

The Tactical Citizen's guide to
**UNDERSTANDING
IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE
DEVICES**



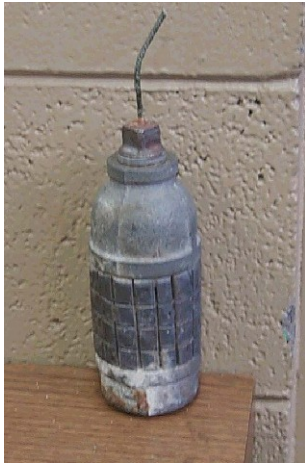
Introduction

May 18th, 1927. Bath, Michigan. Andrew P. Kehoe, frustrated by a pending foreclosure on his ranch and infuriated over high taxes levied upon him to pay for the tiny village's school, tied his wife to a small milk cart, [bludgeoned her to death](#), and then set his farm ablaze with her body still tied near the rickety hen coup. He loaded his truck with dynamite and old, rusty machinery and drove to the crowded school just eight miles northeast of Lansing and [detonated the vehicle](#). Thirty-eight children and six adults were killed in all, including the Kehoes. It was the worst ever intentional [mass killing of schoolchildren](#) in the United States. A few days later, Charles Lindbergh successfully crossed the Atlantic and the devastation in Michigan quickly retreated from the frontlines of newsworthy stories. The devastation had simply disappeared into history as fast as it had erupted.

The devastating effectiveness of improvised explosive devices (IED) – whether of the vehicular- (VBIED) or pedestrian-borne (PBIED) variety – is definitely not a new phenomenon by any stretch of the imagination. The “Philosophy of the Bomb”, indeed, has been around almost from the moment that man first fused raw hatred with gunpowder.¹ Today, the destructive power of the IED is nearly limitless – such as the 2,000-pound tamper-proof device that destroyed Harvey's Casino in 1980.² In the eternal battle between Chechen separatists and Russian soldiers, IEDs took on several designs that would appear years later in Iraq. These included books that detonated when opened, beer cans that blew up when the tab was pulled, and flashlights that killed their users when turned on.³

The word “improvised” bears scrutiny. Any object that you come into contact with may conceal explosives. A soda can, a leather satchel, a delivery van, or, more disturbingly, the body of any one of the shoppers passing you by while you shop. How will you know? How will you know that the iPod® being enjoyed by the fellow sitting next to you on the bus isn't really packed with explosives? What about the new air conditioning unit being installed within your office? What of the fire extinguisher sitting a few feet away from your desk at this very moment? The truth is, you simply can't. Not unless you remain one step ahead of the terrorists out to kill you and therein remains a significant challenge. How do you know from where a terrorist is likely to attack? By understanding what is “normal” within your environment, and what is not.

Improvised Mayhem



Undoubtedly, we've all heard of the notorious pipe bomb – a simple metal casing filled with gunpowder or some other explosive, sealed at both ends, and touched off with a fuse or a mechanical or electrical device such as Hollywood's favorite alarm clock. Many of us types that were more rambunctious in our hobbies may even have experimented with just such devices when we were children. The difference being, of course, is that our stupidity was not intentionally dangerous to our neighbors.

If you saw a device such as that pictured to the left hiding within the shrubbery at your office building, you would immediately know that it was not the mere prank of a student. Or was it? Again, you do not know and so your first course of action would have been to clear the immediate area and inform the authorities. *PRONTO!*

Where the danger is intensified vis-à-vis youthful experimentation is that terrorist improvised explosive devices often contain booby traps to prevent technicians from rendering them safe (see photograph at right). This means that you should immediately think of the following if you were ever to encounter a suspicious object:

