



National Threat Evaluation and Reporting

Q U A R T E R L Y B U L L E T I N



Quarter 1 – FY23

Research in Focus

As we approach the holiday season, the Department of Homeland Security assesses that locations, such as places of worship, special events involving large crowds, and the retail subsector, are likely to remain attractive targets for individuals seeking to further political or social goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence.^b Due in part to the ease of accessibility essential to the success of these locations and other sectors, like all similar locations, there are potential security concerns. Some of the concerns include multiple ingress and egress points that enable easy access to these facilities, the frequency and volume of people that come and go, and even economic conditions that force retail owners to minimize highly visible protective measures to avoid making prospective patrons uneasy and discourage business. These security concerns and the operational environment of all subsectors are unlikely to change; therefore, it is important to be aware of the threat environment and the resources available to mitigate some of these threats.

Our Mission

The National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Office equips Homeland Security partners with tools and resources to assist in identifying, reporting, and mitigating threats of terrorism and targeted violence.^a The NTER Quarterly Bulletin is designed to inform Department of Homeland Security customers of research developments and resources to examine Homeland threats through a threat assessment and management perspective.



Did You Know?

The US Department of Homeland Security defines soft targets and crowded places, such as sports venues, shopping venues, schools, and transportation systems, as locations that are easily accessible to large numbers of people and that have limited security or protective measures in place making them vulnerable to attack.^c Further, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has a plethora of resources available [here](#) for public use to secure soft targets and crowded places.

^a DHS defines targeted violence as any premeditated act of violence directed at a specific individual, group, or location, regardless of motivation, that violates the criminal laws of the United States or of any state or subdivision of the United States.

^b The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong messaging, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics does not constitute violent extremism, and is constitutionally protected. Reporting on protected activity must include articulable facts and circumstances that support the suspicion that the observed behavior is not innocent, but rather reasonably indicative of criminal activity associated with terrorism and the totality of circumstances of the expressed activity and behavior must be taken into consideration.

^c U.S. Department of Homeland Security; (2018); US Department of Homeland Security soft targets and crowded places security plan overview; Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, DHS-Soft-Target-Crowded-Place-Security-Plan-Overview-052018-508_0 (1).pdf.

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Hot Topics

Assessing Security and Safety in Crowded Places

The tragic events surrounding the Astroworld Festival in Houston, Texas, attended by more than 50,000 people, left ten attendees dead and many more injured, after a crowd surge, in November 2021. This event and other large-scale public events remind us of the vulnerabilities associated with soft targets and crowded places. The American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS) International highlights the importance of utilizing a risk assessment approach to help bolster security and safety measures around such events. This collective process allows internal and external stakeholders to perform a threat, vulnerability, and risk assessment to assess a threat and support the level of risk mitigation required prior to an event. In addition, as with any major event, there are a multitude of references and resources that support the threat assessment process and work to enhance the development and execution of security plans and processes. ASIS and the US Department of Homeland Security have published several key [references](#) that focus on risk assessment standards and mitigating the risk of potential terrorist attacks.



Mass Attacks: Prevention, Mitigation, and Follow Up

After studying 600 mass attack events and plots between 1995 and 2020, interviewing dozens of experts, and reviewing hundreds of references, researchers at RAND found that warning signs tend to exist in combination (serious intent to attack + concrete actions for attack = warning). Consequently, the team created the Mass Attack Defense Chain, a series of defenses that work together to reduce the probability of mass attacks. The Defense Chain is divided into three phases: Prevention, Mitigation, and Follow Up. While Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management falls under prevention, mitigation focuses more on incident response, improvement in education, and early detection.^d Lastly, the document points out important follow up actions, to include having a support plan, relentless follow up, and forward prevention—finding early opportunities to divert an individual from violence. You can read RAND's step-by-step guide to preventing shootings and other mass attacks in the [Mass Attacks Defense Toolkit](#).

Holiday Activities and Threat Assessment

As the holiday season draws closer, soft targets with limited security measures can be a potential target for attack. CISA released the [Protecting Patrons During the Holiday Shopping Season Fact Sheet](#) in December 2021, and its key points remain applicable in today's threat landscape. This document provides examples of suspicious behavior indicators as well as protective measures that incorporate concern for high-risk situations, such as contacting local fusion centers to understand the threat environment in the area. While these are beneficial prevention measures, it is important for threat assessment teams to be cognizant of potential vulnerabilities within an organization. The holidays are

^d Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) is a proactive, evidenced-based method of investigation, analysis, and intervention that focuses on an individual's patterns of thinking and behavior to determine whether, and to what extent, that individual may be moving toward an attack. BTAM utilizes a four-step process: Identify, Investigate, Assess, and Manage.



