City of Virginia Beach
Police Department

Suicide Bomber Response
Field Guide

A Guide for Department Personnel

- Methods for the Appropriate Response to suspected or identified Suicide Bombers pre or post detonation

This Field Guide is Prepared and Updated by the Virginia Beach Police Department Special Operations Bomb Squad, Under the Approval of the Chief Of Police ________________________________
# Table of Contents

Purpose ............................................................................................................................................................ 3  
Policy ............................................................................................................................................................... 3  
   Background .................................................................................................................................................. 3  
   The Suicide Bomber - Background ............................................................................................................. 3  
Definitions ..................................................................................................................................................... 3  
Terrorist Tactics ............................................................................................................................................. 3  
Characteristics of a Suicide Bomber ................................................................................................................ 4  
Behavioral Factors .......................................................................................................................................... 4  
   Biographical Data ...................................................................................................................................... 4  
   Clothing Description ................................................................................................................................. 5  
   Physical Description ............................................................................................................................... 5  
   Characteristics of a Concealed Bomb ........................................................................................................... 5  
Legal Review .................................................................................................................................................... 5  
   Reasonable Suspicion ............................................................................................................................... 5  
   Probable Cause ....................................................................................................................................... 6  
   Lethal Force .............................................................................................................................................. 6  
Operations and Tactics .................................................................................................................................... 6  
   Communications ....................................................................................................................................... 6  
   Safe Distances and Evacuations ............................................................................................................... 7  
   General Operations and Tactics ............................................................................................................. 7  
Tactical Considerations ................................................................................................................................... 8  
Using Lethal Force ....................................................................................................................................... 9  
Post Suicide Bombing Incident ..................................................................................................................... 10  
   Response to an Exploded Device .............................................................................................................. 10  
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................... 11  
Appendix A – Graduated Force Option Protocol ......................................................................................... 12  
Appendix B – Suicide / Homicide Bomb Vest .............................................................................................. 13
Purpose

This Field Guide is designed to assist a first responder that may encounter a situation involving a suspected and/or identified suicide bomber prior to or post detonation. It should be noted that any occurrence of this type is to be considered an act of terrorism.

Policy

Background

Embedded cells of militants with international ties to terrorism, as well as domestic terrorists, pose the potential for suicide bombings and other attacks within our borders.

The bomber’s goal is to kill and injure as many people as possible through the detonation of explosives concealed on their person. For the purposes of this field guide the term suicide bomber is being used, however suicide bomber and homicide bomber are synonymous.

Suicide bombers generally target areas of dense population or specific high profile events and their attacks take many forms. This field guide will narrow the focus to suicide bombers. The purpose of this field guide is to assist officers in identifying a suicide bomber and to provide tactical considerations when attempting to interdict a suicide bomber.

The Suicide Bomber – Background

Suicide bombers can be well trained to carry out their mission. Some terrorist organizations train personnel for months in order to prepare for a single attack.

Definitions:

Conducted Energy Device (CED) – a weapon primarily designed to disrupt a subject’s central nervous system by means of deploying electrical energy sufficient to cause uncontrolled muscle contractions and override an individual’s voluntary motor responses\(^1\). Example – Tasers

Command Detonated – any device detonated by remotely controlled means\(^2\).

Terrorist Tactics

An attack by a suicide bomber can be well organized. However, “lone wolf” and individuals with suicidal motivations apart from organized terror should not be excluded.

Tactics may include planning, surveillance, and reconnaissance of the target. Officers should immediately contact the local office of the FBI (Norfolk) via the Virginia Beach Police Departments JTTF (Joint Terrorism Task Force) Representative if they encounter any person they believe is engaged in this type of activity.

Officers need to be acutely aware of the presence of the support team if they encounter a suspected bomber.

The body bomb is commonly worn on the upper torso in the form of a belt or vest (see attached photos Appendix B). These devices are easily detonated by activating a toggle or rocker-type switch that is either attached to the mid-section of the vest or carried in the hand. There may be a secondary detonation system.
present to allow detonation of the device even if law enforcement personnel interdict the bomber. Secondary timing devices may include a timing system or a fuse that is lit when the bomber arrives within close proximity to the target. A support team member may have the means to detonate the device remotely.