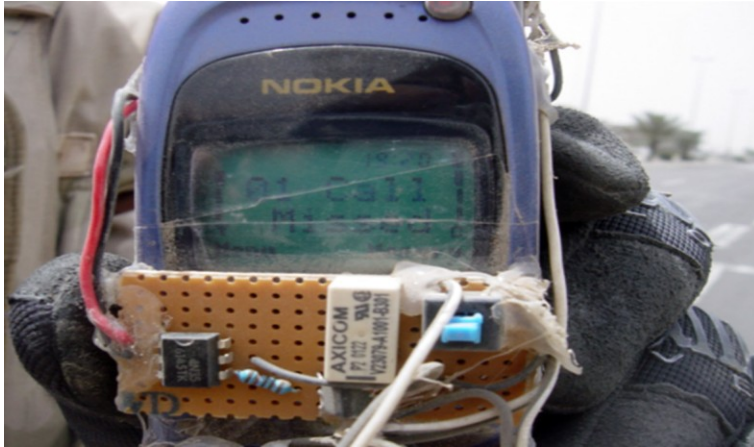


- The device likely contains both explosives and a mechanism to disperse shrapnel (roofing nails, razor blades, pieces of glass, ball bearings, etc.);
- The device likely contains one or more methods of initiation and just being “too close” may be “too late” for your safety and survival;
- The surrounding area may contain secondary devices or other “ambushes” designed to inflict harm on those approaching the device.

Remember, IEDs are designed to kill and/or maim; the more complicated the device appears the more likelihood its designer added “extras” to increase its lethality.

Merely providing any encountered device a wide berth may not be sufficient. Your best course of action – as far as permissible – is to retreat along the exact path from whence you came. You may not be able to see, for instance, the faint filament line

running along the ground until your feet have already snagged it. This tripwire, as unnoticeable as any length of fishing line on dry land, may lead to a simple shard of wood held within the grip of an otherwise innocuous clothespin. Your feet move the line, the line pulls out the piece of wood, the clothespin closes and – *voila!* – the metal clips glued to the mouth of the pin snap together and close the electrical circuit that provides the device with the ‘juice’ to detonate. *BOOM!* You and your co-workers are ground beef.



The Numbers Game

Now that I have your attention, let us run through some startling numbers. On any given day, there are about 4,000 trained Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD, a military descriptive) or Hazardous Devices (HD, a law enforcement descriptive) technicians serving the United States. Eager to have these fine men and women at their disposal rests about three hundred million souls oblivious to the dangers of IEDs. What this means, in layman’s terms, is that we have one qualified bomb squad technician for every 75,000 citizens. Yikes.

Prior to 9/11, the U.S. experienced approximately 2,000 bombings each year resulting in about 500-700 deaths annually.⁴ That is an average of five incidents per day.⁵ That does not sound *too* bad, does it? Well, let us consider the problem from a different perspective. The Michigan State Police Website says that its bomb squad consists of fifteen officers serving seven regions (and responding to approximately 500 calls per year).⁶ Two technicians can reasonably expect to handle a “routine” call. Now here is where criticality comes into play.



Suppose there are *eight* bomb threats (real or otherwise) called in at one time? Where does the extra support come from? Michigan has only two military installations of note – Selfridge Air National Guard Base northeast of Detroit and Camp Grayling halfway up the Mitten. Municipal agencies (Detroit, Grand Rapids, etc.) would have to respond, but are they as effectively trained and adequately supplied? What

happens when the threats exceed eight, nine, ten...? The critical issue then becomes not one of response, but of time.



Even fraudulent incidents tie up valuable resources for the on-scene unit cannot leave until they are “absolutely, positively” sure that it was all a hoax. The situation becomes even more critical if the IED is really an IND – improvised nuclear device. There simply are not enough qualified nuclear technicians within the United States to respond in a timely matter – one measured in several hours at best. But more on that in a later document. For now, however, we will concentrate on what you – John and Jane Q. Public – can do about the situation from your personal perspective.

For starters, you need to remove the cell phone from your ears and grow a sense of awareness greater than a dry soap dish. Think of yourself not as a bucket of saturated fat, but as an always-moving, always-thinking sensor. Your “sphere of awareness” extends outward in every conceivable direction and grows by the day. You are simply an invaluable node in America’s domestic intelligence network.

Street-level Intelligence

Quick question. Who is most likely to encounter an IED first?

