

## PERSISTENT THREAT OF TERRORIST AMBUSH ATTACKS ON FIRST RESPONDERS

Ambush attacks on first responders raise security concerns and challenges for public safety personnel. The tactic's appeal to terrorists likely stems from the nature of the target, the attack concealment, and the element of surprise. In addition, the suddenness of an ambush attack may limit reaction and response by first responders, potentially providing the attacker with a tactical advantage. An ambush attack, either luring or opportunistic, may have some degree of planning, and a calculated execution of the plan against a target. First responder awareness of the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) employed by terrorists may improve threat mitigation and increase safety.

- In January 2019, an identified man called 911 from outside the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office substation in Fountain Hills, Arizona, and asked to speak with a deputy. The man threw rocks and brandished a knife at the responding deputy, who shot the man after repeated warnings to drop the weapon. Authorities charged the man with two counts of terrorism and one count of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, according to court records.
- In February 2018, an identified man was guilty of attempted murder and aggravated assault against a Philadelphia police officer in a 2016 attack. The man, who had pledged allegiance to ISIS, ambushed the officer and fired at the driver's side of the officer's patrol car with a stolen police gun, striking the officer three times.
- In June 2017, an identified Canadian man shouted "*Allahu akbar*" (God is great) and blamed the United States for deaths in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria before stabbing a police officer in the neck outside of the TSA area at the Bishop International Airport in Flint, Michigan.

**SCOPE:** This product provides awareness of the threat that ambush-style attacks pose to first responders, as well as recommendations and resources to enhance officer safety and preparedness.

**AMBUSH TYPES:** According to a police study, an ambush falls into one of two categories:

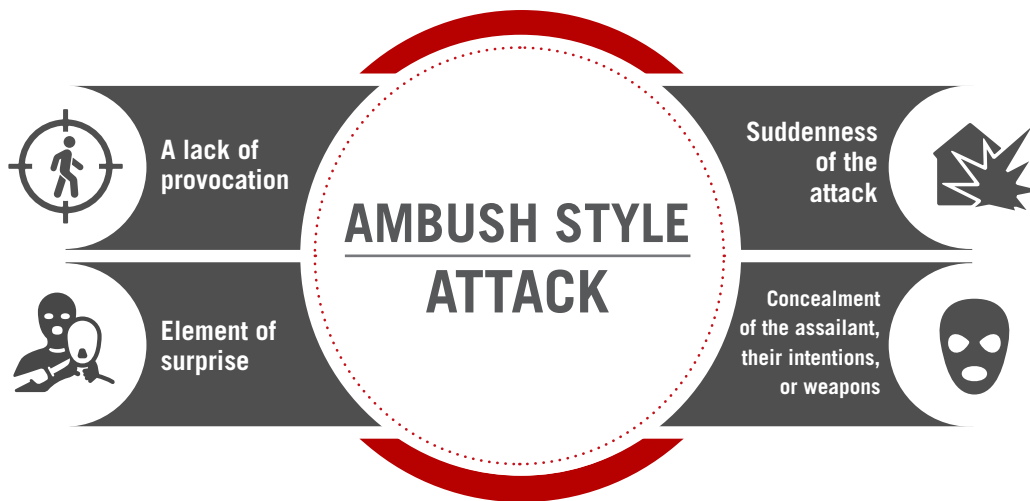
- A **LURING AMBUSH**, also known as an entrapment ambush, is a premeditated attack in which the offender lures an unsuspecting target to a location to execute the attack.
- An **OPPORTUNISTIC AMBUSH**, also known as a spontaneous ambush, is an unprovoked attack—without long-term planning—that the offender considers a crime of opportunity and makes the decision at the time of the target's approach to surprise the target.

**NOTICE:** This is a Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT) product. JCAT is a collaboration by NCTC, DHS, the FBI, and state, local, tribal, and territorial government personnel to improve information sharing and enhance public safety. The product promotes coordination among intergovernmental authorities and the private sector in identifying, preventing, and responding to terrorist activities. Consider the enclosed information within the context of existing laws, regulations, authorities, agreements, policies or procedures. For additional information, contact us at [JCAT@NCTC.GOV](mailto:JCAT@NCTC.GOV).

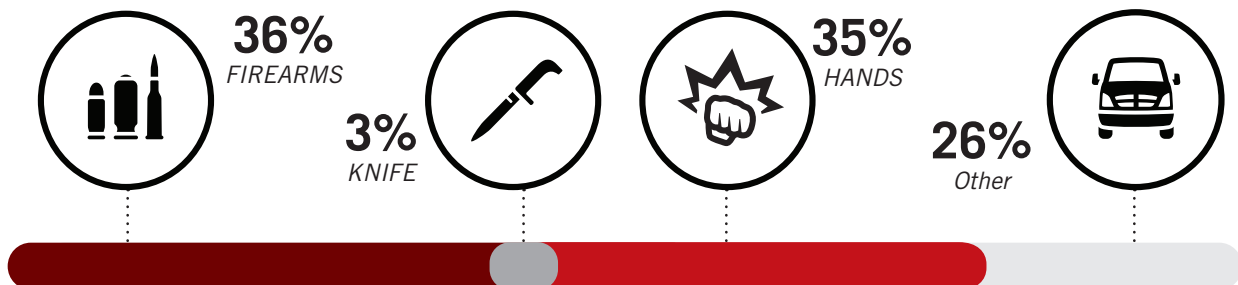


Due to their high visibility and 24/7 accessibility, on-duty first responders are susceptible to becoming victims of ambush attacks. As of July 2019, three law enforcement officers have been killed in ambush attacks upon arrival at the scene of the incident. According to a joint study by the FBI and a US university on ambush and unprovoked attacks, researchers determined that law enforcement officers identified contributing factors to their attacks, including responder distraction, underestimation of threat, and a lack of awareness or alertness. The results of the same study also indicated that 68 percent of ambushes from 1990 to 2012 were opportunistic (spontaneous) ambushes, while 32 percent were luring (entrapment) ambushes. According to a Uniform Crime Report by the FBI, from 2014 to 2018 ambush attacks were ranked the second most common circumstance encountered by law enforcement officers upon arrival to the scene of an incident. The same report identified 53 law enforcement officers as victims of an ambush attack.