2 – Command Detonation definition obtained from U.S. Military (DOD, NATO) referencing command detonated mines, “A mine detonated by remotely controlled means.”

Officers need to be aware that a bomb can be placed in a backpack, briefcase, suitcase, or any other item that could conceal the explosives. Common items used in the past to disguise bombs include guitars, computers, TV cameras, boxes, gym bags, birdcages, and even a watermelon. The majority of these bombs are activated by the simple means of pushing a button or flipping a switch. In some incidents, cell phones have been used to activate the device.

Once the bomber arrives at the target location, the bomber will attempt to move to the center of the crowd to maximize the casualties. **If confronted, the bomber will usually detonate the bomb, rather than be taken into custody.** Just before activation of the bomb, the bomber will often raise both arms in the air to prevent any mitigation of the fragmentation and shrapnel caused by the presence of the bomber’s own body parts.

Characteristics of a Suicide Bomber

Because patrol officers are highly visible, they need to be familiar with these characteristics due to the potential for a chance encounter with a terrorist member. Officers may receive a radio call of suspicious activity from a variety of sources. Terrorists may survey a target, rent a truck, or buy bomb-making components, which may raise the suspicion of the public. Additionally, officers may observe a traffic violation and during the encounter see photos, diagrams, or bomb components. **The knowledge and initial observations of the officer are critical to establish reasonable suspicion to detain and probable cause to further investigate the activity.** Officers should look for more than one characteristic when making their initial observations before drawing conclusions of reasonable suspicion of a suicide bomber.

**Behavioral factors**

- Law enforcement officers should focus on behaviors rather than age, race, ethnicity, and gender in regard to suicide bomber suspects.
- Suicide bomber suspects may display behavioral anomalies that would draw attention to themselves (such as behaviors or indicators that would be out of the ordinary). However, law enforcement agencies should work to develop skills in identifying behavioral anomalies.
- Anomalies include:
  - Irregularity—something that deviates from the norm or from expectations.
  - Peculiarity—something strange and difficult to identify or classify.

**Clothing Description**

- The manner of dress is chosen to conceal a bomb.
Occasionally dressed as a woman (pregnant).
Inappropriate for warmer temperatures.
Will be baggy, ill fitting, unusually long or heavy.
Overly elegant.
Disguised to blend into community surroundings.
Stolen uniforms.

Physical Description

- Blank stare, wide-eyed, unresponsive, perspiring or preoccupied.
- Gaunt appearance (may look ill).
- Smiling or grinning.
- Muttering or talking to self.
- Any other stress-related symptoms associated with imminent death.

The following peculiar characteristics may be present because of the concealed bomb:

- Torso appears unusually bulky or inflated.
- Unusual or suspicious bulges.
- Torso appears stiff, or lacks flexibility.
- Uneven gait, difficulty walking.
- Visible explosive-laden belts, protruding from under clothing.
- Carrying a heavy or unbalanced backpack, suitcase, box or knapsack.
- Switch wire hanging from the sleeve.

The following are less common, but also may be present:

- Herbal or chemical smell emitting from the person due to the presence of poison(s) added to the device.
- Strong odor of peroxide (TATP).
- Strong odor of dead fish (HMTD).

Legal Review

It is important for responding officers to understand the legal and policy requirements for reasonable suspicion, probable cause, and the use of lethal force when attempting to investigate a potential suicide bomber.

Reasonable Suspicion

- Unusual activity has occurred, is occurring, or is about to occur.
- Unusual activity is related to a crime.
- The person detained is connected with the unusual activity.

When developing reasonable suspicion, officers should consider the following factors: the location, the manner of dress, the weather, the suspect’s overall appearance and actions. For example, if the suspect looks inflated, is wearing a heavy trench coat in hot weather, and is walking towards a large crowded location, the officers may attempt a detention.
Probable Cause

- The state of facts that would cause a reasonable and trained officer (or person of similar training and experience) to form an honest and strong suspicion that the person to be arrested has committed a crime.

