



# ARE WE PREPARED?

By Dan Barion

**IF** someone had asked me on Sept. 10, 2001, what I thought I would be doing in 2014, at the very bottom of my list of responses would have been serving as chief of public safety for the City of Tampa Parking Division. Back then, I was a detective investigator with the City of New York Police Department (NYPD). I was past the halfway mark of my NYPD career and having a great time in my role as a detective in the Organized Crime & Control Bureau. Little did any of us know what the next day had in store for us.

THINKSTOCK



## **Lessons for the parking industry from a Sept. 11 first responder.**

On Sept. 11, 2001, I was a first responder at the World Trade Center site in New York. What happened there that beautiful Tuesday morning was true evil, and no one's eyes should ever have to see the results of the malicious deed that took place. Graphic details are not important; we have all seen the news footage. My NYPD career path curved that day, as I received an injury that would eventually lead to the end of the job I so loved.

After the area now known as Ground Zero and the landfill on Staten Island were thor-

oughly searched for evidence and remains, the post-disaster education of the NYPD began. We studied events of terrorism from around the world and learned how to prevent future attacks. Most of this training was very detailed and full of information.

After leaving the NYPD, I found myself part of the parking industry. Not long after making my career switch, I realized there are steps my new industry could take to lessen our levels of vulnerability to a terrorist attack.



**The goal here is not to create an environment of paranoia. It is to remember to implement all the knowledge we have gained**

### **Parking as Target**

Let's take a moment to discuss why our locations could end up as targets:

- Many of our facilities are large.
- Many are used in conjunction with large events (concerts, university and professional sports events, political functions and conventions, religious gatherings). These events draw two "must haves" for all terrorists: large crowds and media on hand to broadcast the results of an attack.
- By their nature, garages stack hundreds or thousands of vehicles in a number of stories. Each of those vehicles stores numerous gallons of combustible fuel that, when ignited, can cause chaos, death, serious injuries, and scary video clips for the world to see.
- To some, parking facilities represent capitalism. This automatically makes them potential targets to both anarchists and terrorists.

- Not everyone takes parking security seriously. This makes us an easy target.

The first terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 was carried out by placing a bomb-filled vehicle in the underground parking garage of the targeted tower. The destruction was massive, but the building held firm and casualties were minimal for such a large, enclosed bombing.

### **Strategies**

One of the focal points of the training I received with the police department was planning for not if, but when, a large-scale attack happens again. Terrorists (domestic and foreign), anarchists, and other groups with radical agendas are out there and are not going away. This is why our diligence must always be running at 100 percent. Here a few parking-specific ideas we can implement to give us an edge:

- **Have some sort of visible security.** Simply placing an unoccupied vehicle with security markings in a facility can be a deterrent.



in preventing future attacks.

- **Use the law to your advantage.** There is nothing that says we can't make general inquiries of people: "How are you today?" "I see you have been standing here for some time. Is everything OK?" "I saw you park on level five and wonder why you're walking around on level nine?" Let people in our facilities know we are aware of their presence. They don't have to answer your questions, but not doing so should raise your level of suspicion. Contact the authorities.
- **Open your eyes!** If you see someone taking photos, ask what he is doing. Is a car back-heavy? Are people loitering in areas other than those in which they parked? Call the authorities.
- **Spend some money.** If funding allows, install cameras and/or hire a security team. Customer service is always a priority. Therefore, have your security team get on a first-name basis with your regular customers. Patrons will feel more comfortable approaching a friendly face and advising someone they know of suspicious activity than they will approaching a stranger with their suspicions. Try to keep security turnover to a minimum. If you have security, use signs to post their contact number.

Security vehicles with high-powered, multi-colored strobe lighting can give off the appearance that there are numerous vehicles patrolling. And add physical impediments where you can. Physical barriers such as bollards or heavy planters allow a level of protection from vehicles ramming a structure and hinder vehicles from being placed too close to a location.

- **Never Let Your Guard Down.** See something suspicious? Report it. Call 911. Take out your phone and snap photos or a video. Record license plate numbers and physical descriptions. Do something. Remember that complacency is our enemy.

### How We Do It

Here in the City of Tampa, we have taken a proactive approach with our public safety team. We have installed cameras throughout our facilities, and all of our public safety officers have the tools they need to effectively do their jobs, including intensive training from the Tampa Police Department and others we've brought in for teaching events.

Our officers have been empowered to make decisions in the field and implement the skills they have learned in our training programs. We have built a good relationship with the Tampa Police Department and our officers have direct radio communication with their officers. This allows for immediate transmittal of observed criminal activity and increased response times.

While no plan is foolproof, vigilance can give us the edge. The one asset we have that is vital to a successful security plan is our frontline employees. They are out there in the trenches day in and out. Ask for their feedback and input. Let them know they can speak up if something is just not right. They know our facilities better than anyone. They will be the first individuals to see that strange package sitting alone; they will notice things that were not there the previous day. Encourage them to report these out-of-place observations no matter how insignificant they appear.

The goal here is not to create an environment of paranoia. It is to remember to implement all the knowledge we have gained in preventing future attacks. We also must keep up with new technology as it is developed. We owe all who patronize and work at our facilities the safest possible environment. This can only be done by keeping in mind that we are in a post-Sept. 11 world and we must never get lax in our prudence to prevent future attacks.

Combating terrorism is a combined effort of many. It's imperative that we all jump on the team. I was there Sept. 11—I know the reality of what can happen. I hope you'll never forget.



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