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typically a stressful time of year, particularly in retail, as companies hire seasonal and temporary workers who may have limited resources and support for managing stress. The Mayo Clinic offers tips for coping with stress and depression during the holidays, and you can check them out [here](#).

Religious Community Outreach in Response to Threats

In light of recent and tragic events involving soft targets and crowded places, it is imperative to highlight diverse outreach mechanisms and community partners, engaging them to assist in targeted violence prevention. The Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT)—comprised of the National Counterterrorism Center, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation—released a [First Responder's Toolbox](#) in July to highlight the importance of community outreach, particularly with threats against houses of worship.^e The Toolbox recommends best practices for engaging with religious communities. For example, first responders are encouraged to build trust, raise awareness of potential threats, partner on prevention, and support security preparedness techniques. These engagements can help communities come together to address risk factors and build protective factors to identify and mitigate potential threats of targeted violence.

Resources

Below are additional resources to assist in violence prevention and increase awareness and understanding of current trends in threat assessment and targeted violence.



- [Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative | DHS](#)
To ensure DHS is meeting the needs of our homeland security partners, the NTER Office recently developed an unclassified training on suspicious activity reporting available on the DHS webpage. The NTER Office would like ALL homeland security partners to be equipped with the knowledge and resources to report suspicious activity to contribute to the safety and security of our communities.
- [Enhanced Dynamic Geo-Social Environment | S&T](#)
The Enhanced Dynamic Geo-Social Environment (EDGE) is a free virtual training platform that first responders, and now education institutions, can use to plan for a coordinated response to critical incidents. EDGE is a comprehensive preparedness tool, complementing and honing training protocols already in place in communities nationwide.
- [Reporting Suspicious Activity – Critical for Terrorism Prevention | JCAT](#)
Public safety personnel are in a position in their communities to report suspicious and concerning behaviors and activities with a nexus to terrorism. This resource highlights the importance of public safety personnel's awareness of suspicious activity reporting mechanisms and encourages partners to document suspicious activity reporting in their jurisdictions.

^e JCAT is a collaboration by the NCTC, DHS, and FBI to improve information sharing among federal, state, local, tribal, territorial governments and private sector partners in the interest of enhancing public safety.



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- [Holiday Workplace Safety | OSHA](#)

As the nation enters the holiday shopping season, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) developed resources to help keep workers safe. You can read about workplace violence in late-night retail, crowd management, and protecting temporary workers on their website.

Threat Assessment Spotlight

The Washington County Threat Advisory Group (TAG) in Minnesota is a multi-disciplinary Behavioral Threat Assessment Team established in 2015 and serves the Twin Cities' eastern suburbs. TAG partners meet virtually on a bi-monthly basis and act in an advisory capacity only. Any government agency or partner/contracted nonprofit may bring a concerning case to TAG for an assessment and management plan, but it is ultimately up to the individual presenting the case to conduct the hands-on management. TAG has demonstrated great success in mitigating many potentially dangerous situations in the community, including high-risk intimate partner stalking, threats of mass and public violence and workplace violence concerns. Among Washington County's population of approximately 280,000, four to six new cases are referred to TAG each month. In addition, TAG continues to receive follow-up reports on previous cases. TAG's members consist of personnel from law enforcement, the county attorney's office, domestic violence organizations, county mental health, county social services, probations, and the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Washington TAG stands ready to assist anyone who is seeking to initiate a multi-disciplinary Behavioral Threat Assessment Team. For additional information about Washington County TAG, please visit its website at <https://threatassessmenttc.wordpress.com/>.



Program Updates

- The NTER Office has recently updated its public-facing website. Explore it at: <https://www.dhs.gov/nter>.
- NTER's Master Trainer Program in Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management is accepting applications to join over 180 Master Trainers across the country. For more information and to apply, please visit: <https://www.dhs.gov/mtp>.
- The NTER Office is reinvigorating the Quarterly Bulletin and will be transitioning to a semi-annual dissemination. We will provide the next Bulletin in June 2023. We welcome any feedback or suggestions you may have to improve this platform's relevance and utility for our partners.



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- The NTER Office is partnering with the Wisconsin Department of Justice and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to provide a publicly available eLearning module titled, “*Foundations of Targeted Violence Prevention*.” The goal of the course is to educate the public on threatening or potentially concerning behaviors and where to report them, providing an opportunity for intervention to prevent targeted violence from occurring.



How Did We Do?

Please take a moment to share your feedback:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NTERBulletinSurvey>

Contact Information

To learn more about the NSI, Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management, or the NTER Office, please contact NTER@hq.dhs.gov.