1. A highly-trained and equipped bomb disposal technician;
2. A government official with full powers of delegation;
3. A common citizen.

This was not a trick question, but somehow I think that a few answered either #1 or #2. For the rest of us, it is we citizens who are the true “first responders” in any given crisis.

Consider, I live in a small town. The approximate population is probably on the order of ten thousand residents. One Sunday, during Mass, our deacon collapsed and stumbled onto the floor. As he hit his head during the tumble, an ambulance was

immediately called for. Well, in about twenty minutes, the firefighters arrived (from the next block). It took another twenty-five to thirty minutes for the ambulance to arrive from just down the street. Instead of an elderly, much stressed widower collapsing to the shock of both a priest and his congregation, what if this emergency entailed a legitimate bomb threat.

If it took the better part of an hour for a relatively minor medical emergency to receive “assistance”, what if it were a major terrorist crisis at hand? It would be appropriate, I feel, to offer that my humble community was also the same place where our illustrious police force once shot up a bunch of Spiderman cardboard cutouts on display because they believed them to be real armed assailants. Not exactly the kind of “local authority” I would feel comfortable with during an IED situation.

What the foregoing suggests is that it will be quite some time before the experts arrive to a scene involving an explosive device. Once they arrive, they will have to locate, examine, and respond to any suspicious objects. It would be nice if, somehow, you could relay to them that “there is a six-stick bundle of dynamite triggered by a Timex clock device that’s set to detonate in an hour and thirty minutes” but such information is well beyond your responsibilities and, frankly, no dedicated bomb technician would accept your word as valid anyway. Nevertheless, you do have a role in intelligence.

Your value to society comes from being a “first observer”. You are the one most likely to utter those infamous words “Oh, shit. That looks like a bomb.” The rest of humanity is predisposed to becoming victims instead of survivors. They pick up strange items best left alone, permit strange people to inquire of the time when they are best avoided, and expect to live complete lives without possessing any sort of contingency plan for when the shit actually does hit the proverbial fan.

To illustrate the effectiveness of intelligent “intelligence”, I would like to mention two cases from the past where an ordinary citizen might have been of some value to the authorities. The first example comes from 1997 when none other than Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Conner arrived home to discover an unmarked box wrapped neatly in black plastic upon her doorstep.⁷ The Montgomery fire department could not address the issue so they turned to the State of Maryland for assistance. Long story short, the mysterious black package was the stylistic wrapping of a particular shoe company; Justice O’Conner had ordered some shoes and the UPS driver inadvertently deposited the package upside down.⁸ It was, quite literally, judicial thinking, but from someone who had failed to remember their own actions. When you order any products, make damn sure you understand by whom – and how – they are delivered.

The second case involves the misidentification of a 13,000 volt (big ass!) electrical fuse found at the intersection of Third and Independence in Washington on January 3, 1995, just as the Republican Party was about to take control of Congress.⁹ The “experts” thought that it was a pipe bomb – albeit an enormously large and extremely well built one. Apparently, no one paid attention to its falling off the truck or was sufficiently well versed in technology to assist within its proper identification.

The proper application of intelligence (pun moderately intended) means that you consider, as brief examples, the following:

- Did that object fall off a passing truck, or was it intentionally *planted* there?
- That electronic gadget on the bench at school; was it left behind by some distracted student or was it placed there hoping to be picked up by a student?
- Did I order anything that might be contained within that box next to my front door?
- Why is that delivery van sitting so low to the ground, as if it is carrying far too much weight for its function?
- Was this new office equipment *really* ordered by the company?
- If that is an actual bomb, might the terrorists desire for me to run into a *specific* direction?

Feel free to embark upon other thoughts as suggested by the above.

The pertinent fact is that *you* are a fundamental node within the national security apparatus whether you believe yourself to be the case or not. Now, just imagine, if your local “neighborhood watch” project could aspire to the following:

“Each block is required to have a guard on duty around the clock. All vehicles passing by are reported by make, color, and license number. The guard is also to observe which residents return home late, whether they carry packages, and if they are accompanied by friends. Every passerby is noted, every visitor investigated. Even barking dogs must be checked out.”

