

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Protective Security Coordination Division
Office of Infrastructure Protection



Infrastructure Protection Report Series

Nightclubs and Entertainment Districts

Nightclubs are located in every region and state, in all major municipalities, and in many smaller localities. In some areas, nightclubs, bars, theaters, restaurants, art galleries, and similar establishments are co-located to form geographically concentrated entertainment districts. During hours of operation, these areas are often congested with patrons both inside and outside the establishments. Nightclubs and entertainment districts are open-access congregation points and have been successfully targeted by terrorists on numerous occasions in the past.



Potential Indicators of Terrorist Activity

Terrorists have a wide variety of weapons and tactics available to achieve their objectives. Specific threats of most concern to nightclubs and entertainment districts include:

- Small arms attack
- Improvised explosive devices (IEDs)
- Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs)
- Arson or incendiary attacks
- Chemical or biological attack

Terrorist activity indicators are observable anomalies or incidents that may precede a terrorist attack. Indicators of an imminent attack requiring immediate action may include the following:

- Persons in nightclubs wearing unusually bulky clothing that might conceal suicide explosives or weapons
- Suspicious or illegally parked vehicles near buildings or where crowds gather

- Unattended packages (e.g., backpacks, briefcases, boxes) that might contain explosives
- Evidence of unauthorized access to heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) areas; indications of unusual substances near air intakes

Indicators of potential surveillance by terrorists include:

- Persons discovered with suspicious photos or diagrams with nightclubs or entertainment district highlighted
- Persons parking, standing, or loitering in the same area over a multiple-day period with no reasonable explanation
- Persons using or carrying video/camera/observation equipment over an extended period
- Nightclub personnel being questioned off-site about nightclub operations or security measures
- Nightclub employees changing working behavior or working more irregular hours without explanation
- A noted pattern or series of false alarms requiring a response by law enforcement or emergency services
- Unfamiliar employees (e.g., cleaning crews) or other contract workers
- Threats from unidentified sources
- Unusual or unannounced maintenance activities in the vicinity of the nightclub or elsewhere in the entertainment district
- Suspicious behavior of patrons asking about facility security and location of surveillance equipment

Common Vulnerabilities

The following are key common vulnerabilities of nightclubs and entertainment districts.

- Open public access to nightclubs and adjacent areas such as parking lots and streets
- Significant numbers of people gathered in a single location
- An atmosphere that is usually dimly lit, congested, and noisy
- Open vehicular access to entertainment districts

Protective Measures

Protective measures include equipment, personnel, and procedures designed to protect a facility against threats and to mitigate the effects of an attack. Protective measures for nightclubs and entertainment districts include:

- **Planning and Preparedness**
 - Develop a comprehensive security plan and emergency response plan to prepare for and respond to emergency situations
 - Establish regular communication with local law enforcement and emergency responders
 - Conduct regular exercises with facility employees to test the security and emergency response plans
 - Maintain constant awareness of current threat condition and available intelligence information
 - Develop policies and procedures for dealing with hoaxes and false alarms
- **Personnel**
 - Conduct background checks on nightclub employees
 - Incorporate security awareness and appropriate response procedures for emergency situations into nightclub employee training programs
 - Follow the guidance of nightclub operation in determining the number of security personnel needed (usually one for every 50–70 patrons for normal operation and one guard for every 35 patrons for “heavy” nights or special occasions)
- **Access Control**
 - Deny access to anyone displaying suspicious behavior
 - Limit the number of patrons inside the facility to the maximum allowed by local ordinance and regulations
 - Control access by employees, vendors, delivery personnel, and contractors
 - Remove any vehicles that have been parked for an unusual length of time at or near the facility
- **Barriers**
 - Provide adequate locks, doors, and other barriers for restricted areas
 - Minimize, to the extent practical, places in public areas that an intruder could remain unseen after work hours
 - Provide adequate exterior lighting, including emergency lighting, where appropriate, to facilitate detection of suspicious or unusual activity
- **Communications and Notification**
 - Install, maintain, and regularly test the facility security and emergency communications system
 - Take any threatening or malicious telephone call, or bomb threat, seriously
 - Communicate threat level information to nightclub employees and nightclub security force. Encourage employees to report any threat or suspicious situation

- **Monitoring, Surveillance, Inspection**
 - Install closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems, entrance metal detectors, intruder detection systems, and lighting to cover key areas, including dance floors, bar areas, and parking lots
 - Train security personnel to watch for suspicious or unattended vehicles near the facility; watch for abandoned parcels, suitcases, backpacks, packages, and any unusual activities; monitor delivery of drinks, food, and other supplies
 - Regularly inspect and monitor restroom areas, trash bins, parking lots
 - Continuously monitor all people entering and leaving the facility
- **Infrastructure Interdependencies**
 - Provide adequate security and backup for critical utility services (e.g., electricity, natural gas, water)
- **Cyber Security**
 - Implement and review, if applicable, a security plan for computer-based operational systems
 - Eliminate, if applicable, any information from nightclub or entertainment district Web site that might provide security information to adversaries
- **Incident Response**
 - Maintain an up-to-date emergency response plan
 - Alert appropriate law enforcement and public health authorities of incidents as they occur

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