

# Terrorism and Hotels

Hotels are viewed as soft targets by terrorists. The combination of potential for casualties and thin security perimeter makes hotels attractive. Large crowds, easy access, ability to blend in with guests arriving and departing, many bags and parcels, etc. add to that attractiveness. And you have a duty (i.e. potential liability) to take steps to protect your guests, your employees, your neighbors and your physical assets.

The Boston Marathon bombings affected hotels in many ways, even though they were merely in proximity to them. The attack killed 3 people and injured 183. We have been blessed in this country to have avoided many hotel related attacks, however they have happened and can easily happen here.

Consider the following incidents directly affecting hotels:

The Taj Mahal Hotel terrorist attack in Mumbai, India in 2008 where explosions in the lobby, elevators and restaurant killed 164 people and injured 308.

The Grand Hotel bombing in Brighton, England in 1984 targeted Margaret Thatcher killed 5 people and injured 31.

King David Hotel Bombing in Jerusalem, Israel killed 91 and injured 46 where hotel staff ignored bomb threat warning calls primarily due to the amount of hoax warnings at the time.

**Terrorism takes many forms** – not just explosions or armed insurrection. It could be poisoning through your HVAC system or through your kitchen. Or compromising your fire protection system then setting a fire.

Are you vulnerable to an attack?

Does your hotel cater to a customer niche or group of any kind that might be targeted by terrorists?

Does your hotel have written procedures and is training continually conducted on how to handle high-profile or potential targeted guests such as VIP's, political party groups or corporate event?

Is your hotel located in an area that attracts this activity or have something close to you that might?

What should you focus on protecting?

- Guests
- Employees and any contractors or vendors on-site
- Hotel Building itself
- Hotel Contents
- Equipment such as fire safety and HVAC systems and access to them
- Information ( electronic and physical) such as blueprints, employee records, guest information

## What Can Hotels Do?

- Written safety and security measures that have they recently been refreshed and if English is a second language for your employees, a second version in their native language when possible.
- Continual training for all employees on these procedures and how NOT to unknowingly render them useless (like propping open a door that serves as a fire break or one that protects computers or HVAC Equipment)
- Limit access to all back-of-the-house areas
- Run employee background checks – many attacks are carried out with insider help
- Written and trained evacuation plans – Authorities ordered the evacuation of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel after the Boston Marathon bombings
- Written and trained plans on accepting an influx of people if something happens nearby – the Sheraton had to accept people in their lobby after police cleared the streets
- Procedures for checked baggage and parcels – how you handle suspicious baggage
- Checking for key cards before coming on premises or going up guest elevator banks
- How to identify and report “suspicious behavior” (not people)
- abandonment of baggage or vehicles
- paying in cash without showing a credit card
- using questionable identification
- nervous or anxious behavior
- questionable materials left in a hotel room and noticed by housekeeping
- people who want to gain access to secure areas
- people taking pictures of odd items like back-of-the-house areas
- The procedure for identifying suspicious behavior must be made easy and clear
- report the incident or behavior to your manager
- alert security
- call 911
- Security camera technology has improved greatly. Installing more of these can help in many ways beyond terrorist incidents. The pictures of the Boston Marathon bombing suspects came from security cameras on top of nearby buildings
- Involve guests in your security plan – though we don’t want to create overly-anxious guests, they can be an important extension of your security team. LodgeNet Interactive has partnered with the Department of Homeland Security to show public service announcements in over 5,500 hotels.