The Response to a Possible Terror Attack in a Small Town

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Terrorism Awareness

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Small Town Terror Attack

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Abstract

Many areas have concerns of terror attacks and a lot of them have legitimate targets that need to be protected. Amberley Village, Ohio is one of those locations due to its large Jewish population. Due to the multi-jurisdictional nature of the emergency responses in Amberley the village is a great place to preplan a large scale event. This paper will look at the response to a particular scenario from multiple points of view. This scenario is completely fictional but the reported responses are how the different agency plan to deploy their resources. Over the course of the interviews it became evident that some of these organizations have conducted a table top drill with a very similar scenario just six months ago.
Amberley Village

Amberley is a 3.5 square mile village in central Hamilton County, Ohio. It has a total population of just over 3,500 of which a large percentage is Jewish. Amberley is one of the few local governments in Ohio to have a combined police and fire department. All of the police officers for the village are trained to the first responder level in EMS and are volunteer firefighters. In the event of an EMS detail a police officer responds with an ambulance from one of two surrounding fire departments. Located to the south of Amberley, Golf Manor Fire Department has a contract to respond to EMS details on the south and west ends of the village while the Deer Park/Silverton Fire District has a contract to respond from the east to cover runs on the north and east ends. In the event of a fire detail all of the police officers respond to the scene and a maintenance worker brings the fire truck from the station with everyone’s fire gear on board. Units from both Deer Park/Silverton and Golf Manor will respond to fire details in the village.

The Scenario

I have met with chiefs and officers from multiple departments that would be involved if a terror attack were to take place in Amberley Village. Interviews were conducted with the Amberley police department, Fairfax police department, SWAT, Golf Manor fire department, and Deer Park/Silverton fire department. All of the representatives were presented with the same scenario and asked what they thought their responsibilities would be and to explain how they would handle the situation.
Accompanying the large Jewish population in the village are three large temples, two Jewish schools, and a large Jewish Community Center. The Jewish Community Center is similar to a YMCA and is connected to the Rockdale temple.

The scenario that was presented is as follows: initial reports come into Amberley PD about multiple people shot at the Jewish Community Center with shooters still on scene. The units dispatched along with Amberley will be Quint 47, Engine 89, Medic 47, and Medic 89. All units are fully staffed with four firefighters on trucks and two medics on squads.

Upon arrival you find two victims outside of the front entrance with one yelling for help and the other with signs incompatible with life. The one that is alive is reporting five gunmen with rifles. There is also a victim visible about 15 feet inside the front door screaming for help. Someone inside is able to text out and third party information is received to Hamilton County Communication Center that the three to four gunmen have gone to the rear of the structure and taken hostages. It is estimated that there are 75-80 hostages in the Rockdale Temple area. Occasional gun shots can be heard from the area. After approximately ten minutes a large explosion occurs on the north side of the building (in the hexagonal part). This area is now on fire.

Quint and Medic 47 are from Golf Manor while Engine and Medic 89 are from Deer Park/Silverton. See Appendix A for an aerial view of the scene.

Amberley Police Department Response

For this section, Officer Jeff Stamm of the Fairfax police department was interviewed for a general view of how police would respond to an incident similar to this one and Chief Richard Wallace of the Amberley Village police department to discuss his department’s response.
According to Chief Wallace, the Amberley Village police department has an officer assigned to the Jewish Community Center at all times. This officer will already be on scene and can respond to the area of gunfire quickly. That first officer on scene will be able to relay information to other responding units such as the number of shooters, their clothing, the types of weapons, if they are wearing body armor, and where the best entry location might be. Hamilton County Communications Center will put out an all-county broadcast for any available units to respond to this scene. According to Officer Stamm, the first arriving units will respond to the corner of the building attempting to use the building itself as cover from possible gunfire. Those officers should do their best to avoid any parked cars in case of improvised explosive devices. They will then grab extra ammo and first aid supplies in a “go bag” and notify dispatch which door they plan to enter. The primary officers will make entry, search for the shooters, and engage. As additional officers arrive on scene they will assist the interior team. Additional police units will set up an exterior perimeter around the building. All walking wounded victims will be directed away from the scene for triage by EMS. In addition to local police departments there will be many other agencies responding including but not limited to Hamilton County and Cincinnati SWAT teams and bomb squads, FBI HEAT, Homeland Security, U.S. Marshalls, and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms. Once officers have cleared areas of the building and decided that there is no threat firefighters and paramedics will be allowed to enter warms and hot zones in the building to extinguish fires or assist victims. All paramedics and firefighters will be under heavy guard by police. The interior team and bomb squad will clear all of the building except where hostages are being held. At this point if there are still gunshots heard from the hostage area then police will engage the shooters to mitigate the situation. If there are no more shots heard then it will be treated as more of a hostage situation and the perimeter will be held until
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SWAT or Federal units arrive. Once all gunmen have been arrested or confirmed down, EMS will be allowed to enter and evacuate victims. The entire structure and parking lot will become a crime scene and be processed for evidence.

