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Los Angeles Sheriff's Deputy Ted Broadston says Americans have a tendency to let their guard down when it comes to staying alert about terrorism.

Sheriff's Deputy Broadston Combats Complacency with Transit Terrorism Awareness Class

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

(Jan. 21, 2009) Training employees to stay alert and report suspicious looking people or incidents on Metro property is just one of the tasks Los Angeles County Sheriff's Deputy Ted Broadston sets out to accomplish during his Transit Terrorism Awareness Training Class.

Broadston has been training Metro employees and consultants for years at transit- sponsored classes and feels strongly that Metro's employees "are really on the front line when it comes to protecting Metro's customers and passengers."

Using a dummy pipe bomb and simulated radioactive powder as props, Broadston is very specific during his training sessions, explaining in detail what Metro employees should be on the lookout for.

The highly-trained deputy provides his students with potential scenarios with the first lesson being that those who want to cause harm are usually pretty smart.

"If you're a bomber and you want to get a bomb some place, what are you going to make it look like," he asks. "You're not going to have sticks of dynamite taped together with a battery and a clock taped to the top of

it and try to set it some place, and have nobody notice it."

Situational awareness

Similarly when you see a suspicious person, "he or she won't be that obvious."

"Sometimes information that seems insignificant might be part of a larger important event," said Broadston.

If a tourist is taking pictures of a bus depot, that's different than if a person is taking pictures of a bus depot three days in a row. "Pay attention to your surroundings and report things that are suspicious," he advises.

Broadston uses examples as he teaches, noting that fortunately most reports turn out to be false alarms.

In one instance, an employee intercepted what appeared to be a bomb in a Metro mailroom. The supervisor evacuated the mailroom and called for help.

The entire building was evacuated before someone pointed out that the suspicious device was actually an obsolete bus transponder from the RTD days. "If you don't know that and this shows up on your desk, it's suspicious," Broadston said pointing to the plastic tube-like device that triggered the alert.

Broadston's class includes a 20-minute video offering important suggestions for employees such as reporting security weaknesses like broken fences, open gates and defective locks. The video urges employees to follow Metro standard safety procedures every day when conducting routine vehicle and area inspections and encourages employees to always wear the proper uniforms and security badges assigned for their positions.

"As transit employees, we are the first line of defense against those who wish to disrupt and disable America's public transportation system," the voiceover says. "So it's imperative that we know what to do if and when we encounter the warning signs of transit terrorism."

Complacency has a cost

A commonly heard recording on Metro's rail lines and stations, for example, encourages passengers to keep an eye out for unattended bags and packages.

The taped message has spurred many passengers to call and report suspicious activity with the call volume actually increasing following major events such as the recent foiled Christmas Day terrorist bombing attempt on a Detroit-bound passenger plane.

"If there's a big event somewhere here or in another country, then our suspicious package calls and suspicious stuff calls will go up because people are scared and concerned," he said.

However, complacency is one of the main reasons why such incidents occur in the first place.

People let their guard down, Broadston notes and terrorists and criminals are always on the look-out for the easy target.

"They're not looking for the person who appears to be paying attention.

They're not looking for the biggest guy. They're not looking for the transit system with the best security," Said Broadston. "They're looking for the easiest place to get into."

The next Metro Transit Terrorism Awareness class is scheduled for March 9 at the Gateway Building.

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