Lethal Force

An officer is authorized to use lethal force when it reasonably appears necessary:

- To protect himself or others from an immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury, or
- **To prevent a crime where the suspect’s actions place persons in jeopardy of death or serious bodily injury, or**
- To apprehend a fleeing felon for a crime involving serious bodily injury or the use of lethal force where there is substantial risk that the person whose arrest is sought will cause death or serious bodily injury to others if apprehension is delayed.

There is no exception to the law or use of lethal force policy when encountering a suspected or confirmed suicide bomber. An Officer may not use lethal force to stop someone who is “merely” suspected of being a suicide bomber. The officer must have probable cause to believe the suspect is presenting an immediate threat to life before lethal force can be utilized. If an officer observes an explosive device attached to the suspect, and believes the suspect presents an immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or others, then lethal force is reasonable, since the officer is trying to “prevent a crime where the suspect’s actions place persons in jeopardy of death or serious bodily injury.”

Operations and Tactics

Communications

- Officers should limit the use of electronic communications in close proximity to a suspected suicide bomber.
- Officers should position themselves at least 100 ft. (6 police car lengths) away from a suspect if they use a handheld police radio (0-29 watts) in proximity to a suspected suicide bomber.
- Officers should position themselves at least 170 ft. (10 police car lengths) away from a suspect if they use a vehicle-mounted police radio (30–49 watts) in proximity to a suspected suicide bomber.
- Upon arrival at the scene, responding officers should report the following information:

  - Officers should request the response of specialized support units when threat and risk assessment dictates such a response.

Safe Distances and Evacuations

- When possible, officers should confront a suspected suicide bomber in an isolated or less populated area.
While every effort should be made to maintain a safe distance from a suicide bomb suspect, there may be unanticipated situations in which officers find themselves within close proximity to the suspect. Under these extreme circumstances, it may be necessary to grab a suspect’s arms and keep them away from the torso or in some other restraint tactic.

- If the bomber is on the ground while detained by an officer(s), officers should restrain the suspect’s hands to prevent movement.
- When maintaining a safe distance, officers should seek cover from a potential blast, heat and shrapnel from both the device and other objects (glass, bomb debris, etc.).
- Officers should attempt to contain the suspected suicide bomber, and should not allow the suspect to leave the area or enter a vehicle.

Where applicable, officers should evacuate endangered citizens.

- In evacuation decisions, officers should consider background and collateral injuries to bystanders upon the possible detonation of an explosive device.
- Officers should be aware that evacuation of persons from public areas or buildings could carry as great of a risk as keeping them in place.

Officers should remain vigilant in their efforts to detect secondary devices, additional suspects or attacks. Consideration should be given to deploying plainclothes officers to conduct such duties.

**General Operations and Tactics**

- Consider all suspected bombs to be live devices.
- If available, and if time allows, officers should not use Conducted Energy Devices (tasers) on a suspected suicide bomber.
- Shooting an area of the body that might contain a bomb carries an increased risk of detonation.
- If the area is secure and contained, officers should generally not approach a suspect (bag, vehicle, or body), even if a suspect is willing to surrender (or appears to be dead/incapacitated) until the explosives are rendered safe by bomb technicians.
- In order to manage the police response to a suicide bomber threat, the three below listed primary objectives should be considered when developing suggested defined tasks for the first officers arriving on the scene:
  1. Identify, locate, and contain the suspect, take cover, pass information back to a command center, and challenge the suspect if appropriate.
  2. Focus on warning bystanders, clearing the immediate vicinity of people, and securing witnesses/informants.
  3. Conduct perimeter search and surveillance activities, seeking secondary devices and/or accomplices.

- To avoid confusion and conflicting messages, a single lead officer should be designated to communicate with the suspect.

- Officers should attempt to seek compliance/ surrender of a suspected suicide bomber.
**Tactical Considerations**

There is no precise formula for interdicting a suicide bomber. However, in all situations, officer and public safety must remain paramount. When confronted by a possible suicide bomber in light of the totality of the circumstances, the following tactics should be considered. **Historically, when confronted by law enforcement, bombing suspects will often detonate the bomb, rather than be taken into custody.**

If the suspect is **AWARE** of the police officer(s) presence:

- Assume cover and maintain a tactical advantage.
- Do not approach, if possible.
- Maintain a reasonable (safe) standoff distance.
- Request assistance; deploy responding officers to covered positions.
- Order the suspect to stop all movement.
- Warn bystanders in the area to leave immediately.

