

Awareness and Preparedness is the Key to Survival

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Consequence management of WMD Disasters would require the successful, excellent inter and intra agency cooperation and fool proof communication. Citizens on their part must be prepared for a WMD terrorist incident.

Modern man is living in a violent world and under an undeniable threshold of rising societal violence. As a result, people are already preparing against various forms of violence. On the terrorist's side, more spectacular or significantly different attacks would be necessary to receive greater attention. The need to kill people is fuelled by the desire to capture bigger headlines. This need is also a compulsion because of heightened security against traditional terrorist acts. Consequently, the postmodern terrorist is going to be technology-driven and would exploit the easy flow of information and availability of cheap technology to graduate to higher levels of violence. Recent incidents like the aircraft attacks on the twin towers of World Trade Centre and Pentagon on September 11, 2001; the 1993 and 2006 Bombay Blasts; the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly bombing and the attack at Glasgow airport suggest that terrorists are graduating to 'ultra violence'. That is from controlled and surgical acts of terrorism to killing 'en masse'.

The nerve gas attack by the Japanese cult group, Aum Shinrikyo, on March 20, 1995 had set precedence and encouraged other terrorist groups to follow suit. We have already seen the Anthrax letter cases in US and Europe. Radiation poisoning of the Russian spy Litvinenko with Polonium in the UK and fanatics blowing up trucks laden with Chlorine gas in Iraq. These acts are evidence of terrorists graduating to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) as their choice of weapon. On their part Nations across the world are urgently preparing to prevent or manage such WMD terrorism incidents. It is no longer a matter of **if** - but rather **when** - a WMD will be used in anger against the masses of India. Recent threats of cyanide poisoning of Mumbai water supply are such indicators.

This article highlights likely actions by the

Administration and those required to be taken by the common man in the event of a WMD terrorist incident.

Chemical Weapons

Chemical weapons are the simplest and cheapest of the category of WMD. A terrorist could produce a chemical weapon from materials available with the local pharmacy, simply sabotage an existing chemical plant or contaminate a water resource. The resulting toxic cloud or water will enter into populated areas and public places like Shopping Malls, Railway Stations and Airports causing fear and panic among the civilian population and thus achieve a major terrorist objective. Such places frequently have (private) security guards and their education and training does not equip them with necessary skills to combat chemical/biological terrorism.

Chemical warfare agents are either Persistent or Non Persistent type. Non-persistent agents are designed to dissipate or degrade readily after they come in contact with wind, water, sunshine, and other natural elements. Most non-persistent agents can be cleaned with soap and water. Persistent agents, however, have an “oily base” and are designed to remain in place and deny access to personnel in the area where they are used.

Biological Weapons

Viral epidemics are common in India however, Germ Warfare or deliberate release of deadly viruses or toxins is difficult to detect. During the first few vital hours of recognition of such a situation, many emergency agencies would be suffering from an “information vacuum.” With few exceptions, they would not have immediate access to medicines, supplies, protective clothing, equipment. In addition immediate contact with the necessary experts to

successfully resolve the situation would not be possible. The expert help that local agencies need would come from Biological Research Laboratories, or a new specially trained team of CRPF called the Disaster Response Force (DRF). Decontamination of most biological agents can be done with a diluted solution of common household bleach (sodium hypochlorite). However medical aid would have to be sought on priority.

Actions by the Civil Administration

Consequence management of WMD Disasters is an administrative problem. Efforts of the Police, Civil Defence, Public Health Department, Para Military Forces, NGOs and Media would contribute towards Consequence Management. In case of an outbreak, large numbers of patients, both infected persons and the “worried well,” would seek medical attention, thus overwhelming the public health infrastructure. In anticipation of the reaction of the public at large, the Administration will have to refine response mechanisms. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) ought to be practiced on regular basis with involvement of all concerned agencies including the public. To make the procedure successful, excellent inter and intra agency cooperation and fool proof communication is imperative.

The Police (being the usual first responders) and the Para Military forces are well versed with the task of rapidly securing and evacuating the incident site. Only after the type and physical properties of the weapon or agent of mass destruction are identified and downwind hazard area ascertained that an effective perimeter can be established and civilian casualties minimised. Thereafter, neutralisation plans, decontamination of personnel and equipment and emergency treatment can be initiated. An effective

psychological operation to include extensive participation by public information/affairs officers and the media would also be initiated to prevent panic and chaos and negate the advantage to the perpetrators.

