

ARTICLES

Terrorism and Commercial Vehicles

Jan 4, 2018

SOURCE: Transportation Security Administration / U.S. Department of Homeland Security

COMMERCIAL VEHICLES USED IN VEHICLE RAMMING ATTACKS

Commercial vehicles—distinguished by their large size, weight and carrying capacity—present an especially attractive mechanism for vehicle ramming attacks because of the ease with which they can penetrate security barriers and the large-scale damage they can inflict on people and infrastructures.

Furthermore, commercial trucks and buses are plentiful and routinely arouse no suspicion because of the exceptional access they have to structures and activity centers.



Commercial vehicles may be obtained for terrorist activity in a variety of ways, including:

- Insider threat – authorized commercial vehicle driver carries out or facilitates the attack;
- Hijacking – attacker gains control of a commercial vehicle by force;
- Theft – attacker steals a commercial vehicle;
- Rental – attacker rents a commercial vehicle; and
- Purchase – attacker purchases a commercial vehicle.

INDICATORS

Several indicators may suggest terrorists are planning a commercial vehicle ramming attack. Although a single indicator may not always warrant suspicion, one or more indicators might indicate an imminent attack, based on specific facts or circumstances. It is also important to note that a commercial vehicle ramming attack can occur with little to no warning.

The commercial vehicle industry should be aware of the following potential vehicle ramming attack indicators:

1. Unusual and unexplained modifications to commercial motor vehicles, such as attempts to reinforce the front of the vehicle with metal plates.
2. The purchase, rental, or request for temporary use of commercial motor vehicles, if accompanied by typical indicators such as nervousness during the purchase, paying in cash, or lack of familiarity with the vehicle's operations.

3. Attempts by a commercial vehicle driver to unnecessarily or unlawfully infiltrate areas where crowds are gathered.
4. Commercial motor vehicles being operated erratically, at unusual times, or in unusual locations, particularly in heavy pedestrian areas. 3 U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Terrorist Use of Vehicle Ramming Tactics." 2010. p.1
5. Presentation of altered or questionable driver's license, proof of insurance, credit cards, or other required documents when purchasing or renting vehicles.
6. Suspicious behavior on the part of a vehicle trainee, such as lack of interest in what type of work they will do, what route they will drive, or how much they will be paid.

HOW TO PROTECT AGAINST THE THREAT

Would-be terrorists can be stopped by some of the least-intrusive and lowest-cost means available: meaningful security awareness. Drivers and staff who both remain alert to potential threats and report suspicious activities to appropriate authorities are the most effective means of detecting acts of terrorism by a commercial vehicle.

SUMMARY

TSA recommends vigilance and preparedness to prevent the use of commercial vehicles in terrorist attacks. Commercial vehicle owners and operators should alert their staff to possible theft or hijacking of vehicles by would-be attackers and the importance of reporting suspicious activities to appropriate authorities.

Commercial vehicle owners and operators can also help their home community's business and law enforcement agencies by partnering to discuss the threat of vehicle ramming attacks and the security awareness, planning, and countermeasures which could mitigate the threat.

No community, large or small, rural or urban, is immune to attacks of this kind by organized or "lone wolf" terrorists. Good security is good business. TSA recommends that you take an active role in protecting your business and your community from this potential threat.

TAGS:

Transportation