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RESOURCE GUIDE

Risk Assessment: Overview

PURPOSE

This document presents an overview of resources that provide terrorism risk assessment guidelines and related information. Terrorism risk assessment is a systematic effort to identify critical assets, survey potential terrorist threats, evaluate asset vulnerabilities, and take steps to mitigate or eliminate the risk from terrorist attacks.

SUMMARY

The goal of a terrorism risk assessment is to identify key assets, evaluate the threats to and vulnerabilities of these assets, and then take active steps to mitigate or eliminate the risks. An asset is generally defined as any site, facility, system, or special event within a jurisdiction. Risk is defined as the potential for suffering loss or damage.

Jurisdictions cannot realistically expect to plan and prepare for every possible terrorist threat. The number of threats, vulnerabilities, and critical assets can easily surpass a jurisdiction's ability to handle and allocate resources to all contingencies.

To balance priorities effectively among critical assets, threats, and vulnerabilities, jurisdictions must systematically assess terrorist risks and focus on planning preparedness and mitigating efforts for the most high-risk scenarios.

Terrorism risk assessment methodologies typically include three distinct components:

Criticality assessment: A systematic effort to identify and evaluate important or critical assets within a jurisdiction. Criticality assessments help planners determine the relative importance of assets, helping to prioritize the allocation of resources to the most critical assets.

Threat assessment: A systematic effort to identify and evaluate existing or potential terrorist threats to a jurisdiction and its target assets. Due to the difficulty in accurately assessing terrorist capabilities, intentions, and tactics, threat assessments may yield only general information about potential risks.

Vulnerability assessment: A systematic effort to identify and evaluate the vulnerabilities of a jurisdiction's target assets. By identifying and evaluating existing weaknesses, a vulnerability assessment can determine ways to eliminate or mitigate the risks from identified weaknesses.

By integrating the results from these assessments, jurisdictions can develop an overall terrorism risk assessment, which can help to identify the most high-risk terrorist contingencies.

Based on this overall terrorism risk assessment, jurisdictions can take concrete steps to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate potential risks by taking protective measures. The results of the risk assessment enable jurisdictions to decide where best to direct their limited resources toward strengthening their defenses against terrorism.

Many risk assessment methodologies are broad in scope and are meant to be applicable to a wide range of assets, while others are designed for a specific type of asset or critical infrastructure (e.g., risk assessments for chemical facilities).

RESOURCE GUIDE OUTLINE

- Risk Assessment Overview
- General Risk Assessment Guides and Tools
- Critical Infrastructure Sector-Specific Risk Assessment Guides and Tools
 - Agriculture & Food Supply
 - Water
 - Information Technology and Telecommunications
 - Energy
 - Transportation
 - Chemical and Nuclear/Radiological

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