



2018 Vigilant Guardian Tabletop Exercise

November 14, 2018

After Action Report
and Improvement Plan

Executive Summary

Jim Bailey
Sensemakers

Exercise Overview and Purpose

In partnership with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Defense (DOD) Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region IX, U.S. Coast Guard, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), California Army National Guard, and local first responder agencies, the Preventative Radiological/Nuclear Detection (PRND) Workgroup planned and conducted the 2018 Vigilant Guardian Tabletop Exercise (TTX) at the San Francisco Armory on November 14, 2018.

The workshop purpose was to introduce Bay Area elected and senior government officials to the threat of radiological/nuclear (R/N) terrorism, current initiatives to prevent, protect, mitigate, respond and recover from the R/N threat, and to offer a series of guided discussions designed to explore the region's R/N preparedness strengths and areas in need of further improvement.

Threat Overview

R/N materials are being sought after by terrorists for use as a weapon of mass destruction (WMD) against targets in Europe and the United States. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, emergency managers and first responders at the local, state and federal level became concerned about radiological and nuclear materials being taken out of regulatory control and used as a WMD.

Examples of how R/N materials could be “weaponized” into a WMD include:

- Radiation exposure device (RED): A strong source of radiation that when placed in an area where people are likely to sit, stand, or pass, will expose them to unhealthy levels of radiation.
- Radiation dispersal device (RDD): An improvised explosive device that when detonated spreads radioactive material over a small area. The RDD is the most likely R/N WMD weapon.
- Improvised nuclear device (IND): Unlike an RDD, the detonation of an IND results in a nuclear detonation that causes widespread damage and radioactive contamination over a wide area. Of the three R/N WMDs, the detonation of an IND is the least likely due to the difficulty in obtaining the required special nuclear material.

The primary use of an RDD is to disperse radioactive material into the environment. With the threat of additional attacks and the public's hypersensitivity to R/N materials, the detonation of an RDD will inflict panic and terror within the population. Radioactive contamination that may persist for an extended period of time in affected areas will require the mandatory relocation of many persons and businesses. The costs of relocation and environmental cleanup are staggering and negatively impact a region's economy for years post-attack.

Exercise Scenario Overview

Since June 2018, the Intelligence Community (IC) has tracked the efforts of the ‘The Brotherhood’—a Homegrown Violent Extremist group (HGVE) with ties to the Global Salafist Jihad (GSJ) movement—to steal or buy radioactive/nuclear (R/N) materials.

In response to this intelligence, Joint Task Force West (JTF-W) consisting of the FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF); United States Coast Guard and various agencies begin gathering information on the Brotherhood’s activities. Through the JTF-W’s efforts, eight containers of stolen or illegally obtained R/N materials are seized across the United States and several suspects are arrested. One of the suspects reveals the group’s plan to detonate multiple RDDs in major U.S. cities. Various sources believe the San Francisco Bay Area is a primary target. Northern California Regional Intelligence Center analysts provide analytical and investigative support to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

After several unsuccessful attempts, the Brotherhood successfully steals radioactive material from a geological engineering company. Brotherhood members use the radioactive material to construct several radiological dispersal devices (RDD) and threaten to detonate multiple Radiation Dispersal Devices at locations throughout the Bay Area unless their demands are met. Before the deadline set by the Brotherhood is reached, an RDD explodes outside of San Jose City Hall spreading radioactive material over a wide area and causes scores of blast related injuries and deaths.

Improvement Plan (IP) Highlights

Based on the strengths and areas for improvement identified during the exercise, the following Improvement Plan (IP) items are highlighted:

1. The Northern California Regional Intelligence Center should continue its outreach to expand the number of public and private sector partners.
2. Consider the conduct of a regional Preventive Radiological Nuclear Detection (PRND)/Radiological Nuclear Incident Response-Consequence Management (RNIR-CM) capabilities assessment.
3. Find a common operating picture platform that all R/N agencies and stakeholders can access.
4. Exercise and evaluate the top-down R/N information flow to end users.
5. Work with FEMA to ensure R/N equipment and resources are added to the National Qualification System as typed resources.
6. Develop and deliver PRND/RNIR-CM presentations to elected officials and senior leaders.
7. Consider the conduct of an R/N Elected Officials and Senior Leaders discussion-based exercise.
8. Develop a roles and responsibilities playbook for elected officials and senior non-public safety leaders. A playbook they can use during preparedness training and real world events.
9. Task the UASI PRND Sub-Committee to develop a common public safety standard for radiological detection equipment procurement and usage.
10. Consider hosting a series of R/N seminars to enhance the familiarity of emergency management, public health, hospitals, and other stakeholders.