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REAL ESTATE  
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SHARING AND  
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CENTER

THE APRIL 2013 BOSTON  
MARATHON TERRORIST  
BOMBINGS: IMPLICATIONS AND  
LESSONS LEARNED FOR  
COMMERCIAL PROPERTY  
OPERATIONS

RE-ISAC: SECTOR INCIDENT ANALYSIS | 15 May 2013

Numerous questions remain about the 15 April 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, regarding the suspects, their associations, motives and possible foreign connections. As the investigation proceeds, many details about the plot and how it might have been prevented will emerge. The impacts of the bombings and subsequent crime scene investigation on commercial properties in the immediate area, however, have already become apparent.

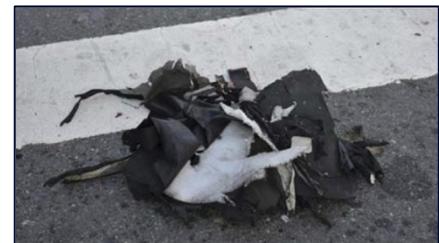
What follows is a brief explanation of how an incident such as this can, and most likely will, impact commercial property operations within relative proximity of a major terrorism incident. It addresses how property owners and operators can better protect their properties and building occupants before and during mass gathering events that could become a target of a terrorist incident (what law enforcement refers to as "left of BOOM"), what they are likely to be called upon to do afterwards ("right of BOOM") to assist in the investigation and how all of this is likely to impact their property operations and building occupants far into the future.

## TIMELINE

The events surrounding the Boston Marathon bombings and subsequent investigation allegedly evolved as follows:

Monday, 15 April:

- 2:38 PM: Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev are first observed on Boylston Street near Copley Square, the site of the Boston Marathon finish line in central Boston. They are observed together approximately one-half block from the site of the second explosion.
- 2:41 PM: Tamerlan Tsarnaev begins walking toward the finish line carrying a backpack.
- 2:45 PM: Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, also carrying a backpack, begins walking toward the finish line with his right thumb hooked under his backpack strap and a cellphone in his left hand; he stops in front of the Forum Restaurant at 755 Boylston near the metal barricades separating spectators from the marathon contestants and then allegedly places his bag on the ground. He remains there for approximately four minutes. About 30 seconds before the first bomb detonates, he speaks briefly on his cellphone.
- 2:50 PM: Within seconds of completion of the call, the first device detonates near the marathon finish line. Video coverage shows that while virtually every person in the crowd turns toward the explosion in apparent alarm and then begins running in the opposite direction in apparent fear, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev glances toward the explosion down the block and then calmly but rapidly begins moving to the west, away from the direction of the finish line. His demeanor is noticeably different from that of the remainder of the crowd. His knapsack remains against the metal barricade where he had placed it.





- 2:50 PM: Approximately ten seconds later, the second device apparently concealed in Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's backpack detonates.
- 3:19 PM: Police begin locking down Copley Square to search for additional improvised explosive devices and to begin a thorough investigation of the crime scene.

Thursday, 18 April (T+3 days):

- 5:00 PM: FBI releases images of the two bombing suspects during press conference.

Friday, 19 April (T+4 days):

- 4:00 AM: Boston and Cambridge police confirm that two men involved in the fatal shooting of an MIT campus police officer and a subsequent vehicular chase into Watertown and shootout are the same individuals believed to be involved in the Boston Marathon bombing. They are identified as Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and police reveal that Tamerlan has died as a result of his injuries.
- 5:30 AM: Massachusetts Governor Duval Patrick suspends all public transit service on the MBTA system, instructs all Boston area businesses to remain closed pending successful apprehension of the second bombing suspect and instructs Boston area citizens to shelter-in-place within their homes. All area schools are ordered closed.
- 7:00 PM: Police surround a home in Watertown where they believe the suspect is hiding under the tarp of a boat located in the backyard.
- 8:50 PM: Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is taken into custody.

Wednesday, 24 April (T+9 days):

- 3:00 AM: City authorities reopen Boylston Street and the area surrounding Copley Square following completion of the crime scene investigation. Commercial properties within the crime scene begin to reopen on the morning of 24 April, *nine days following the bombing*.

## PRE-INCIDENT ("LEFT OF BOOM") PREPARATION

The Boston Marathon is a major national sports event that is widely publicized internationally and that is attended by thousands of runners and tens of thousands of spectators from all over the world. As an outdoor event that draws huge crowds, attractions such as the marathon present a highly desirable soft target to domestic or international terrorists who seek to cause

mass casualties, have a significant negative impact on the US economy and generate international media attention.

Providing adequate security for mass outdoor events is an extremely challenging task given the number of people attending, the event's geographic footprint, the need to provide spectators open access to the event's activities and the fluid nature of crowd dynamics. Event organizers, whether local municipalities or private organizations, typically draw upon the vast resources of Federal, state and local law enforcement and counterterrorism agencies to establish as high a security standard as is feasible within these constraints hoping to dissuade terrorists from targeting the event or to detect and disrupt or neutralize their activities if they elect to do so. The size and importance of the event typically dictates the amount of resources that authorities will expend in establishing a security program.

