

Dirty Bomb Drills Possibly a Waste of Time and Money

By Ashley Hafer Dec. 5, 2011 11:49 a.m.

A grant from the Federal Transit Administration funded a mock terrorist attack drill on the RTD in Englewood to help prepare emergency agencies for any future attacks that may happen.



Employee of an emergency agency taking away a contaminated passenger. (14:05).

ENGLEWOOD, Co. – [Dirty bomb](#) drills have been implemented all over the United States, but the effectiveness of responses to other disasters raises doubt about whether the drills are beneficial or not.

A simulated dirty bomb exploded on the RTD light rail train earlier today which contaminated many passengers due to the radiation exposure. Funded by the [Federal Transit Administration](#), participants believed this was an important drill in teaching local, state and federal emergency agencies what to do if a real attack were to occur.

"It has just as good a chance happening here as it does any place," said the public information officer of Englewood Department Safety Services Jim Ulrich. "I like to think that the more prepared you are for it, the less chance you have of it happening."

A [report by the Congressional Research Service](#) published in 2011 argues that past preparations for other types of tragedies have not lived up to expectations.

"Governments have planned responses to hurricanes, yet the overall response to Hurricane Katrina was poor," states the report. "The Deepwater Horizon disaster occurred despite the federal government's National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan."

It was the first time in the Western region for a simulation like this, but a total of more than 12 agencies responded and participated in the drill. Although several of these agencies have never worked together before, they came together and were said to be successful in the treatment of the 220 volunteers imitating injuries and after-effects of radiation.

After the Twin Towers were hit in New York, agencies realized that it was important to know how to handle such a crisis.

"What we've learned from [nine-eleven](#) and even before this is that they will strike wherever they find the vulnerability, or they find someplace where they think they can cause mass panic, or they can you know, ruin the economy," said Michael Brown, the undersecretary of [Homeland Security](#) and director of Federal Emergency Management Agency ([FEMA](#)).

The report by the Congressional Research Service highlights that after the hijackings, an unnecessary public fear was created causing people to worry more than they should.

Since the amount to carry out such a drill is extremely high, it is still being debated whether or not the cost outweighs the effect.

"Of nuclear, chemical, biological, and radiological weapons, the latter would arguably kill the fewest people," states the report. "Most planning, training, equipment, and supplies that would help respond to an RDD [radiological dirty bomb] attack would be of use in other disasters as well, so it is difficult to determine the balance between funds to counter all hazards and those to counter RDDs only."

The Federal Transit Administration is funding drills such as this one all over the country, making RTD the 14th transit agency in the nation to participate. There are currently 83 other agencies that have applied for the grant.

The topic is still being debated and no conclusions about whether or not the drills should be discontinued have been reached.

What should the money for dirty bomb drills be used for?

- Continuing dirty bomb drills*
- A different weapons of mass destruction drill*
- Something other than a drill*

