life in preparation for suicide gives them a purpose, and often respect and relative freedom that they could find in no other way.

For so long as the war in Iraq continues, the supply of vengeful widows and relatives of extremist fighters will continue to grow. Chechnya, Afghanistan, and even Palestine, if the current progress toward peace turns out to be unsuccessful, will continue to display similar trends. Extremism has found a new supply of cannon fodder.

Euro-terrorists

Even beyond being a female suicide bomber, there was something odd about the Muslim convert who blew herself up in the November 9 attack on Iraqi police near Baqubah. Myriam, born Muriel Degaugue, was Belgian. She grew up in

the decaying industrial city of Charleroi, a troubled girl who ran away from home frequently and eventually fell into a series of unsuccessful relationships with Muslim men. The last of them was a Belgian radical of Moroccan descent who was shot dead in the same attack that killed Ms. Degaugue.

Myriam was one of the most obvious and successful—if that concept applies to suicide bombing—examples of this trend, but she was far from alone. Muslim extremism is beginning to spread from those of Middle-Eastern descent to converts from other heritages. In Australia, government authorities are worried about the teaching of fundamentalist Islam by prisoners linked to Al Qaeda to Caucasian and Aboriginal inmates. One Australian of European extraction already has been arrested for scouting potential bomb targets on behalf of Al Qaeda, whose worldview he had absorbed while incarcerated. One of the four London bombers was a British subject born in Jamaica; the rest, or of Moroccan descent, had been born and grew up in Britain. The abortive attacks two weeks later included Britons born in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Pierre de Bousquet, director of France's domestic intelligence service, worries that Muslim extremists are building ties to ordinary criminals and recruiting them to the cause. According to one report, at least seven French citizens already have been killed in Iraq.

Terror by Sea

The attack on the Seabourn Spirit 60 to 80 miles off the coast of Somalia—the International Maritime Bureau recommends staying 200 miles out—was just the first attempt by pirates to capture a cruise vessel. It could prove to be the first of many. According to the International Maritime Bureau, pirates attacked 251 ships worldwide in the first nine months of 2005, including three small, luxury cruise ships operated by Seabourn and Silver Seas.

By far the majority of ship attacks serve the cause of free enterprise rather than politics. Pirates steal passengers' cash and valuables, take hostages—259 of

them in the 251 attacks cited above—and hold ships and personnel for ransom, which often amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars per incident. This exceedingly profitable business is allowing pirates to buy larger, more capable boats and equip them with deck guns rather than relying on hand-carried weapons.

However, Al Qaeda is believed to operate in Somalia as well as commercially motivated brigands, and Al Qaeda has a long record of maritime attacks. In October 2002, a speedboat laden with explosives approached the destroyer USS Cole in Aden harbor, Yemen, and blew a hole in the vessel's hull, killing 17 crewmen. In 2002, a similar attack struck the supertanker MV Limburg in the Gulf of Aden, killing only one but causing extensive damage. And in 2002 and 2003, authorities derailed plots by Al Qaeda and its sister organization, Jamaah Islamiya, to attack vessels in the Straits of Gibraltar, the Singapore Straits, and the Straits of Hormuz. Although all these schemes were aimed primarily at American naval vessels, attacks on cruise ships off Somalia would be very much in keeping with Al Qaeda's goals and methods.

If the increasingly frequent attacks in Somali waters are not attempts at terrorism, they may well be a convenient way to finance terrorist activities. They also may represent the growth of ties between Al Qaeda and the pirate community, much as terrorists in France have formed ties with local criminals. This could give the terrorist organization the local knowledge and skills to carry out even more spectacular operations. For example, they might sink a large ship at a chokepoint in the Straits of Malacca, disrupting the flow of oil to much of Asia and destabilizing the global economy. There is evidence that Al Qaeda has been planning, and Jamaah Islamiya operating, schools for diving and underwater demolition. Whatever motivates these attacks, they are a growing problem for cruise operators in the Indian Ocean, and that hazard could well spread to other regions. They will continue to worry cruise lines for years to come.



No one anywhere in the world is immune to the **threat** of terrorism.

thorough screening could be completed. And very few restaurants have a trained security staff to carry out this kind of research. Yet food contamination could be one of the easiest, highest-payoff operations a terrorist group could carry out. Witness the fear and economic impact caused by the anthrax scare of 2001. Then consider the consequences of having a similar, far larger outbreak traced to your restaurant or hotel food service.

In order to carry out rigorous employee background checks, most hotels and resorts are likely to need a larger security staff, and to hire people experienced in this kind of work. Restaurants will have to build a security department from scratch. Yet this is one investment that could pay for itself many times over.

There are some other hints as well

Time was that hotels wanted their "house detectives" to be inconspicuous. In the current environment, they should be visible to all, both as a deterrent to malicious acts and as a reassuring presence for guests. The more gregarious among them should be encouraged to chat with guests, reminding them to watch their valuables and avoid trouble when away from the hotel, and perhaps picking up valuable information in return.

Other personnel should be trained to be aware of anything unusual, and to take whatever action is appropriate. This includes helping guests with special needs, such as carrying packages for seniors, but also watching out for abandoned packages and other potential hazards. Guests will appreciate the extra attention, and a timely call to security could someday interrupt a disaster in the making.

