



Information Alert

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FIRST RESPONDER IMPERSONATORS: THE NEW TERRORIST THREAT

(U//FOUO) In September 2014, The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) released a propaganda video encouraging its followers to murder “intelligence officers, police officers, soldiers and civilians.” The video was re-released in January 2015 and specifically named the United States, France, Australia and Canada as targets.¹ Now, first responders have an additional threat: Impersonation and misrepresentation by terrorists as first responders. The impersonators main goals are to further their attack plan and do harm to unsuspecting citizens as well as members of the emergency services community.

(U//FOUO) Misrepresentation is defined as presenting false or misusing insignia, documents, or identification to misrepresent one’s affiliation in an effort to cover possible illicit activity or gain access to sensitive areas.² Terrorists and homegrown violent extremists (HVE’s) in Europe have been purchasing and stealing authentic firefighter and police uniforms in an effort to disguise themselves at scenes, gain the trust of citizens, or facilitate a hasty exit in the event of an attack. They are also procuring vehicles, equipment, and other items that are associated with government, military, law enforcement, fire, and emergency services personnel.³

- (U//FOUO) On 10/05/2014, a 19-year-old Chechen suicide bomber dressed as a police officer and detonated an explosive device at the entrance of a concert hall where festivities had been planned to celebrate a local holiday. Five police officers were killed with 12 others wounded.⁴
- (U//FOUO) In January 2015, Belgian police uncovered a weapons cache, police uniforms, as well as fraudulent identification following a fire in the city of Verviers. It is believed that they uncovered an imminent plot against an unknown target, and that the individuals involved planned on impersonating members of law enforcement.²
- (U//FOUO) In April 2015, French authorities disrupted a potential terror plot after responding to a call for medical help from a victim who falsely reported being wounded by an armed robber. A search of his home and vehicle yielded multiple firearms, bulletproof vests, police armbands, as well as notes on potential targets. They also uncovered evidence that he was planning a potential attack somewhere in France.²

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(U//FOUO) Terrorists have the potential of using these same tactics in the United States, as there are numerous businesses that cater to the needs of first responder personnel. A wide variety of products such as clothing, weapons, and tactical gear can be purchased on the Internet by any consumer, regardless of a confirmed affiliation to emergency services, government, or law enforcement agency.

- (U//FOUO) In November 2014, a Fairfax County (VA) police officer observed a male wearing a Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department turnout coat. The subject advised the officer that he had previously been employed by that department in Maryland as a firefighter, but resigned due to an injury. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that the subject had never been employed by Prince George's County, neither as a paid nor as a volunteer firefighter. Additionally, his girlfriend reported that he had purchased the coat for \$200 from an unidentified firefighter.²
- (U//FOUO) In March 2015, a member of the Illinois National Guard allegedly offered his uniform to his cousin to allow him to enter an armory and conduct an attack.⁵

(U) Potential Indicators

(U//FOUO) The following activities could be indicative of pre-operational activity, attack planning, or criminal activity. Depending on the context of time, location, personal behaviors, and other indicators of suspicious activities, incidents should be reported to appropriate authorities:

- Theft of first responder uniforms, credentials, equipment or vehicles;
- Possession of counterfeit first responder uniforms, credentials, or other badges without a reasonable explanation;
- Suspicious use of uniforms, equipment, or vehicles inconsistent with those in service within a particular jurisdiction, without a valid justification;
- Visible identifiers such as phone numbers painted on vehicles or license plates that are inconsistent with an operating area or mission that would arouse suspicion of terrorism or other criminal activity in a reasonable person;
- Unusual interest in or attempted purchase of authentic service uniforms and equipment without a valid justification or credentials;
- Use of official or emergency vehicles or equipment which appear to be in a poor mechanical or cosmetic state, or which appear to be loaded beyond capacity, and would arouse suspicion of terrorism or other criminal activity in a reasonable person; and
- Presence of unauthorized individuals in a restricted area or personnel with appropriate uniforms/vehicles in unapproved areas with no reasonable explanation.³

RECOMMENDATIONS

(U//FOUO) PaCIC encourages its partners to report suspicious attempts to acquire items such as specialized clothing and identification. Incidents of lost/stolen credentials or uniforms should be reported immediately to law enforcement. Dressing as a police officer, firefighter, or EMS personnel would afford a terrorist less scrutiny at a scene, thus providing the perfect opportunity for an attack. Situational awareness, effective communication, and suspicious activity reporting will assist in keeping not only our emergency services personnel safe, but also the public. Report suspicious activity by calling the toll-free Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) Terrorism Tip Line at (888) 292-1919, or via email at tips@pa.gov. Additionally, PSP launched the "See Something, Send Something" smartphone application (app) to help fight terrorism. The app allows suspicious activity to be captured as a photograph or written note and sent directly to PaCIC. Available

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at no cost to iPhone and Android users, the app also contains information on what to look for and when to report suspicious activity.⁶ All tips received are thoroughly investigated to determine if a nexus to terrorism exists. This will enhance statewide situational awareness and can potentially prevent future terrorist acts through early identification and intervention.

The information used in this bulletin is drawn from open sources, DHS open source reporting, FBI and other law enforcement intelligence reports and court filings. State police has high confidence in the information obtained from court documents and those of government agencies. State police has medium confidence in the information obtained from open sources, which includes media reports and Internet websites whose information is credibly sourced and plausible but may contain biases or unintentional inaccuracies. When possible, open source information has been corroborated through other law enforcement and government sources.

PaCIC SINS: 05.03.09

HSEC SINS: 7.1, 7.10, 8.1, 8.8, & 8.9

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¹ Fox News. (2015, January 12). NYPD, FBI issue alerts after ISI puts out video calling for attacks on law enforcement. Foxnews.com. Retrieved on 08/27/2015 from <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/01/12/nypd-fbi-issue-alerts-after-isis-puts-out-video-calling-for-attacks-on-law/>.

² Stanley, K. (2015, July 15). Suspicious activity reporting: Misrepresentation, theft, loss and diversion. *IAFC.org*. Retrieved on 08/26/15 from <http://www.iafc.org/onScene/article.cfm?ItemNumber=8447>.

³ FBI. (2015, August 18). Terrorist tactics, techniques, and procedures: Impersonation of First Responders Overseas.

⁴ Grove, T. (2014, October 6). Chechen leader vows tough response to suicide bombing. *Businessinsider.com*. Retrieved on 08/27/2015 from <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-chechen-leader-vows-tough-response-to-suicide-bombing-2014-10>.

⁵ The InfoGram. (2015, August 20). Theft of first responder gear linked to terrorism. *Usfa.fema.gov*. Retrieved on 08/26/2015 from http://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/infograms/34_15.pdf.

⁶ Pennsylvania State Police launch new “see something, send something” app to help fight terrorism. (2013, January 10). *Pennsylvania State Police*. Retrieved 03/30/2015 from

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=4451&PageID=457781&mode=2&contentid=http://pubcontent.state.pa.us/publishedcontent/publish/cop_public_safety/state_police/news/articles/pennsylvania_state_police_launch_new_see_something_send_something_app_to_help_fight_terrorism.html.

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