

“Returning jihadists and the Facility Manager”

The relationship between the Facility Manager and the returning Jihadist is one of mutual support. The jihadist needs the facilities that the FM manages as targets; the FM can use the threat posed by jihadists and others to consider the measures in place, their effectiveness and relevance, and the documented and assumed roles and responsibility of the various managers on the site.

ASIO are warning us about, and we have seen the threat posed by, returning jihadists and “lone wolf” activists. The FM has two overarching responsibilities related to jihadists: to provide a safe and secure environment and to minimise disruption to the tenants. And, to do this in an economical and profitable manner.

This is not a new problem, since the mid-Nineteenth Century there have been groups committing acts of violence in our sites: anarchists, ethno-nationalists, separatists, right and left wing extremists as well as religious and racist zealots. During, the terrorist decade of the mid-1960s-70s there were bombings, shootings, hostage takings and other acts of violence. Since then we have had many incidents in Australia, some of which were political, some criminal and some the result of mental illness. With the exception of the odd shooting in the bush and violence against private houses they have all occurred in managed facilities. The intent and capability have always existed. What has changed and led to an increase in the Government’s alert level is the loose association of aligned jihadist groups and individuals with the stated aim of committing public acts of violence.

Based on what has been planned in Australia and what is happening overseas the probable attack is armed assault with guns and knives possibly supported by bombings. The arrests over the last few years and tighter controls may have moved the current group away from bombs towards armed assault but explosives are still available. So, suicide, placed and vehicle bombs are still options.

There are three elements managers can influence: Prevention, Detection and Response. The roles and responsibilities for these functions vary from site to site between: the FM, the Security Manager, Safety/WHS Manager and the Chief Warden. All of them have some responsibility for aspects of the preventative and response capabilities but the FM has overall responsibility for ensuring that all activities on site are coordinated. The FM should be aware of how many security, safety, WHS managers and Chief Wardens are on site and whether each tenant has their own or any of these positions.

Prevention is primarily a security function, one of the many functions for which the FM is often responsible. Security is about protection from deliberate human action, in this case against violent attacks by jihadists. Other disciplines worry about: mechanical failure, weather events, human stupidity, etc. If security staff are on site, which is not always the case, they will be the front line - expected to identify the hazard and step between it and the tenants. It is worth determining if on-site security have the contracted responsibility to assess incidents and to initiate a response that can result in thousands of people being moved and closing down the facility for hours. The chain of authority for initiating an evacuation needs to be identified, defined and documented.

The level of preventive security obviously depends on the function of the site. To be bluntly honest, for most facilities it will be difficult to prevent someone from entering public areas and committing acts of violence. For sites that have access control, preventing unauthorised entry through a combination of good security policies, procedures and practices supported by technology should prevent incidents in the secure areas. Of course, this does not stop the “trusted insider” who has been granted access from causing harm.

Detection is the primary factor in minimising the effects of an act of violence. Detection relies heavily on staff, particularly those who deal with the public. The staff may work for the FM, for one of the sub-contractors or for the tenants. The FM is in a position to coordinate awareness and response training with or through the security manager(s), the emergency manager(s) and the Chief Warden(s) for the site. The FM and other managers need to foster a work environment that encourages and does not belittle staff for reporting people, items or incidents that they think are out of place or do not fit. The key is their being aware of the normal environment and knowing what they should do if they see anything they think is out of the ordinary. To whom do they report, how and what should they say?

Things that may be out of the ordinary are groups or individuals acting in a furtive manner, appearing to conceal items, wearing inappropriate clothing for the season or event, people who seem inordinately interested in back-of-house areas or how the site works and of the security and emergency response plans. Actions that raise suspicions may not be the prelude to a terrorist act, it may be the planning or conduct of a range of criminal activities; in any case it is worth noting and reporting.

An appropriate response is fundamental to protecting both lives and business operations. Response should not always equate to an immediate evacuation, the concept of “better safe than sorry” is a fallacy. There is nothing safe in moving thousands of people in a way that they are not used to – unless they are being moved away from a hazard. If an evacuation is initiated when there is no hazard the tenant’s business will be severely disrupted and the FM’s judgement called into question. If the site is not evacuated when there is a hazard people will die. The difficult part is determining whether the incident does pose a hazard. This requires accurate information from those who observed the incident and an objective assessment, possibly starting from the premise of “why would I think this poses a hazard?”.

Questions that need to be addressed include: who is responsible for assessing the incident; who has authority to respond, particularly if the response includes closing down the site; what are the tenants’ expectations; what are the contracted responsibilities; and what are the ethical responsibilities particularly of the FM.

In preparation the FM should review the site’s Emergency Plans, actually read them and walk through them in their mind (or even on the ground). Are the plans really applicable to the site, if they are of the “insert client’s name here” type, with only the diagrams having changed from any other site, do they reflect what will happen? Do the plans address the actual tenant base; does it include the Child Care Centre; what will happen if surrounding buildings also evacuate to the same location; if the hazard, say a mass shooting event, is external do they address how to “Shelter In Place” until a safe response can be identified? In relation to SIP the FM has a critical role as they are the ones who know how long people can stay in the building particularly if water/sewerage is cut off. Do the plans provide sensible and relevant guidance on what to do if there is an armed assault, knifing, hostage taking, unattended item, or (perish the thought) a post-blast incident? Do the plans actually offer guidance to the Chief Warden or are there “Warden makes wise decision here” type statements throughout the plan?

A factor that will affect the assessment of an incident is where the FM is geographically located, on site or in a different building or even a different city to the particular facility. In which case, who has the local responsibility for providing the safe and disruption free environment?

There are specialist with a wealth of knowledge to assist the FM in developing appropriate, site specific policies procedures and practices. There are also those of less skill. We are already starting to see a new bunch of “talking heads” appearing, offering advice on terrorism. When seeking guidance in relation to security and emergency response FM should demand of the provider the same standards they would of any other managerial advisor: relevant qualifications, relevant corporate experience, membership of professional bodies, PI insurance that covers what they are offering, and in relation to security advice the relevant State licences - this applies even if the client is a Federal Government site.

FM should be willing to challenge security, emergency and safety reports that fail the “common sense” test and to send them back to the provider requiring them to be rewritten to reflected needs and operating environment of the specific facility.

Knowing that they have a relationship with returning jihadists the FM cannot be complacent. They need to review how they fulfil the dual responsibilities of protecting life and protecting business. Hopefully the existing plans, procedures and relationships are appropriate but it is worth checking.

***Don Williams CPP RSecP** holds qualifications in Security Management and Security Risk Management. He is a Certified Protection Professional and Registered Security Professional. In 2013 he was awarded the Australian Security Medal for services to the security profession. Don has provided managerial advice on security and strategic security analysis for 30 years. He has a particular specialty in bomb safety and security. He is a member of: ASIS International, the Institute of Explosives Engineers, the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators, and the Venue Management Association. Don can be contacted at donwilliams@dswconsulting.com.au.*