If the suspect **complies** with the contact officer’s direction to stop:

- Have the suspect open the palms of both hands and demonstrate that nothing is contained within them.
- Have the suspect turn around and raise the outer garment to neck level.
- Once the suspect’s hands and waist area are visible and nothing of a suspicious nature is observed, the contact officer may order the suspect into a high risk kneeling or high risk standing position until arrival of the Bomb Squad.
- If the suspect is carrying a device in a backpack or similar vessel, officers should order the suspect to gently and slowly place the object on the ground and have the suspect step away from the device.
- Officers should remain in a position of cover and evacuate any bystanders.
- Request the Bomb Squad.

If the suspect **does not comply** with the contact officer’s direction to stop:

- Continue to warn bystanders to leave the area.
- Maintain a position of cover and monitor the actions of the suspect.
- Based on the actions of the suspect, (i.e. the officers have established probable cause to believe the suspect is in possession of an explosive device AND they believe the suspect represents an immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury to themselves or others, **officers may utilize lethal force to stop the suspect.**

If the suspect has been neutralized:

- Do not approach the suspect.
- Do not allow others to approach the suspect.
- Immediately evacuate the area (the explosive device may still be detonated by other means).
- Seek and maintain cover.
- Await the arrival of the Bomb Squad.

If the suspect is **NOT AWARE** of the police officer(s) presence:
Officers may:

- Assume cover and maintain a tactical advantage.
- Maintain a position of cover and monitor the actions of the suspect.
- Maintain a reasonable (safe) standoff distance.
- Request assistance; deploy responding officers to covered positions.

Based on the actions of the suspect, (i.e. the officers have established probable cause to believe the suspect is in possession of an explosive device AND they believe the suspect represents an immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury to themselves or others), officers may utilize lethal force to stop the suspect.

If probable cause Does Not exist to utilize lethal force:

- Officers may elect to announce their presence and follow recommendations described for a suspect that is AWARE of the police officer(s) presence
- If the suspect is believed to no longer present a threat, officers should stop and detain the suspect and conduct an investigation.

While every effort should be made to maintain a safe distance from a suicide bomber suspect, there may be unanticipated situations in which officers find themselves within close proximity to the suspect. Under these extreme circumstances, it may be necessary to grab the suspect’s arms and keep them away from the torso (chest) or in some other restraint tactic.

- Once the suspect’s arms are secured, officers should give verbal commands to the suspect, explain their actions and attempt to gain voluntary compliance. Officers should avoid taking the suspect to the ground to avoid accidental detonation.

Using Lethal Force

When a suspect has been neutralized

- Do not approach the suspect.
- Do not allow others to approach the suspect.
- Immediately evacuate the area (the explosive device may still be detonated by other means).

- Seek and maintain cover.
- Await the arrival of the Bomb Squad.

Post Suicide Bombing Incident

When a suicide bombing occurs, the post blast crime scene will be bloody and chaotic, requiring officers to be emotionally and mentally prepared to take control of the incident. Officers must remain focused because there may be significant threat to rescue personnel in the form of secondary devices, blood-borne pathogens, hazardous chemicals, and the potential for structural collapse. The purpose of this field guide is
to prepare officers to respond to a suicide-bombing incident and will only address specific information regarding suicide bombings.

**Response to an exploded device**

As with any bombing incident, officers must look for the presence of secondary devices placed to kill first responders. The initial bomb may have been detonated to draw first responders to the location where a second bomb has been planted. The explosive device may be in the form of a car bomb or concealed in a trashcan or other item large enough to hide explosives. Terrorists have used common items such as thermos bottles, backpacks, and flashlights to disguise their bombs. The devices may be command detonated by remote means such as the use of a cellular telephone wired into the firing mechanism of the bomb, or by means of a timer. Terrorists may place secondary devices at main points of ingress and egress, as well as possible Command Post (CP) locations, to maximize the potential for injury and death to first responders. If a possible secondary device is located, the area around the device should be immediately evacuated in all directions and then handled as any other suspected explosive device.