**ELEMENTS OF AN AMBUSH-STYLE ATTACK**



**COMMON WEAPONS USED IN AMBUSH ATTACKS**



**RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS:** Prior to and upon arrival at the site of a call for service, vigilance and situational awareness of the immediate surroundings may help an officer make a preemptive assessment of the environment, establish baselines of normalcy, spot possible anomalies, and recognize tactical disadvantages, thereby increasing the chances of preventing and surviving a potential ambush attack. According to law enforcement studies and strategies, first responders should prepare to survive and respond to encounters of ambush attacks by practicing response considerations, such as:

- When responding to an ambush attack involving a downed first responder, do not immediately rush to the location if the threat's location is unknown.
- Establish procedures and protocols against ambush-style assaults to increase officer safety.
- Perform joint training with specialized units that include observation, tactical and counter-sniper teams, and counter-ambush tactics and resiliency, including the use of overwatch techniques, offender engagements, survival, and tactical emergency casualty care.
- Plan for ambush attacks from high-ground and target-rich environments, such as large crowds.
- Wear recommended protective gear such as body armor, eye protection, gloves, and boots.
- Provide medical supplies such as tourniquets, hemostatic agents, chest seals, pressure bandages, and other casualty care items.
- Ensure duty equipment, such as firearms, Tasers, pepper spray, handcuffs, and batons, is properly secured to prevent seizure by the perpetrator.
- Practice mitigation techniques, such as maintaining a safe distance, parking in well-lit areas or car lots away from buildings, and driving out and through an ambush.
- Get out of the "hot zone" if possible, also notify responding units of the "hot zone" and the location of the attacker if known.
- Ensure scenes are no longer active and offenders are gone or neutralized before conducting containment and scene preservation procedures.
- Recognize that distractions and routine behaviors, such as writing reports in the patrol vehicle or a commonly frequented eating establishment, may result in complacency.
- Avoid treating calls for service as routine and follow all department or agency protocols to properly evaluate the operating environment and refocus awareness levels.
- Back-up units should provide ample room and not block access to responding emergency medical services.
- Be aware of suspicious behaviors, such as an individual looking around to see who is watching, which may indicate their intent to attack responding officer(s) and to flee the area.
- Pay attention to "tight" trapped language that may often precede violent assaults. For example, "I have no other choice" and "There is nothing I can do."
- Incorporate increased alert mechanisms, such as patrol car computer systems that warn officers when a person may have violent criminal history (prior charges for domestic violence, resisting arrest or other past behavioral features that correlate with violence against officers).
- Establish a staging area for responding rescue teams.
- Recommend safe routes for responding safety personnel.



**RESOURCES:**

- **BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE (BJA) VALOR SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY:** Additional resources on ambush attacks on law enforcement officers and other law enforcement safety, health, and wellness topics are available at [www.valorforblue.org/s/sos](http://www.valorforblue.org/s/sos).
- **FBI/CRIMINAL JUSTICE INFORMATION SERVICES DIVISION AND WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY “AMBUSHES AND UNPROVOKED ATTACKS”** is a study focused on the mindset and perceptions of officers and offenders, why the incidents may have occurred, and how those involved reacted to the situation. [www.flsheriffs.org/uploads/AmbushStudy.pdf](http://www.flsheriffs.org/uploads/AmbushStudy.pdf)
- **FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS KILLED AND ASSAULTED (LEOKA) PROGRAM** provides relevant, high quality, potentially lifesaving information to law enforcement agencies focusing on why an incident occurred as opposed to what occurred during the incident, with the hope of preventing future incidents. <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr/leoka#Resources>
- **HOMELAND SECURITY INFORMATION NETWORK (HSIN)** is a national, secure, and trusted web-based portal for information sharing and collaboration among federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners engaged in the national Homeland security mission. <https://hsin.dhs.gov>
- **THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE (IACP): AMBUSH FACT SHEET.** This report builds knowledge on the topic of ambush assaults against law enforcement. [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/IACP\\_Ambush\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/IACP_Ambush_Fact_Sheet.pdf)
- **LAW ENFORCEMENT ENTERPRISE PORTAL (LEEP)** is a secure, Internet-based information-sharing system for agencies involved in law enforcement, first response, criminal justice, CT, and intelligence. <https://www.cjis.gov>





## PRODUCT FEEDBACK FORM

(U) JCAT MISSION: To improve information sharing and enhance public safety. In coordination with the FBI and DHS, collaborate with other members of the IC to research, produce, and disseminate counterterrorism (CT) intelligence products for federal, state, local, tribal and territorial government agencies and the private sector. Advocate for the CT intelligence requirements and needs of these partners throughout the IC.

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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS, OR QUESTIONS.

WHAT TOPICS DO YOU RECOMMEND?