Golf Manor Fire Department Response

This interview was conducted with Lieutenant Charles Weghorn of the Golf Manor Fire Department. When presented with the scenario, Lt. Weghorn was familiar with the building and recognized the possibility of a large number of occupants and casualties so he would automatically dispatch a first alarm for EMS and set up an offsite staging area. Figuring that the police would be busy closer to the building, Lt. Weghorn would begin blocking traffic around the scene including the four lane highway that runs along the north of the building. Once more units begin to arrive at the staging area he would have one of the officers in the staging area act as the staging officer. Lt. Weghorn would use the first two medic units on scene to set up a triage area between the scene and staging area but far enough so that they are not interfering with police activities. This triage area would have an officer assigned as well. Using police protection Golf Manor would attempt to remove the accessible victims to the triage area. The staging and triage areas would be established to that squads could easily depart in multiple directions to transport to multiple hospitals. The area hospitals would be notified. Much of the rest of the scenario depends on the police response. With the typical active shooter event the police would establish a safe zone that the paramedics would be able to enter and remove victims but the bomb blast in this scenario complicates this and would keep the paramedics out of the building longer. Lt. Weghorn would not allow any personnel in or around the building until it has been cleared completely by the police and bomb squad. As for the area of the building that ends up on fire due to the explosion, Golf Manor would deem the area unsafe for firefighters and would not
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attempt to extinguish the fire until the police deem the scene to be safe. Once the scene is safe for fire and EMS personnel, Lt. Weghorn would send crews to extinguish any fire and remove victims for triage and hospital transport.

Deer Park/Silverton Fire Department Response

This interview was conducted with Captain Jeffery Lutz of the Deer Park/Silverton Fire Department. Captain Lutz would have all units stage one block to the south of the scene in a large parking lot. Captain Lutz would then attempt to make contact with the Amberley police department to set up a command post across the street from the scene at a separate temple. Once command is established a first alarm for both EMS and fire would be dispatched and staged at the original staging area. Once police units have secured the area in front of the building, two EMS crews would be sent in to attempt to remove the visible victims. As the safe zones in the building grow larger a staging officer would be used to establish a line of medic units to be used to transport any victims that could be safely removed. For a situation this large, Captain Lutz would activate the hospital network which notifies all area hospitals of the situation and opens a radio channel for the scene to communicate with any or all of the hospitals. Two medical helicopters would be dispatched as well as the Red Cross Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT) to help with triage and treatment on the scene. Cincinnati and Hamilton County bomb units would be requested to sweep the scene for bombs. Command 400, a mobile command trailer, would also be requested to help coordinate communications between fire and police. Once police have secured the area Captain Lutz would use unmanned hose lines and master streams to keep the fire from the explosion under control until a better attack can be made. Apparatus would be set at each fire department connection in order to keep the sprinkler system running and help to control the fire. Captain Lutz emphasizes the need for flexibility in an
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incident like this because things can change quickly and your decisions will need to change with them.

Table Top Exercise

I had originally discussed the response of the Hamilton County Sherriff’s Office SWAT Team with Chief Jim Puthoff. Chief Puthoff is the fire chief for the Golf Manor Fire Department and he runs the SWAT Medic division of the HCSO SWAT Team. As we began to talk, Chief Puthoff explained that there had been a table top exercise conducted just six months prior that included a scenario extremely similar to the one for this paper. Our focus then shifted to the results of that exercise. A command post will need to be established and this duty will originally fall to the fire department because they are more used to setting up multi-jurisdictional command posts. The police will then take over command until the shooters have been mitigated and then it swing back over to fire command to handle fire and EMS operations on scene. Final command will go back to the police as the investigation takes place. The results from the exercise begin with a unified command post being established 1.4 miles away from the scene at the Amberley Village police department. This is a secure building that will give the incident commanders a safe place to operate. This off site area is also a good place for a public information officer to set up to keep the press away from a dangerous scene. A police secured staging area would be set up around the corner from the scene for the first alarm for fire and EMS that would be dispatched automatically. Along with the local police departments the Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office SWAT team, the Cincinnati Police Department SWAT Team, the Butler County Sheriff’s Office SWAT team, the FBI, the ATF, and the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation are all automatic requests when the original call goes out. There are 3 armored cars in the area that will be requested. The Hamilton County and Cincinnati bomb squads will be requested with their robots.
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The robots will be used to make entry and utilize their cameras to scout the interior of the building. One of the robots is large enough to drag a victim out if needed. Personnel would be utilized to clear all of the cars in the parking lot so that it is a safe area from which to operate. Once parts of the building are clear and become warm zones the armored cars will be used to evacuate victims to a triage area to begin EMS operations. Once the operation begins to wind down and the scene becomes safe the incident will begin to collapse in on itself. Command will move to the scene and the staging area will no longer be needed. The table top exercise concluded with a nod to the inclusion of some rabbis from the local community. The Jewish community has very specific rules regarding death and how bodies are handled so once the scene has been ruled safe they would be invited in to begin caring for the dead.

Conclusion

The agencies that would be involved in a terror act at the Jewish Community Center seem to be extremely prepared for such an event. The table top exercise shows that they are aware of the threat and taking terrorism seriously. After talking to multiple agencies and multiple people from those agencies, the one thing that could be done better is communication from those that attended the table top exercise to the line officers and firefighters that will be actually carrying out this plan.
Appendix A
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References

Weghorn, C. (2015, November 17). Email Interview

Lutz, J. (2015, November 17). Personal Interview

Stamm, J. (2015, November 18). Email Interview

Puthoff, J. (2015, November 19). Personal Interview

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