

# Independent Guide

## What is the real risk of Bioterrorism?



Independent workplace compliance

### What is the real risk from bioterrorism?

The risk that biological and chemical agents will be used deliberately to cause harm has historically been very low outside wars. However, in a time of international conflict and terrorist activity, it is easy to become paranoid about biological and chemical agents being used in the UK. We have examined the advice from a number of sources concerning this issue, ranging from the World Health Organisation (WHO) to the UK Public Health Laboratory Service. Without exception, the key piece of advice they offer is - DON'T PANIC.

If someone is determined to use a biological or chemical agent, particularly through a deliberate airborne release, there will be very little any business can do to stop them. If such an attack were to occur, it is unlikely to be preceded by a warning. Therefore, ensuring that you have good security in and around your building and a structured business continuity plan is about the most you can do to prevent and deal with a bioterrorism event. The WHO has a global system of surveillance and response to help ensure that the world is not taken by surprise by a sudden outbreak. In addition, the British Government continuously monitor and assess the risk of a bioterrorism attack and will do everything in their power to prevent it.

### What are biological agents?

Appendix 1 lists a number of viruses and bacteria that could theoretically be used as biological agents. With the exception of the deliberate release of anthrax through the postal system in the USA, there are no recorded cases of any of those biological agents listed being used as bioterrorism weapons.

### What are chemical agents?

Cases where chemical agents have been used to inflict injury or death are rare, but not unprecedented. In 1994 and 1995, sarin was used in two terrorist attacks in Japan. Further details on this agent, and ricin, which featured in the British press at the beginning of 2003, are contained in Appendix 1.

### What guidance is available on dealing with a bioterrorism attack?

Following the anthrax outbreak in 2001, which resulted in 22 cases and five fatalities, the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health have jointly provided 'guidance for protecting building environments from airborne chemical, biological or radiological attacks'.

### What does this guidance say?

The specific guidance given by the US CDC on protecting building environments from airborne bioterrorism have recommendations under four general categories:

#### 1. Things not to do

Do not permanently seal the outdoor intakes.

Do not modify the HVAC Systems without first understanding the effects on the building systems or the occupants.

Do not interfere with the fire protection and life safety systems.

#### 2. Physical security

- Preventing access to outdoor fresh air intakes, by either relocating any ground level intakes to a higher level or, where they cannot be relocated, extending the outdoor intake to a higher level and by establishing a security zone around any outdoor intakes to make them inaccessible.
- Preventing public access to mechanical areas.
- Preventing public access to building roofs.
- Implementing security measures such as guards and/or alarms to protect vulnerable areas.
- Isolating lobbies, mail rooms, loading docks and storage areas from the rest of the building.
- Protecting exhaust air grilles to the outdoors.
- Restricting access to building operations systems by off-site personnel.
- Restricting access to any information on the building services.
- Upgrading the general building physical security.

**This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting. Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent compliance consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. We have over 30 years' experience of helping customers of all sizes, from across all sectors, manage their compliance responsibilities, making sure that their organisation is compliant, their employees are safe, their processes are cost effective and their management team is in control.**



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