

## Checklist: Homeland Security: Common-Sense Measures to Safeguard Your Community

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To improve coordination and communication among all levels of government and with the public in the fight against terrorism, President Bush signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3 on March 12, 2002, creating the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS). This system serves as a foundation for a common-sense approach to a simple communications structure for disseminating information on the risk of possible terrorist attacks to all levels of government, as well as to United States citizens.

A number of federal alert systems exist in the United States, each of which is tailored for and unique to a different concern in our society: transportation, defense, agriculture, and weather, for example. These alert systems fill vital and specific requirements for a variety of situations in both the governmental and commercial sectors.

The HSAS is a national framework for these systems, allowing government officials and citizens to communicate the nature and degree of terrorist threats. This advisory system characterizes appropriate levels of vigilance, preparedness, and readiness in a series of graduated threat conditions.

### **Protective Measures**

The protective measures that correspond to each threat condition will help the local government and its citizens decide upon which actions they should take to help counter and respond to possible terrorist activity. Based on the threat level, federal agencies will implement appropriate protective measures. State and local governments are encouraged to adopt compatible local response systems.

Whenever possible, state and local officials will be informed in advance of national threat advisories. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will convey relevant information to federal, state, and local public officials, as well as to the private sector. Heightened threat levels can be declared for the entire nation or for a specific geographic area or a specific functional or industrial sector. Changes in assigned threat conditions will be made, whenever necessary, by DHS.

These threat conditions characterize the risk of a possible terrorist attack based on the best information available. Protective measures are the steps that should be taken by government and the private sector to reduce their respective vulnerabilities. The HSAS contains five threat conditions, with associated suggested protective measures: Green, Low Condition; Blue, Guarded

Condition; Yellow, Elevated Condition; Orange, High Condition; and Red, Severe Condition.

Since September 11, 2001, the United States has been at the Orange level—High Condition—only a few times. Recent HSAS warnings have been regional and/or functional in their scope. When the whole nation goes to threat condition Orange, public officials in localities should take the necessary steps so that citizens know their local officials are making an effort to protect them.

### **Condition Orange**

To achieve this goal, there are common-sense measures that local officials should take so their citizens and businesspersons know they are being properly protected against a possible terrorist attack, regardless of its actual likelihood. These public officials include elected leaders, managers, police chiefs, fire chiefs, public works directors, and other emergency personnel. Here are the suggested measures they should take when threat condition Orange is declared:

- Police and fire personnel should maintain a heightened sense of awareness while responding to and working at incident scenes.
- Appropriate local officials (manager, police chief, fire chief, and public works director) should review local emergency response plans and be prepared to activate their emergency operations center.
- Managers, as well as police chiefs, fire chiefs, and public works directors, should communicate and coordinate with their respective counterparts at other levels of government, in case a coordinated response is needed.
- Police chiefs should closely monitor all available security and intelligence data from federal, state, and other local law enforcement agencies.
- Police personnel should inspect buildings and parking lots for suspicious packages.
- Managers should ensure that employees are especially watchful for suspicious or unattended packages and articles received through public and private mail-delivery systems.
- Managers should work closely with police chiefs to consider controlled access to all buildings, other significant facilities, and critical components of the public infrastructure.
- Managers and police chiefs should ensure that appropriate security devices are in place and are functioning properly.

- Police chiefs should make sure that police officers closely monitor all local reservoirs and watersheds, wastewater treatment plants, and other sensitive public facilities.
- City officials should work closely with county officials, in an attempt to report and detect all transmittable diseases.
- The manager should place all emergency management and specialized response teams on call-back alert status. This is also applicable to police and fire chiefs.
- The police chief should limit access points at critical facilities to essential personnel only. Entry-control procedures should be strictly enforced.
- The police chief should ensure the enforcement of the restriction that vehicles be parked away from sensitive public buildings.
- The police chief should boost defensive measures around key structures and for major public events.
- Both the police and fire chiefs should make sure that critical response vehicles are stored in a secure place or in an indoor parking facility, if one is available.

Local officials should also issue recommended precautions for citizens and businesspersons. These measures should be decided upon in advance of a heightened state of alert. Here are the recommended guidelines for these two groups:

### **1. Citizens should be encouraged to:**

- Resume normal activities but expect some delays, baggage searches, and restrictions as a result of heightened security at public buildings and other facilities.
- Continue to monitor world events and local circumstances, as well as local-government threat advisory warnings.
- Report all suspicious activities at or near critical public facilities to local law enforcement agencies by calling 911.
- Avoid leaving unattended packages or briefcases in public areas.
- Do an inventory of and organize emergency supply kits and discuss emergency plans with family members. Reevaluate the family meeting location, based on the national threat level.
- Consider taking reasonable personal security precautions. Be alert to your surroundings, avoid placing yourself in a vulnerable situation, and closely monitor the activities of your children.

- Maintain close contact with your family and neighbors to ensure their safety and emotional well-being.

## **2. Businesspersons should be encouraged to:**

- Announce threat condition "High" to all employees and explain any special actions they require.
- Place company emergency-response teams on notice, as appropriate.
- Activate the company's operations center, if suitable to the occasion.
- Monitor world and local events, passing on the latest information to the employees.
- Ensure that appropriate internal security devices are functioning properly, such as computer network and database safeguards, employee identification systems, and evacuation procedures and routes.
- Instruct employees to immediately report suspicious activities, packages, and people to their supervisors.
- Search all personal bags and parcels and require employees to pass through a metal detector, if one is available.
- Restrict vehicular access and parking close to company-owned buildings.
- Make sure that all external security devices are operable, such as intrusion-detection devices, outdoor lighting systems, security fencing, and building and ground security systems.
- Inspect all deliveries and consider accepting shipments only at off-site locations.
- Remind employees of heightened security policies and proper procedures for building evacuation.

### **Guidelines for Response**

The time to prepare such a response plan as the ones described above is before the nation goes on a heightened state of alert. A community's guidelines should be put into hard copy and distributed to elected officials, all department managers, emergency management personnel, and citizens, as well as to the local chamber of commerce because procedures for the private sector will be included.

This information should also be posted on a community's Web site, published in local newspapers, and placed as a public service message on public-access cable television. A citizens' newsletter would also be a good vehicle to promote

these community safeguards. These last vehicles are excellent ways to inform citizens about the local state of readiness. It is also a good idea to inform citizens and businesspersons of homeland security–related Web sites. These would typically include, at the federal level, the Department of Homeland Security (<http://www.dhs.gov>) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (<http://www.fema.gov>).

On the state level, the state Office of Emergency Services (to be found in California at <http://www.oes.ca.gov>) and the Department of Health Services (<http://www.dhs.ca.gov>) should be listed. It is also a good idea to list the American Red Cross (<http://www.redcross.org>), as well as the city or county's own Web site. Homeland security updates can easily be posted on the site.

### **Spread the Word**

The goal is to spread the word to citizens about your local government's state of preparation for the next heightened state of national alert. Citizens expect their public officials to be looking out for their safety and health under such circumstances. Simple guidelines for communities, citizens, and businesspersons such as the ones listed above, represent a common-sense approach to being prepared to safeguard and protect your community during a disaster, whether natural or man-made. Take steps now to make sure your city or county is prepared!

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### **Look to ICMA**

For information on ICMA's book *Homeland Security: Best Practices for Local Government* (Item no. 42858), visit [www.bookstore.icma.org](http://www.bookstore.icma.org). This 192-page Special Report contains a collection of contributions from public safety professionals involved in all phases of emergency management—mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and more.