Another hazard to first responders at the scene of a suicide bombing involves blood-borne pathogens. Due to massive trauma caused by the explosion, there will be a tremendous amount of bodily fluids and tissue present. These fluids and tissue can contain human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis, or other blood-borne pathogens. In recent attacks in the Middle East, suicide bombers have been found to be infected with HIV and hepatitis, which can contaminate both bomb victims and first responders. Anyone who might encounter body fluids or tissue should wear personal protective equipment (PPE), including a mask, gloves, jumpsuit, apron and boot covers. Each officer is issued a basic level C PPE kit and should carry this equipment with them while on duty.

**Do not** approach the suspect or the suspect’s remains. In addition to the threat of secondary devices, there may be undetonated or partially detonated explosives present on or near the suspect. Evacuate the area from the location of the bombing. Body bombs can cause severe structural damage including downed electrical lines and ruptured gas and water pipes. To ensure the safety of the public and first responders, officers should immediately establish a large crime scene perimeter. A general rule for a post blast crime scene perimeter is to look for the furthest blast debris/damage from the center of the explosion and then double that distance. Blast debris should not be moved or examined by anyone except Bomb Squad personnel. The location of the debris can give clues as to the type of device used. Because blast debris can spread in wide areas, vehicle tires and shoes can pick up key blast evidence, so if possible they should be checked before leaving the perimeter. Evidence preservation should never supersede rescue operations.

It is the responsibility of officers on the perimeter to limit access in and out of the blast area/crime scene. This will reduce crime scene contamination, and further injury caused by a secondary device. Once the Fire Department has completed the rescue mission, no one should be allowed to enter the post blast crime scene until the Bomb Squad has cleared the area. Blast debris should not be moved or examined by anyone except Bomb Squad personnel. The location of the debris can give clues as to the type of device used. Because blast debris can spread in wide areas, vehicle tires and shoes can pick up key blast evidence, so if possible they should be checked before leaving the perimeter. Evidence preservation should never supersede rescue operations.

The Incident Commander should assign an officer to record the hospitals where the victims are transported. This can be coordinated through EMS (emergency medical services). Officers should then be assigned to each hospital to gather victim information, record any statements and preserve evidence pending the arrival of detectives assigned to investigate the bombing. Remember that one of the injured may have been a participant in the bombing. The Incident Commander should also assign someone to locate any security cameras that may have captured the incident on tape. Security tapes should be recovered as soon as possible to avoid any critical images being lost. All tapes of the affected area that
are available, regardless of the date recorded, should be recovered, since they may show terrorists scouting the location weeks or even months prior to the incident.

Conclusion

In the interest of public safety, it is imperative that law enforcement assumes a proactive role in countering suicide bombers. Officers can help prevent attacks by remaining vigilant to signs of terrorism, reporting suspicious activity, understanding trends, and being tactically prepared. As stated previously, there is no precise formula to be applied to a suicide bomber incident. Police officer and public safety will always remain our highest priorities.

Officers must be mentally prepared to contend with the chaos and carnage caused by a suicide bombing incident. Officers need to look for possible secondary devices and wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment to reduce the risk to themselves or others. By being prepared, the first officers on the scene of a suicide bombing incident will have the knowledge to prevent further casualties, preserve crucial evidence, and assist in the apprehension of additional suspects.
## Appendix A

### Graduated Force Option Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THREAT ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>SUICIDE BOMB INCIDENT SCENARIO</th>
<th>GRADUATED FORCE INTERVENTION LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>Person acting suspiciously and:</td>
<td>Citizen contact: Conventional stop and/or frisk without firearms drawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. No device seen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. No intelligence other than call</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Possibly some behavioral anomalies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td>Person acting suspiciously and:</td>
<td>Armed felony stop (including less lethal options--not CED, ie. tasers) CED (Conducted Energy Devices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. No device seen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Suspicion from intelligence, Information, or behavioral anomaly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>Suicide bomb device observed or probable cause that device is present.</td>
<td>Armed Intervention Graduated Force Option Sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. When feasible, warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Critical shot to incapacitate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Detonation
Appendix B

SUICIDE / HOMICIDE BOMB VEST

Galvanized Pipe Bombs (Electrically Initiated)

Commercial Vest

On/Off Rocker Switch for Activation