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Terror Alert: Code Mauve w/ a Hint of Magenta



This article is driven by the recent surge in “reliable information,” raised terror levels, and other such things. While I ignore here the underlying socio-psycho/political underpinnings of such warnings I cannot ignore the seemingly universal sport of guessing what the next event will be. We cannot guess what will happen tomorrow. Our response to a terrorist incident will always be reactionary, never preemptory and will necessarily look a lot like our response to any other major incident.

An advanced fire in a residential, non-sprinklered, occupied, high rise building at 0300 hours will tax our resources as much as any terrorist event. If that fire occurred during a storm, or at the same time as a working METRO incident, we will be faced with the same sorts of problems that a terrorist event will bring too few people with too much too get done.

So how do you prepare for such things? Well, I have this uncle who once told me, speaking of saving money, that, “rainy ain’t so rainy if you have money.”

My personal response to terrorism is pretty simple. Practice hard every chance you get on the basic stuff and remember the incident priorities: life safety, incident stabilization, and property conservation. Beyond that I think:

- **That accurately predicting how and when a terrorist will strike is about as likely as creating a perpetual motion machine.**

[Some person or group of persons should be worried about this and addressing this issue, the rest of us have too much practicing to do.]

- **That if our house fires are confusing and poorly managed, our terrorist incidents will be too.**

[Our fires seem to be, in general, a chaotic mess, and we send more resources on a box alarm than on any other assignment we have, we have people at our disposal and some how things still get crazy...we all need to

work on changing this.]

- **If we practice really hard every day for the stuff we do everyday, we will be better able to handle the once in a lifetime events.**

[I refuse to believe that the guy who does not know how to do a “heavy water hook-up” or set up the ladder pipe quickly, will be able to do that under the intense gut-wrenching pressure of a high profile incident.]

- **Operational discipline was a challenge for the FDNY, it will be a challenge for us too. We should start practicing that now.**

This is not an individual effort. The whole team will need to play their assigned roles if the mission is to be successful. When armies move someone has to cover the rear and someone has to cover the flanks. When the terrorists strike somebody’s grandmother will get sick and we still will need to get her to an emergency room, someone’s house will catch on fire and we will still need to make sure it goes out. Know your job and ensure that it gets done.

- **We should stop trying to remember where filter capacitor discharge switches are and start worrying about developing thought processes.**

Knowing the location of that switch is not a bad thing, so long as the search for it does not unduly delay the incident priorities, and so long that we don’t focus on other such nice to do things at the expense of must do things.

- **We really should learn that we can rush into house fires, garden apartment fires, and we should really take a bit of pause with everything else.**

There are times when the right thing to do is to stop and think for a second. Like Hazmat runs, METRO calls, high rise fires, auto/dumpster fires/EMS runs/ mass casualty events/ etc., etc., and etc.,

- **We should remember that our incident priorities never change.**

LIFE SAFETY, INCIDENT STABILIZATION, PROPERTY CONSERVATION

- **We should really learn how the basic ICS works and what the terms mean or else when it grows out we will be totally lost.**

Units calling command direct on a large-scale incident will ruin any semblance of order. Imagine an ICS built out completely and a member of a group calling command direct. The sky would fall.

- **We should remember that SOPs are for “standard” operations, and terrorism is anything but standard at least for now.**

The SOPs guide us for every day stuff. We need to use our brains, mixed with experience, and a critical thought process to handle everything else. We must truly understand the system.

- **Hazmat, police, fire, EMS, bomb squad guys, USAR guys, swift water rescue guys, career and volunteer.....they are all on the same team. If we cannot pursue common goals on routine calls and during time of calm, if we piss around our tools and equipment to mark them for us alone, if we refuse to share information and resources internally, if we never practice together, if don't share a similar structure....if any of those things is true failure is the only possible outcome.**

Unchecked egos will eventually cause loss of life, failure to stabilize incidents, and excessive property loss the public can have that without us!

I am sure that the list could be longer; perhaps you would like to add to it. As usual your comments are welcome. In the mean time I will continue trying to refine how I do my daily operational business.

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