Commercial properties within relative proximity of the event have a great deal at stake in ensuring that appropriate security measures are taken but for those closest to the event's activities, the stakes can be enormous. While it is often tempting to leave event security planning to the "experts" and focus solely on ensuring the safety of the building's occupants and controlling unauthorized access to the property by spectators, this may not be the most prudent approach since a terrorist attack against the event can have catastrophic impacts on the property, its occupants and operations. A strong case can be made for direct involvement in the event security planning process to ensure that the plan is based on a realistic understanding of the area in which the event is to take place by leveraging the property management team's intimate knowledge of normal patterns of activity and potential security vulnerabilities of the area surrounding their property. It also integrates property security into the overall event security program, providing a force-multiplier to event security personnel and enhanced situational awareness to the property management team. Likewise, participation in neighborhood organizations that serve a community liaison function with local authorities can also provide property owners excellent insights into the how an event may affect them in addition to providing a valuable network of other property owners and operators in the immediate vicinity.

The detection of suspicious pre-operational surveillance in advance of a terrorist incident is the most effective way to disrupt a terrorist operation before it is carried out. Once a terrorist or terrorist group decides to attack a mass outdoor event, however, there are relatively few options to detect and neutralize the plot short of establishing an impermeable security perimeter and searching all who enter. One effective option is the use of vapor wake dogs that can detect minute aerosol traces of explosives in the wake of persons who have been in contact with or may be carrying explosives as they move through the crowd. Another is to detect anomalous behavior on the part of individuals in the crowd through the use of Behavior Pattern Recognition (BPR) techniques. The marathon bombing suspects' cool demeanor prior to setting down their backpack bombs and after the first device detonated compared to the behavior of legitimate spectators as documented on video was notable and could have been detected by an astute, trained observer. Either of these measures may have identified the marathon bombers before they were able to detonate their explosives.

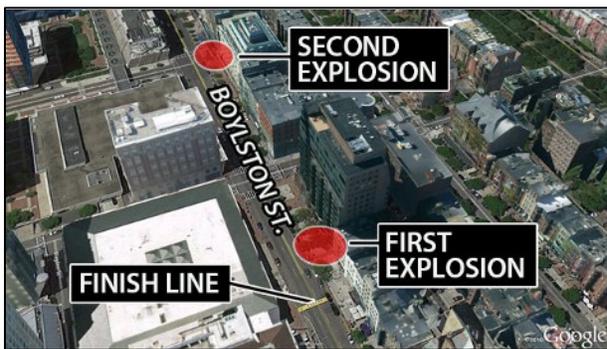
The importance of ensuring that CCTV equipment is fully functional at commercial properties in relative proximity to the event cannot be over-emphasized. Property owners and operators should ensure that all cameras are functioning properly and directed at key areas in and around the property. Properly operating and monitored CCTV systems can be invaluable in detecting pre-operational surveillance and casing activity in advance of an incident as well as a critical element of the investigation should an incident actually occur.

## IMMEDIATE POST-INCIDENT (“RIGHT OF BOOM”) RESPONSE

Assuming that terrorists’ pre-operational activities go undetected and they successfully carry out their plan, the impact on commercial properties in close proximity to the attack is immediate and profound. Following the detonation of an improvised explosive device, the single most important priority becomes protecting building occupants and staff from further harm and rendering aid to those who have been injured.



In an explosives attack, a common tactic is to set off a primary explosive device intended to draw first responders to the scene followed by the detonation of one or more secondary devices intended to kill or injure as many responders as possible. For this reason, the period immediately following an explosion remains highly perilous despite the need to assist the injured and to facilitate the arrival and activities of first responders. A number of steps should be taken almost immediately following the detonation of an Improvised Explosive Device on or in the immediate vicinity of a property:



- Issue a shelter-in-place order for all building occupants, regardless of whether local authorities have done so.
- Call 911 if authorities may be unaware of the incident.
- Evacuate all uninjured and ambulatory injured from the area and remove them to a safe, controlled area.

- Establish a security cordon around the site of the incident and ensure that no personnel from the building enter it unless they are trained emergency responders and are doing so to render assistance.
- Search for any unattended items that may contain additional explosive devices. If suspect items are found, immediately evacuate the area, establish a security cordon and alert law enforcement. DO NOT TOUCH, INSPECT, HANDLE OR MOVE SUSPICIOUS ITEMS.
- Check for fires at the property that may have been caused by the explosion.
- Account for all property management staff personnel and have tenants account for their personnel. Notify first responders if any persons believed to have been in the area of the explosion at the time of the blast are unaccounted for.