“Guards are instructed to pay particular attention to occupants of cars arriving after dark. Not the slightest incident should be ignored; family quarrels, for instance, are to be reported.”¹⁰

Obviously, the foregoing would never work within Western, “privacy-loving” societies, but ‘What if? How many molested (or worse) children could we save if *someone* noticed a suspicious character moving through their midst? How many suicide bombers could be thwarted if people asked, “Why is that delivery van here and at *this* hour?” What of Islamic terrorists masquerading as “stressed out, disgruntled” workers? Could not lives be ultimately saved if someone had the raw courage to state, “Hey, this guy is just plain freaking my ass out!” Instead, we have military academics who spout such ridiculous thoughts as:

“What a tragedy for the world that not one of the great spiritual leaders – Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad or the Buddha – was brave enough to say that he did not believe in life after death.”¹¹

The real tragedy is that few of our great political leaders are brave enough to say that the West is at war for survival with radicalized Islam.

The November 5th, 2009 shooting down at Fort Hood, Texas was politically motivated terrorism, because the perpetrator wanted to kill his fellow countrymen over those residing within a foreign land that merely subscribed to his religious beliefs. This should be an outrage to millions of Americans who bombed Christian Italians, Germans, Austrians, and French, etc. by the hundreds of thousands.

You have to ultimately decide, do you want safety and survival? Or you do want guaranteed privacy? You cannot have both. Granted, I myself do not believe in kicking down someone’s door to discover what they are watching on the television, but when they are out on the highway, shopping within our stores, or sharing our office space, they are fair game.

There is nothing inherently illegal – or mischievous – about remembering the license plate numbers of suspicious (speeding, erratic, etc.) automobiles passing you along the highway. There is nothing wrong with paying attention to the faces and dress of shoppers who surround you at the local mall. If they possess the capability of influencing your life, then you have a right – and a responsibility – to suspect them.

Defending against IEDs

Let's be clear about what we're discussing here. We are not talking about rendering safe a discovered device or wearing body armor to prevent ourselves from being turned into pink mist. That's other peoples' responsibilities. That said, there are several things that you can do to prevent IED attacks before they occur. For starters, you can make your workplace more "IED proof". One way is to make sure that your work environment is located far away from traffic or sidewalks where bombs can be carried. The Oklahoma City Bombing was so devastating because Timothy McVeigh could pull his vehicle up right next to the building – "by positioning the van as he did, he might as well have driven inside".¹²

A second way to defend yourself is to become (or remain) highly suspicious. Do not open beverage cans before you have scrutinized them for evidence of tampering. Do not handle packages that do not present proper identification or legitimate addresses. Do not – as far as possible – let strangers approach within fifteen feet of your person. Place a small strip of invisible cellophane tape across your door or the hood of your car to signal tampering. If the tape is broken, assume that someone other than you got there first.

A third way is simply to arm yourself. If you find an IED, evacuate the area and call the authorities. If you find someone trying to detonate an IED, shoot the bastard. Position armed guards around your office or factory. Mossberg 500 shotguns are a good deterrent and 00 buckshot can pierce car windows. AR-15 rifles can pierce body armor and car doors. An FN Five-sevenN pistol chambered for the 5.7x28mm round will pierce *all* body armor.

Those who seek to harm you through explosive devices try to enter your arena by force (speeding vehicles) or deceit (e.g., disguising a bomb as a child's toy). The more obstacles that you place into their way, the harder it is for a vehicle bomb to detonate close to your most vulnerable areas. The more suspicious you are of even everyday objects, the more likely you are to refrain from detonating a cleverly packaged bomb through habit. The more you scrutinize your daily environment, the more likely you are to observe suspicious objects hidden in the bushes, under the steps, or next to your car. The authorities can render safe most devices, but you'll get there first.

While you're at it, support the Wounded EOD Warrior project at
<http://www.woundedeodwarrior.org/>

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