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GSA's Security Strategy

The process we follow with any one of our client agencies is, first of all, to conduct a security assessment or to determine the level of threat that applies to a given building. This is based on several factors, the most important of which is the number of federal employees in the building. If there are more than 450 employees, then in most cases it is rated at security level four or higher.

In addition, if an agency is a very high-visibility law enforcement related organization, such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (which was the target in Oklahoma City), it could also be level of security four even if there were less than 450 employees at the site.

Then we assess the kinds of threats that are presented at each individual building. For example, if a building faces a long street that ends at a T-intersection just in front of it, then the risk of a vehicle bomb coming down that long street and ramming into the building is higher than if the building were on the corner of a four-way intersection.

Once we complete that assessment, we take three different types of measures. If it's an existing building, we limit ourselves to two issues. One is operational. We want to monitor access to the building, put in magnetometers, X-ray machines, security guards, maybe television cameras. We might, if there is public parking, inspect the undercarriages of cars entering the garage.

The second is perimeter security. What we were trying to do, before NCPC moved forward with this plan, was to articulate the value of trying to find architecturally compatible perimeter security to install on our around our buildings. Obviously,



that's expensive. It depends on appropriations, and we cannot always move as fast as we would like. In the interim, we may have to install less attractive, temporary barriers.

Finally, if we are undertaking a major renovation of an existing building, or constructing a new building from scratch, we could engage in activities like building hardening, protecting against progressive collapse, or reglazing the windows so they don't shatter and send shards of glass flying into the building.

Now there is the problem of security creep. We've been doing this since 1995, but until Sept. 11 some agencies did not take security issues that seriously. Now employees say, "Well, the people next door have barriers, why don't we have barriers?" even though we might conclude that a building has no threat from a vehicle bomb and doesn't need barriers. Bat-

tles sometimes arise between agencies and GSA about whether an agency needs the security it claims it needs.

The most significant aspect of the NCPC plan is that it deals with the already-built environment. That is where you have problems that are not amenable to new construction achieving the perimeter security requirements, unless you're narrowing the street, widening the sidewalk, things of that sort. You have to make do with less than our guidelines would suggest. So how do you make do in an attractive way? That's the question the plan tries to answer.

— Michael S. McGill

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