Bomb Threat or Threatening Call Checklist

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: Crisis Management, Crisis Communications

The danger of a possible fire or bombing is too great to ignore. All phone calls threatening bombs, arson, death or bodily injury should be treated as real expressions of the caller's intention to inflict injury or damage.

In the case of a letter bomb, the U.S. Postal Service and several other sources, advise training telephone receptionists [and anyone else who regularly answers the organization's telephones] to remain calm and ask the caller the following questions:

- What kind of bomb is it?
- What does it look like? Please describe it.
- Where is it located? Can you give us the office and floor number and building location?
- What will cause it to detonate?
- Many innocent people may be hurt; why are you doing this?
- What is your name and address?

The USPS says if the bomber's intentions are to damage property and not harm people, the receptionist may be able to elicit useful information before the caller hangs up. They advise "under no circumstances should the person taking the call hang up if the caller is still on the line."

The person taking the call should also attempt to write down the threat in the caller's own words, and record vocal traits and background noises that might help in identifying the caller during the official investigation.

The following sample checklist can be used as a reminder and to record of any type of threatening call, or it may be adapted to specific threats, such as bombs, by making the questions more specific to the threat. (See the six bomb-specific questions at the beginning of this piece.)

SAMPLE

Threatening Call Checklist

[Front of Sheet]

Instructions:

1. Be calm and courteous
2. Let the caller speak.
3. Keep the caller on the line as long as you can.
4. Record as much of the caller's conversation verbatim, as possible.
5. Notify your supervisor (or, if your supervisor is unavailable, the Executive Director) immediately after the call.
6. Don't tell anyone else about the call or caller.

Ask:

1. Who are you?

2. Where are you?
3. What do you want from us?
4. What are you going to do?
5. Why are you doing this?

[Back of sheet]

Threatening Caller Profile Checklist

Date: _____ Time of call _____a.m./p.m.

Your name: _____

Caller's Exact Words:

_____

Male _____ Female_____

Try to estimate the following while speaking to the caller:

Adult _____ Teen ____ Child _____
Approx. Age. _____

Circle any and all characteristics that apply to the caller:

Voice:
Loud
Highly pitched
Raspy
Soft
Deep
Pleasant
Monotone

Speech:
Fast
Distinct
Stutter
Slurred
Slow
Distorted
Nasal
Lisp

Accent:
Local
Foreign
Race
Region

Word Choice:
Very educated
Average
Poor
Foul
Other _____

Manner:

Calm
Rational
Coherent
Deliberate
Righteous
Angry
Irrational
Incoherent
Laughing
Crying

Background Noise:
Talking
Laughing
Music (describe _____)
Machinery
Typing
Traffic
Trains
Planes
Boats
Restaurant/Bar
Party
Quiet

Building Knowledge:
Very familiar
Some familiarity
No familiarity

Assessing Your Vulnerability

No organization is completely immune from attack according to the USPS. Your organization's vulnerability depends on its exposure to foreign terrorism, domestic hate groups and workplace violence.

Organizations with foreign offices or activity; high-profile organizations whose services or programs are subjects of public controversy; and any recent downsizing, layoffs, employee threats or stalking are red flags indicating further assessment is wise.

Law enforcement finds that revenge appears to be the most common trigger of a bomb or bomb threat. The USPS says letter bombs are targeted most often at individuals, while placed bombs target organizations ad hoc and aim to injure whoever's in the way.

More Information

Read our book on crisis management: *Vital Signs: Anticipating, Preventing and Surviving Crisis in a Nonprofit*.