EXPLOSIVES RECOGNITION AND AWARENESS TRAINING:
A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PRE-BLAST MITIGATION

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"This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under Award Number 2008-ST-061-ED0001. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security."

Abstract

The nation’s security strategy tends to be reactionary to a specific event, instead of being preemptive or preventive. It is rare when established policies have proven successful, even though there is substantial financial and resource investment. The payoff is measured by analyzing the desired minimal effect rather than prevention of the event altogether. Such is the case in combating explosives-related threats. Like safety, where the aim is to prevent injury, explosives training must be implemented to enhance a site’s capability to deter possible attacks. This research investigates the current practices in explosives recognition and awareness training, the availability of training to security personnel and first responders, the tactics utilized to mitigate explosives events and develops a comprehensive psychological training mechanism on which both the private and public sector can build an authentic explosives site security plan.

Goals

Develop an explosives training program, Figure 1, for first responders and security personnel that:

- Establishes common explosives vocabulary
- Is continuously improved and tested
- Addresses site specifics and professional roles
- Covers the risk management process
- Creates a basic knowledge of explosives components
- Is available and cost effective to obtain
- Is incentive-based rather than punitive
- Receives participant feedback regarding attitude and behavior

Challenges & Significance

Today, research and development, science and technology, are plugged as the savors of a post-blast event. Synthetic and composite materials are used to strengthen barriers and cutting-edge technology is utilized to refine the latest in standoff detection. These legitimate measures provide a sense of security for those who are “protected.” By establishing an acceptance that the blast will occur, a facility’s infrastructure and occupants fall into a specific category where minimizing is the accepted goal, rather than blast prevention being the ultimate objective. Although massive walls can act as a deterrent to terrorist attacks, evil doers are capable of breaching those barriers both from the exterior and interior. Therefore, a more logical goal of preventing the blast must be emplaced.

Accomplishments 2009-2010

- Trained 30 local and federal law enforcement personnel
- Provided Professional Development training to over 75 U.S. Army officers and NCOs on ALERT Education Initiative and Advanced Explosives Education opportunities at Missouri S&T
- Initiated a collaborative effort with Fort Leonard Wood’s Engineer School to offer explosives courses to officers
- Created and distributed informational material to inform Missouri S&T’s advanced explosives degree
- Created Site Awareness of Firing and Explosives Devices (SAFE-D) explosives training plan for facilities

ERA Training Results

A total of 29 surveys were submitted, Figure 2 shows an example.

- 64% responded that they have been involved with an explosives-related threat while on the job
- Prior to training, only 24% said they were at least “somewhat” familiar with explosives
- Nearly 97% answered that the training was effective in expanding their explosives knowledge
- 90% expressed interest in participating in more advanced explosives training
- Result – training was beneficial, accomplished the training goals, and needs to be expanded in scope and to reach more first responders

Future Work

Further expand ERA training to all levels of first response as well as private security companies. Hone the training to fit the specific needs of participants as shown in survey results, Figures 3 & 4. Develop SAFE-D training plans, requiring no less than 24 hours of initial explosives-related threat training and an annual refresher of 8 hours. Coordinate this effort among private and public stakeholders to create a genuine network involved with local emergency response plans.