Employees also should know what to do in case of emergency. Do they all know the safest exit routes throughout the facili-

ty? Do they know what to do in case of a bomb threat or terrorist attack? Can they find a doctor promptly in a medical emergency? The answers should all be yes.

Finally, both security departments and upper management should build good contacts with local authorities and first responders. Security may need immediate help from city police, fire, or emergency medical departments. Knowing exactly whom to call and being known themselves as competent people unlikely to panic without a reason will help to ensure that assistance arrives promptly.

For upper management, both of individual locations and at the corporate level, official contacts are even more important and more complicated. In the United States especially, their job is to push local, state, and federal government to do a better job of security on the broader scale.

That pressure seems to be needed. In mid-December, members of the federal panel that investigated the September 11 attacks and made extensive recommendations for tightening our security against terrorism handed out a report card on the job the government has done since then. Out of twenty issues, they gave Washington a single A and two "incompletes." The rest of the grades were either "D" or "F." Two specific problems stood out as being especially troubling:

One was the continuing failure to improve the country's emergency communications so that local police, fire, and medical departments can talk to each other when responding to a catastrophe. Use of incompatible radio equipment by different departments made it hard to coordinate rescue efforts at the World Trade Center.

The other problem was the distribution of money from the Department of Homeland Security for local security pro-

grams. Logically, it seems that funding should go for the improvement of police and fire departments and the creation of emergency medical plans in the major cities where terrorists are most likely to strike. Instead, the great majority of funding has wound up in small towns represented by powerful congressmen and, in the absence of real need, has often been used for projects with little or no connection to terrorism. Meanwhile, urban needs go unmet for lack of money.

These problems should concern hospitality executives at all levels. Lack of compatible radios will almost certainly hamper any future attempt to put out fires, tend the wounded, and evacuate guests and staff after any future attack on a hotel, restaurant, casino, or resort. Lack of other necessities, such as adequate medical supplies in case of a major attack with bioweapons, would hit major hospitality sites at least as hard as it did the surrounding communities.

This is a matter for local research and national lobbying. Site managers need to build close relationships with officials in their communities, so that they can learn about the gaps in local emergency preparedness and lobby local politicians for improvements. They can also pass their needs on to the corporate level, so that upper executives can represent them effectively in Washington.

Whatever form the next terrorist attack takes, it is likely to be the hospitality industry that gets hurt first and worst. Working to improve local preparedness is both a civic duty and a matter of self-preservation.

The Bottom Line

If the recent hotel and restaurant bombings in Egypt, Jordan, and Bali—to say nothing of the train bombings in Madrid in March 2004 or the London subway

Change Your Approach for Better Security

BY FRED J. DEMICCO, PH.D., HOTEL & RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT, THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE,
AND JOHN C. FANNIN III, CPP, PRESIDENT/CEO SAFEPLACE CORPORATION

Most hoteliers have done little to improve their security, probably because they do not know how to begin. However, progressive business professionals understand that change is inevitable. Those who do not make changes will have a difficult time staying competitive and profitable. We offer the following thoughts for consideration.

Embrace change: Responsible lodging professionals are quick to meet consumer demand and enhance the safety of their guests and employees. They are not afraid of independent evaluations of their safety and security measures, introducing cutting-edge technologies, or accepting effective policies and procedures.

Change perspective: Don't confuse perception with reality. Today's consumer considers safety to be among the most important factors when selecting a hotel. Good security will not harm your brand or raise the price of the room.

Create a culture shift: Shift from a culture of liability paranoia to one obsessed with guest and employee safety. The only acceptable goal for preventable safety and security losses is none at all.

Utilize credible resources: Bodies such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) provide standards such as NFPA 1600, for national emergency preparedness and business continuity; and NFPA 730-2006, which is designed to reduce security vulnerabilities to life and property. Adhering to such standards can improve your preparedness and reduce your liability.

Go beyond the basics: Many facilities are beginning to perform pre-employment background checks and employee drug testing; implement effective weapons screening and access control measures; provide public access to automated electronic defibrillators; and develop comprehensive site security/emergency management plans based upon a security vulnerability assessment.

Plan ahead: Systematic risk assessment is a mandatory and continuing function for any hospitality business. Every hospitality executive wants to build up years of safely, profitably serving the needs of satisfied guests. Too many such plans end with an ugly headline in tomorrow's newspaper. Risk assessment can make the difference.

attacks of July 2005—have any redeeming features, it is that they provide a valuable reminder: No one anywhere in the world is immune to the threat of terrorism. (Think about what would happen if terrorists managed to smuggle large quantities of high explosive into the Channel Tunnel or the rail tunnels entering Manhattan!) In Paris, Tokyo, or Nashville, Tennessee, the possibility that bullets will fly or bombs explode may be small at any given moment, but it is ever present. And if bombs and guns are the terrorists' favorite weapons, other forms of attack are equally

possible. It is just a question of which target and technique will provide the greatest impact, preferably while allowing for the possibility of escape. The purpose of guards, bulletproof windows, and background checks is to make your facility a hard enough target so that would-be terrorists pass it by in favor of easier victims.

In a time when consumers are becoming ever more safety-conscious, security can even be a marketable asset, reassuring potential guests that they can have a good, comfortable, worry-free time at your facility. ■