

Potential Criminal Use of Self-Storage Facilities

Over the past several years, it has been the Virginia Beach Police Department's experience that professional narcotic traffickers and distributors are utilizing private storage facilities to store and conceal their drugs and/or proceeds of their illicit business. Of particular concern however, is the health and safety threat that this imposes on property owners, employees, and the surrounding neighborhood. For example, many of the chemicals used in the illegal manufacture of methamphetamine are volatile and toxic and can be potentially lethal even if exposed to in small amounts.

The Virginia Beach Police Department's Special Investigations' Interdiction Unit desires to make storage company owners and managers in Virginia Beach aware of the problems we all face. The most effective means to address this problem is with your cooperation and support. You would not be acting as police agents, but merely reporting anything that may be an indication of illegal activity. You are aware of everyday operations of your property and what is considered normal comments and concerns from renters. We are asking that you advise us about the few renters that say, or do, something outside of the norm. By reporting this information you are not violating any rights of the renter; you are protecting your rights as the property owner and ensuring that renters conform to the rental agreement. Additionally, you are safeguarding your property from being used for illegal activity.

A detective will assess the information and determine the best course for the investigation; not all information provided will lead to an investigation. The property owner/manager will be advised of any police activity that occurs on their property. In most cases, a narcotics canine will screen the storage unit to determine if any narcotics are being stored. No search warrant is required for a canine sniff of the exterior of a storage unit. We draw little to no attention from other renters because of our plain clothes and plain vehicles.

We understand that your business reputation is important to your success. Future, and existing, renters will be pleased to know that your company takes the necessary steps to ensure that illegal activity does not occur on your property.

We ask that you report any actions or comments that are out of the norm and create a cause for concern. These actions do not have to equal illegal activity; they merely have to cause you to question the intended use of the storage unit. Reported information does not go on a renter's criminal record or implicate them in any wrongdoing.

As with possible terrorist activity, some of the behaviors of concern include customers who:

- Insist on paying cash (months in advance).
- Attempt to use false or incomplete information on rental application.
- Seem overly concerned about privacy.
- Visit the unit at unusual or odd hours, short stays, extended stays, & other people using the code.
- Exhibit suspicious behavior while in the unit; closes door while inside or shields activity or items in the unit.
- Have unexplained fumes, liquids, or substance coming from their unit.

Virginia Beach has a large number of storage facilities renting to thousands of people. The criminals have been using storage units for years to safeguard their enterprises. You provide a great service to our community; it is unfortunate that criminals can also use that service to their advantage. It is important to the community that we work together to stop criminal activity from occurring on your property. Your cooperation and assistance is needed to help expose these criminals.

If you have any concerns or questions about possible illegal drug activity occurring at your facility, call Special Investigations at our office number at (757) 427-1749 and ask for an interdiction detective.



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VIRGINIA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

James A. Cervera
Chief of Police

Crime Awareness Procedures for Operators of Self-Storage Facilities



Emergency Telephone: 911

Non-Emergency Telephone: 385-5000

A Certified Crime Prevention Community

VIRGINIA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Self-Storage Facilities Crime Awareness Bulletin

Potential Terrorist Use of Self-Storage Facilities

The Virginia Beach Police Department is concerned with the safety and welfare of the citizens and visitors of Virginia Beach. One of our strategies to combat crime is to increase public awareness concerning illegal activity. In support of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), we are requesting the assistance of storage facility owners, operators, and employees in the fight against terrorism. There have been recent discoveries indicating that Al-Qaeda may be planning an attack using improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Historically, terrorist plots that involve IEDs have utilized rental storage facilities to house parts of the bomb or other supplies until the plotters have the time to assemble the weapon or prepare for the attack. Examples of these plots include the following:

- In April 2004, eight individuals were arrested in the United Kingdom for their involvement in a plot to set off an ammonium nitrate bomb in London. The plotters had stored over 1,200 lbs of ammonium nitrate in a rented storage unit in the outskirts of London.

- In 1993, the members of the cell that conducted the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York had chemicals, 105 gallons of nitric acid and 60 gallons of sulfuric acid housed in a storage unit in New Jersey.

Analysis of terrorist preparations for past attacks overseas and in the United States suggests preoperational indicators may be present in the days or weeks prior to an attack. Alone, each indicator can result from legitimate commercial activity or criminal activity not related to terrorism; however, multiple indicators combined with other factors can possibly suggest a terrorist threat. By providing the following information to employees of storage facilities, we hope to enlist their help in preventing any future attack. To that end, owners, operators, and employees should be aware of suspicious activity by self-storage customers which may provide a possible indication of preoperational activity.

Behaviors of concern include customers who:

- Insist on paying in cash, sometimes weeks or months in advance.
- Seem overly concerned about privacy.
- Visit the storage facility late at night or at unusual times.
- Exhibit suspicious behavior when approached by rental employees or security personnel.
- Have unusual fumes, liquids, residues or odors emanating from their storage units.
- Display burns or chemical exposure symptoms and provide vague or irrational explanations for the injuries.
- Discard chemical containers in storage unit dumpsters.

Storage of the following items may also be cause for concern:

- Quantities of fuel.
- Agricultural or industrial chemicals.
- Agricultural equipment, such as commercial sprayers.
- Explosives, blasting caps or fuses.
- Weapons or ammunition.
- Flight manuals or other similar materials.
- Laboratory materials (e.g., flasks, sealed containers) or protective clothing (e.g., surgical masks, gas masks, rubber gloves, self-contained breathing apparatuses), incinerators, incubators, cell cultures, agricultural sprayers, improvised showers and eye baths, and textbooks and journals discussing biology, chemistry, explosives and poisons.
- Pesticides.
- Large delivery vehicles, vans, cargo containers, trailers or related equipment.

Storage unit personnel are encouraged to contact their local FBI office should any concerns arise regarding possible terrorist activities or behaviors. Contact information for field offices may be found by calling their local police departments or referring to www.fbi.gov. The non-emergency number for the Virginia Beach Police Department is (757) 385-5000. For emergencies, call 911.

- If large quantities of fertilizer, fuel, chemicals, or any quantity of explosives, blasting caps or fuses are observed or suspected on storage facility property please contact the Virginia Beach Bomb Squad at 911 for emergencies or (757) 385-5000 for non-emergency calls.

For further and more specific information on storage facility security concerns please reference the below listed Web Sites.

Fbi.gov (search-storage facilities)
Storagelaws.net
Insideselfstorage.com
Selfstorage.org
