

PRESS INFORMATION

BEWARE OF THE ENEMY WITHIN

With the Christmas season just around the corner, many shops and businesses are recruiting workers on short-term contracts to cope with this busy period. However, as Mike Bluestone of Corps Security explains, potential employees must be thoroughly checked out in order to thwart possible terrorist attacks.

With Halloween and Guy Fawkes Night just gone, the run up to Christmas is well underway. And despite the current economic doom and gloom, shopping centres up and down the country are already packed with people buying presents. With this in mind organisations must ensure that they have adequate security procedures in place.

Under threat

The threat posed by terrorism is still very real and it was only a couple of months ago that the security services downgraded the UK's threat level from 'severe' to 'substantial'. Although this suggests that there is less likelihood of an attack now than there was then, the definition of the current threat level is that a terrorist attack is a strong possibility.

The most obvious threat is from al-Qaeda and despite the death of Osama Bin Laden this group is still highly active and still poses a significant danger. However, terrorist attacks could come from a variety of other sources including the dissident IRA groups that continue to cause concern.

Be prepared

Cynics argue that the decision to downgrade the threat level was made so that in the likely event that it goes up again in the spring – in preparation for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games – we will be more vigilant.

That said, it is important to have confidence in MI5's judgement and we should assume that the threat level is in accordance with the perceived danger. With this in mind, if the various newspaper reports of an imminent Taliban led attack on British cities were true then the threat level would have been amended accordingly.

Terrorists will be looking for opportunities to cause disruption and busy shopping centres are an obvious target. The fact is that from now until Christmas there will be a high density of people in every town and city in the UK almost every day – meaning that an attack could happen anywhere at anytime.

Screen test

In order to cope with the sudden influx of consumers, many shops and retail centres are in the process of taking on additional staff, usually on a short-term basis. While most organisations consider security from an 'outside in' perspective, it is important to consider and act upon possible threats that could come from the 'inside out'.

Due to the temporary nature of seasonal employment some employers may be tempted to cut corners and adopt a less rigorous selection procedure on the basis that individuals taken on won't be around for long. However, this ambivalent approach provides an ideal opportunity for those with malicious intent to wreak havoc.

Terrorists will be looking to exploit any lapse in security, so companies must be extra vigilant and maintain high standards of recruitment protocol. It is also important to remember that there is no 'one appearance fits all' – terrorists can be of any ethnic origin, young or old, male or female.

Preventative measures

Special attention must be given to the screening of staff to make sure that they are who they say they are. When a CV is submitted employers must not simply rely on

written references but should talk directly to any referees. Also, it is important to dig a little deeper and not just use the contact details provided as they could easily be false – make sure that the information given stands up to scrutiny.

If using recruitment agencies it is imperative that they work to a set of agreed procedures that ensure the thorough authentication of an individual. If necessary, stipulate penalties that can be activated if the agreed level of screening is not undertaken by the agency.

Remember though that any third-party investigation must comply with the framework outlined in the Data Protection Act, and written consent must be obtained from the potential employee allowing these checks to be made. Obviously, should someone refuse to have their details checked alarm bells should start ringing and the application should go no further.

Inner vision

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Business Continuity Management Survey 2011 found that only one in three organisations provides training for non-specialist staff in subjects such as identifying and responding to potential terrorist activity. This is clearly something that needs to be addressed.

Existing staff must understand and follow strict security processes. They should be brought up to speed with on-site preventative measures such as monitoring and checking changing rooms, and keeping doors to backroom operations closed via access control technology.

Security is a team effort and employees should also be encouraged to report any type of unusual behaviour or activity. Security managers from neighbouring businesses must work together and share information in order to help protect each other and engender a community-wide approach to this issue.

Thinking ahead

Now is clearly a good time for all retail based businesses to carry out a security and health and safety risk assessment to ensure that they are in the best position to deal with any situation. By undertaking a detailed analysis of an organisation's activities,

premises and facilities, the risk posed to staff, visitors and customers can be understood and the necessary action taken.

While such an assessment will help devise a set of company wide processes and procedures, it may also suggest the need for expert training and consultancy. Specialists such as Corps Security deliver on-site training to enhance an organisation's existing security measures with counter terrorism training. This process includes helping personnel identify and respond to potential threats and gives them confidence in the organisation's ability to manage terrorist activity.

Plan of action

A response to an event such as a terrorist attack cannot be made up on the spot. Any responsive action should be meticulously planned and communicated so that employees know how to react in a way that maintains their own safety and that of others.

Therefore, it is advisable to rehearse both the evacuation and 'invacuation' of the building – where a decision is made to contain people within a particular environment rather than exposing them to possible danger outside from things such as secondary devices, breaking windows and unsafe structures.

A risk assessment will also provide valuable guidance about how to judge a particular scenario and how to make the right safety decisions.

On guard

Despite this being the busiest time of year for the retail sector it is no time to compromise when it comes to addressing the safety of people and property. Carrying out strict screening of temporary staff, undertaking a risk assessment, introducing preventative measures and implementing an internal awareness programme will increase vigilance and reduce the likelihood of an attack.

For further information please contact Corps Security on 0800 0286 303 or E: info@corpssecurity.co.uk

E N D S