Once first responders have arrived on-scene, follow their directions. Their first priority will be to triage victims, administer first aid to stabilize the most severely injured and arrange for their speedy transport to a medical facility. They will most likely instruct you to close the building until further notice and to send occupants/tenants home. Some building occupants are likely to be in shock or traumatized by the event. You should consider the following measures to assist them in evacuating the building:

- Have occupants depart the building through one or more exits that do not have line-of-site to the area where the explosion occurred or where injured persons may be. If that is not possible and if materials are available, attempt to shield the area from view by establishing a temporary barrier using tarps, plywood or other items.
- Identify any individuals who may be in shock. Have them lie down in a safe area, elevate their feet and seek medical assistance from first responders. If possible, have someone stay with them until medical assistance arrives.
- Identify any building occupants with special needs and assign a person to assist them to safely evacuate the building.
- Search the building to ensure that all have evacuated.

## MID-TERM RESPONSE

Once occupants have been evacuated and the injured attended to, law enforcement will declare the area a crime scene and will begin a thorough forensic exploitation of any evidence that could be used to identify the perpetrators and to assist in their conviction if they are apprehended. Crime scene investigation is a lengthy process in which all physical evidence must be identified, photographed in-place, catalogued and sterilely removed for further analysis in a laboratory setting. Physical chain of custody must be established for all evidence before it is removed from the site in order to be admissible in court. Fragments of the explosive device must be collected and analyzed for the type of explosive used as well as the methods of

construction and concealment. The effects of the bombing on the property and other nearby structures or objects must also be recorded, as well as the locations of victims when the incident occurred and the bomb's effects on them. Thorough exploitation of the site of a bombing can very easily exceed a week in duration, and the property most likely will remain closed by the authorities until the investigation is completed.

As soon as the scene is stabilized, law enforcement will require access to the building's Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) if a CCTV system is installed to examine security camera coverage for images that may assist in the investigation. This may be done on-site or authorities may physically remove the DVRs for analysis in a laboratory setting. Building management staff also may be called upon to provide access to areas of interest within the property but may be instructed to vacate the premises as the investigation proceeds. In some instances, authorities may grant engineering personnel access to the building during the investigation but this is not guaranteed. Since the building is likely to be closed for an extended period, it may be necessary to shut down systems that could require maintenance or adjustment during that period unless the required work can be performed remotely.

Building occupants may request access to their spaces during the course of the investigation to retrieve personal and work-related items and this will require prior authorization from the authorities in charge of the investigation. If the building is likely to be closed for an extended period due to the investigation or to permit the repair of damages sustained in the explosion, it also may be necessary to arrange for temporary space for tenants or occupants and this task may fall upon the building's owner, property manager or leasing agent depending on whether the property is owner occupied, a sole occupancy or multi-tenant property. A careful analysis of lease agreements and the terms and conditions of liability and business interruption insurance policies will help define the respective rights and obligations of all parties.

## **RETURNING TO NORMAL**

Any property directly affected by a terrorist bombing will face a series of challenges following completion of the investigation and before it can reopen. First will be repairing any structural and cosmetic damage that the property sustained as a result of the incident and much will depend on whether the authorities permit work to commence while the investigation is still ongoing. If not, an even lengthier closure is likely. Of course, a thorough inspection of the property to identify and remediate any remaining vestiges of the event is essential.

A second issue is less concrete but perhaps even more critical: fostering a positive disposition toward the property in the minds of the public, and being sensitive to and addressing the concerns of occupants, staff and/or tenants who may have been consciously or subconsciously traumatized by the event. A carefully planned and managed reopening ceremony that respectfully pays homage to victims, first responders and volunteers, including property staff and occupants, who rendered assistance immediately following the terrorist event may help turn a potential negative into a strong positive. The assistance of a firm specializing in crisis

communications and/or public relations can be invaluable in planning and implementing such a campaign.

Accommodating those at the property who may have been psychologically traumatized by the event can be challenging but staff must remain sensitive to potential issues when the property is reopened and long afterward as concerns may not immediately manifest themselves. Modifying previous standard operating procedures by visibly increasing security, giving occupants or tenants alternate means of entering and exiting the building to avoid the area where the incident occurred or arranging for security escorts for persons entering or leaving the building after hours are all things that owners and managers may have to consider as they transition back to normal operations. Arranging for grief counselors to be available to property occupants may also be of great value during the transition period.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mass outdoor events that take place in close proximity to commercial properties have been and will remain of targeting interest to domestic and international terrorist groups. Properties' active participation in security planning in advance of a major event is essential to make sure that security planners have full knowledge of the area in which the event is to take place, that neighboring properties' security programs are integrated into event security and that properties benefit from the situational awareness that direct involvement provides. The manner in which a property responds immediately following an incident is critical to both victims and building occupants and property owners and operators must prepare themselves for potentially lengthy closures as investigations are completed and repairs made. Reopening properties should be carefully managed to accommodate the sensitivities of potentially traumatized building occupants and to any dispel any potential negative association to the property in the public's mind.