

Take 5 To prepare



Resilience and specialist operations team briefing note:

Fire as a Weapon

We are very much aware of the risks brought by a conventional fire in a building, however, when this fire is used as a weapon to attack innocent people then the risks increase considerably. One of the first times we became aware of terrorists using Fire as a Weapon was during the attacks in Mumbai in 2008. One of the lasting photos from this incident was of the Taj Mahal Hotel on fire (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-30630278>).



Since then a number of attacks, around the world, have been thwarted which were going to use fire as an attack methodology, however, there was an attack on Edmonton Police Station in 2020 where Fire was used as a Weapon. Here the offender poured a flammable liquid across the road before setting it on fire (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-54911870>).

Within the UK the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) have completed some work with the Home Office and the Fire Chiefs Council to ensure buildings and the people who work in them are protected, as far as possible, from the consequences of Fire being used as a Weapon.

The definition of Fire as a Weapon (FAW) is the deliberate use of fire within a marauding terrorist attack (MTA), with the intent to cause harm. This may include causing harm to people, premeditated damage to property, or a combination of both.

FAW is likely to be deployed in one or more of the following ways:

- Used as a distraction tactic which will draw the attention or response of security officers, which may allow other vulnerabilities to be exploited, e.g. attackers may enter a building while security officers are focused on the fire.
- Augment other attack method(s) (bladed weapons, firearms etc.) and so cause injury or damage to property, through the use of accelerants, e.g. petrol bombs (aka Molotov cocktails) or other incendiary methods.
- Trigger a fire evacuation which might cause people to become vulnerable to an attack.
- Causing disruption or delay with the intent of preventing or restricting emergency responders confronting the attackers, carrying out lifesaving operations and extinguishing the fire

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A well planned and executed FAW attack is likely to have a devastating effect. Carrying and lighting petrol bombs or setting fire to furnishings may not be as straight forward as the offender believes, however, when fire is used effectively in an attack the consequences can be deadly. Understanding how to use fire and careful target selection are key for a terrorist.

Success is likely to be influenced by:

- The level of sophistication of the attackers.
- The amount of time attackers have taken for planning and preparation of the attack (hostile reconnaissance), and how capable they are at using fire as part of the attack.
- The level of planning and preparation that has been taken at the site to prevent such attacks.
- The sites adherence to sound Health, Safety and Fire safety practices.

FAW attacks are generally divided into:

- Petrol Bombs (PBs) thrown. – Flammable liquid poured and then ignited.
- Grenades or other device thrown that start a fire.

While attackers may have formed an intention to use FAW during an attack, they may not always have identified a specific target during the planning phase or as they commence their attack. An accelerant will likely be used, and petrol is the most commonly used accelerant.

Fire and smoke can, in certain situations, penetrate defences with alarming lethality and speed. This is compounded if materials, such as plastics, vegetation, clothing and furniture are readily available at the attack site and can be used as accelerants.

Some plots have involved the disabling of fire safety systems or interfering with evacuation routes; it is therefore vitally important that everyone takes action when they see a blocked or damaged fire exit or fire alarm system.

Images of fire attacks are likely to increase media coverage, capturing world attention and creating fear. When combined with other terrorist attack methods as part of an MTA, this becomes a challenging and complex situation to respond to.

Staff are reminded that simple housekeeping and paying attention to suspicious activity could thwart an attack occurring on EEAST premises. Similarly ensuring all staff have completed their mandatory Fire Safety training will help them respond to a fire related incident should one occur.