In order to reduce the after effects of a WMD incident, Government agencies and health officials are working towards identifying and creating stocks of medical supplies, antidotes, protective gear and equipment needed for WMD incidents.

Citizen Awareness

The attack on the Tokyo subway with Sarin nerve agent in 1995, provides a good example of the consequence of *public ignorance* during WMD attacks. Perhaps human costs would have been reduced and casualties mitigated if some of the people involved had been versed in the symptoms, effects, and employment of nerve agents.

Community awareness programmes, street plays, NGO initiatives can all go a long way in increasing public awareness. Interestingly, a number of firms are manufacturing specialised HAZMAT (Hazardous Material) detectors, IPE (Individual Protective Equipment), Gas Masks and emergency kits for mitigating WMD related risks. These were displayed at the recently held exhibitions on Disaster Management and Fire/Industrial Hazards in Pune and Mumbai.

Actions to be taken by Citizen

It is evident that as concerned citizen of our Nation, we must prepare for a WMD terrorist incident. As citizen, it is our duty to be alert to avoid panic and chaos and provide full support and cooperation to the Administration in their disaster management efforts. A Chemical or Biological attack is the deliberate release of a toxic gas, liquid, solid or virulent agent that can poison

contaminate people and the environment. Given below are some mitigating actions that should be taken before, during and after an incident:-

Before

- Be alert and aware of your surroundings. Report anything suspicious.
- Use caution when you travel. Observe and report unusual activity. Keep your packages with you at all times. Do not accept packages from strangers.
- Do not open mail which looks suspicious (i.e. excessive postage, unknown origin).
- If you live or work in multi-level buildings:
 - Identify the location of fire and emergency exits and review emergency evacuation procedures.
 - Maintain fire extinguishers in working order. Train responsible persons on how to use them.
 - Obtain training in first aid and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).
 - Assemble and maintain an emergency supply kit for each floor.

During

- Never rush into a suspected terrorist event. You probably will not know what agent has been released. Do not become a victim!
- If you are aware of the agent/weapon used, inform the authorities/responders/other victims immediately.
- Indicators Of A Possible Chemical incident:
 - Unexplained and unusual odours, ranging from fruity/flowery to sharp/pungent.

- Signs and symptoms include convulsions, difficult breathing, loss of consciousness, nausea, vomiting, unexplained water-like Blisters, weals (like bee stings), severe skin and eye irritation and severe coughing.
- Quickly try to define the area which was affected and seek “clean air.” However, if you are exposed to a Chemical agent, do not flee the scene, you may expose others.
- Stay upwind, uphill and upstream from any suspected contaminated areas.
- Remove all clothing and other items in contact with the body. Cut off contaminated clothing to avoid contact with eyes, nose and mouth.
- Decontaminate exposed skin with soap and water. Flush eyes with lots of water.
- Seek immediate medical assistance.
- If there is an explosion/If you are trapped in debris:
 - Remain calm. Take cover under a desk or sturdy table if ceiling tiles, bookshelves, their contents, etc. begins to fall.
 - Heavy smoke and poisonous gases collect near the ceiling first. Stay low to the floor at all times and exit the building as quickly as possible.
 - Use a wet cloth to cover your nose and mouth.
 - Use appropriate fire exits, not elevators.
 - If possible, use a flashlight or whistle to signal rescuers regarding your location.
 - Tap on a pipe or wall so that rescuers can hear where you are. Shout only as a last resort, as it can cause a person to inhale

dangerous amounts of dust and contaminants.

- Remember, some of the victims may actually be suspects.

It may be prudent to “shelter in place” if a WMD incident occurs. “Shelter in place” means staying where you are (such as inside a building or other place of shelter) in order to avoid being contaminated. If a full evacuation is necessary, authorities will notify all regarding locations of safety.

Conclusion

Most nations and the UN have enacted Acts and laws to prevent and combat WMD Terrorism. India is a signatory to these acts and laws. To combat the threat of terrorism, emergency services officials representing all levels of Government are working together to develop and implement effective strategies for deterring, preventing and responding to WMD incidents. The need for immediate and special training and equipment for local Police/Fire/Civil Defence/Public Health personnel needs no emphasis. Bottom-line... if we are to be truly prepared for the threat of a WMD attack, we need to develop and deploy a totally integrated response against terrorists and terrorism. Remember... *Awareness and Preparedness is the Key to Survival.*