

DHS Information Bulletin - "Potential Terrorist Use of Official Identification, Uniforms or Vehicles" - 23 July 2003

OVERVIEW:

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Information Bulletins are informational in nature and are designed to provide updates on the training, tactics, or strategies of terrorists. The following information is meant to advise the owners and operators of the nation's infrastructures about the possible use by terrorists of official identification, uniforms, or vehicles to gain access to sensitive facilities for purposes of planning or carrying out attacks. (In this Information Bulletin, "official" refers to recognized implements of federal, state, and local governments and private sector entities.) While DHS possesses no information indicating an organized effort by extremist elements in the United States to illegally obtain official identification, uniforms, or vehicles in furtherance of terrorist activities, it has identified the recent theft or disappearance of large numbers of these items. Attempts to acquire official identification, uniforms, or vehicles would be consistent with the tactics and techniques of Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups, according to a variety of reporting sources.

DETAILS:

Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups likely view the theft or other illegal acquisition of official identification, uniforms, or vehicles as an effective way to increase access and decrease scrutiny in furtherance of planning and operations. Although we possess no information that Al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups are systematically pursuing the illegal acquisition of the above referenced items, there is indeed precedence for the use of official identification, uniforms, or vehicles in the execution of terrorist attacks. Terrorist groups have utilized police or military uniforms to mask their identities and achieve closer access to their targets without arousing suspicion. This was illustrated in the December 2002, suicide bombings that targeted the Chechen Government Headquarters in Grozny, Russia. Terrorists in South America, the Philippines and Pakistan have commandeered or stolen emergency medical services vehicles and uniforms (or cleverly designed imitations) to facilitate the execution of their attacks on key facilities. In an effort to understand the extent of official identification, uniform, and vehicle thefts, DHS recently conducted a survey of selected members of the law

enforcement community in five states. This survey revealed that from February to May 2003 hundreds of official identification cards, badges, decals, uniforms, and government license plates were reported stolen or lost. Additionally, a number of private companies have reported receiving suspicious inquiries about renting official delivery vehicles and emergency services representatives have received unusual requests for detailed vehicle descriptions. There is no historical baseline to compare recent theft or suspicious inquiry data, and the intent or resolution of many of the thefts cannot be determined. The worldwide proliferation of individuals or "companies" that traffic in high-quality imitations of official identification, uniforms, or vehicles is a related issue that increases the possibility such items could be used to facilitate future terrorist attacks and further complicates efforts to prevent their acquisition. For example, earlier this month the New York City High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force reported that it had identified a Japanese website selling near exact replicas of badges from law enforcement agencies such as the U.S. Secret Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Agency, U.S. Marshals Service, and Los Angeles Police Department. Several press reports this year have referred to the theft and sale over the Internet of a large number of United Parcel Service (UPS) uniforms. Although these reports proved to be false, they did bring to the public's attention the potential security concerns of missing or stolen identification, uniforms, or vehicles. DHS reminds all recipients to remain vigilant to the disappearance of, or unauthorized inquiries regarding, official identification cards, badges, decals, uniforms, government license plates, and vehicles and establish practices that account for missing items. DHS encourages recipients to report suspicious incidents to the proper authorities and to remain vigilant for any nexus to terrorism

PROTECTIVE MEASURES:

Recognizing that possession of some combination of official identification cards, badges, decals, uniforms, government license plates, and vehicles tends to reduce suspicion and might allow an individual or vehicle greater access to sensitive facilities, the following protective measures are suggested:

- a. Keep comprehensive records of all official identification cards, badges, decals, uniforms, and license plates distributed, documenting any anomalies and canceling access to items that are lost or stolen.

- b. Practice accountability of all vehicles to include tracking vehicles that are in service, in repair status, or sent to salvage.(1)
- c. Safeguard uniforms, patches, badges, ID cards, and other forms of official identification to protect against unauthorized access to facilities, to include stripping all decommissioned vehicles slated for resale and/or salvage of all agency identifying markings and emergency warning devices.(2)
- d. Check multiple forms of valid identification for each facility visitor. e. Verify the legitimate business needs of all approaching vehicles and personnel.
- e. Improve identification card technology to eliminate reuse or unauthorized duplication.
- f. Alert uniform store vendors of the need to establish and verify the identities of individuals seeking to purchase uniform articles.(3)
- g. Ensure all personnel are provided a security briefing regarding present and emerging threats.

DHS encourages recipients of this Information Bulletin to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to law enforcement or a DHS watch office.

The DHS Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection watch offices may be contacted at:

For private citizens and companies Phone: (202) 323-3205, 1-888-585-9078, Email: nipc.watch@fbi.gov; Online: <http://www.nipc.gov/incident/cirr.htm> For telecommunications industry Phone: (703) 607-4950 Email: ncs@dhs.gov

For Federal agencies/departments Phone: (888) 282-0870 Email: fedcirc@fedcirc.gov Online: <https://incidentreport.fedcirc.gov>

DHS intends to update this Information Bulletin should it receive additional relevant information, including information provided to it by the user community. Based on this notification, no change to the Homeland Security Advisory System level (HSAS) is anticipated; the current HSAS level is YELLOW.

Footnotes

(1) Maryland Security Intelligence Bureau/Maryland State Police, "Emergency Services Equipment and the Terrorist Potential," June 20, 2003, Volume 8, Number 47, p. 2.

(2) Maryland Security Intelligence Bureau/Maryland State Police, "Emergency Services Equipment and the Terrorist Potential," June 20, 2003, Volume 8, Number 47, p. 2,

(3) Maryland Security Intelligence Bureau/Maryland State Police, "Emergency Services Equipment and the Terrorist Potential," June 20, 2003, Volume 8, Number 47, p. 3.