

VEHICLE RAMMING ATTACKS: A WHOLE GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO RISK MITIGATION

The vehicle-ramming terrorist attack in New Orleans, Louisiana, highlights the potential threats concerning the use of a vehicle as a weapon. Unfortunately, the threat of vehicle ramming incidents is not a new threat, as one study has found that there have been 184 vehicle ramming attacks in the world since 1964, but 70% of such attacks have occurred since 2014.¹ Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued a Terrorism Advisory Bulletin in June of 2022 highlighting an increased risk of attacks conducted by vehicle ramming.² Such alarming increases and threats demand that local governments consistently evaluate their general layered security measures, especially for special events or anywhere large numbers of people gather for any reason.

Local governments play a crucial role in mitigating the risks associated with such attacks through comprehensive planning, coordination, and implementation of adequate security measures. Local government leaders should not inappropriately delegate the responsibility solely to their local law enforcement agency. Indeed, local law enforcement plays a critical role in developing and implementing mitigation strategies; however, a whole government approach involving key stakeholders from public works, fire, EMS, municipal or county engineers, local professional planners, local finance officials, elected officials, emergency management coordinators, city managers, and more is essential to reducing the risk of such attacks and ensure the safety and security of their communities.

Critical Considerations for Local Governments

Collaboration and Coordination:

- Foster a shared understanding among all stakeholders and initiate a planning committee to identify vulnerable locations and special events that pose a heightened risk, as well as mitigation strategies, and develop a comprehensive local government plan.
- Discuss budgetary considerations with the planning committee while conveying that recovering from an incident will be significantly more costly than the cost of prevention.

Identify Key Strategies for Prevention and Mitigation:

- An initial step in the planning process should be performing a risk assessment specific to vehicle-pedestrian contact. Direct all planning team members to read the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), [Vehicle Incident Prevention and Mitigation Security Guide](#) (2024).
- Review the CISA resource, [Vehicle Ramming Mitigation](#).
- Utilize the [CISA Vehicle Ramming Self-Assessment Tool](#). This tool can assist the planning team in evaluating singular or multiple areas of interest, prioritizing such areas by vulnerability, and identifying necessary security measures. It is a stand-alone web-based application that does not collect user information.

- Review the NJCE Resources:
 - [SD Bulletin: Special Events Best Practices](#)
 - The Law Enforcement Bulletin, Parade Risk Mitigation Considerations includes the Parade Planning Worksheet and Vehicle Ramming Considerations. Although this bulletin provides critical considerations for parades, many suggested measures apply to any event.
 - Review the NJCE Law Enforcement Risk Analysis, [Vehicle ramming attacks are acts of targeted mass violence, and many of the strategies associated with active shooter prevention are applicable.](#)
- Engage in strategic planning when designing roadways and public spaces to channel vehicle movement and reduce speed, thereby minimizing the potential impact of a ramming attack. Ensure local professional planners, engineers, and planning boards are aware of the local government's unified efforts to evaluate vehicle ramming risks and the goals established by the local planning team.
- Evaluate the existing use of advanced surveillance systems and automated license plate readers to monitor and detect suspicious vehicle activity and whether adding additional technology will help deter an attack. Ensure that technology deployment is not a substitute for other needed actions such as target hardening actions, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design considerations, engineering evaluations, policy development, and training. Review the MEL Safety Director Bulletin, [Artificial Intelligence Sample Policy and Risk Mitigation Considerations for Local Government Entities](#).
- Evaluate the current security measures to help prevent the theft of government vehicles, especially large trucks. Ensure local police vehicles have enhanced theft prevention devices. Often, such mitigation measures are an option when purchasing police vehicles, and there are numerous existing after-market options to help prevent police vehicle theft. Review the MEL Law Enforcement Bulletin, [After Market Police Vehicle Theft Prevention Devices Can Mitigate Many Risks](#).
- Ensure that all involved also understand that accidental vehicle incidents can pose a significant risk to people and property and are clearly more common than intentional vehicle ramming incidents. Therefore, investing in protective measures has benefits beyond mitigating purposeful attacks.

Budgeting and Planning:

- Utilize the many available resources and the outcomes of the planning team to identify vulnerabilities, develop potentially viable mitigation strategies, and engage in both long- and short-term budget planning to meet identified goals. The *CISA Vehicle Self-Assessment Awareness Tool* prioritizes tasks based on the level of concern, problem areas, and the community's operations needs and resources.
- When establishing long and short-term budgets, ensure that costs for maintenance and upkeep of all equipment and technology are included.

Training and Preparedness:

- Discuss as a team what resources are needed for all stakeholders to conduct regular training sessions, including tabletop exercises recognizing and responding to vehicle ramming threats. Law enforcement officers have had specific training concerning mass violence incidents, but other local government employees staffing events may not have had any training. Such employees might be in a key position to identify suspicious behavior. Furthermore, non-law enforcement local government employees must learn essential personal safety steps.

- Include in the training program as appropriate:
 - The resource [Vehicle Ramming Action Guide](#) (2024).
 - The American Society of Industrial Security video, [Why Vehicle Attacks Continue to be Effective](#) (3 Minutes and 40 Seconds).
 - The CISA [Personal Security Considerations Action Guide](#).
 - The proper method for staff at the event to report suspicious behavior. Significant events might have a central command post or other method for reporting concerning behavior, while during most events, the most effective reporting method might be to call 911.
 - Ensure local government employees are trained to be aware of suspicious behavior when preparing for the event location, even days in advance, and how to report any suspicious activity.
- Utilize the many training resources from the [NJCE.org/Safety](#). Some examples, but not limited to::

LIVE	LEARNING ON DEMAND
Dealing With Difficult People and De-escalation	Workplace Violence
Employee Conduct and Violence Prevention	Fire Safety & Emergency Action Plan Refresher
Introduction to Communication Skills	Emergency Planning
Introduction to Understanding Conflict	Evacuation Procedures
Preparing for First Amendment Audits	
Implicit Bias in the Workplace	

Develop a Local Public Awareness and Education Initiative:

- Regularly communicate and coordinate with local businesses, community organizations, and residents to raise awareness and enhance preparedness. Collaborate with local rental agencies as they can be a key position to help identify suspicious behavior.
- Educate the public on recognizing all suspicious behavior and reporting potential threats, including using the [See Something Say Something](#) initiative.
- Include the CISA Awareness Video [Vehicle Ramming Attack Mitigation](#) to inform community members of the warning signs of such attacks (12 Minutes and 38 Seconds). Also, consider utilizing this video in the local stakeholder training program.
- Promote community involvement in local security initiatives and encourage residents to stay vigilant and informed.
- Mental health issues are a more common cause of such attacks than radical ideation.³ Prioritize providing information to the community concerning the availability of mental health resources, especially local and easily accessible resources. Promote the use of the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#).

¹Jenkins, M., & Butterworth, B. R. (2019). "Smashing Into Crowds" - An Analysis of Vehicle Ramming Attacks. San Jose: San Jose State University

²U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2022, June 7). U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved from National Terrorism System Advisory Bulletin: [National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin - June 7, 2022](#)

³U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. (2024). *Vehicle Incident Prevention and Mitigation*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government.