



4.3.20 Terrorism

This section provides a profile and vulnerability assessment of the terrorism hazard.

4.3.20.1 Description

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), terrorism is “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (National Institute of Justice 2019). Acts of terrorism include: threats of terrorism, assassinations, kidnappings, hijackings, bomb scares and bombings, cyber-attacks (computer-based attacks), and use of chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological weapons (FEMA 2009). Various types of terrorism are discussed in the sections below.

Agriterrorism

Agriterrorism is the intentional use of plant or animal pathogens to cause devastating disease in the agricultural sector. There are similarities to bioterrorism, but the aim of agriterrorism is to specifically target crops and livestock to cause a significant economic impact or to damage food supplies (FEMA 2007).

Armed Attacks and Assassinations

Armed attacks include raids and ambushes. An assassination is the killing of a selected victim, usually by bombings or small arms. A drive-by shooting is a common technique employed by unsophisticated or loosely organized terrorist groups. Historically, terrorists have assassinated specific individuals for psychological effect.

Arson and Firebombing

Incendiary devices are inexpensive and easy to hide. Arson and fire-bombings are easily conducted by terrorist groups that may not be as well organized, equipped, or trained as a major terrorist organization. An act of arson or firebombing against a utility, hotel, government building, or industrial center portrays an image to the public that the ruling government is incapable of maintaining order.

Bioterrorism

Bioterrorism refers to intentional release of toxic biological agents to harm and terrorize civilians, in the name of a political or other cause. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified the viruses, bacteria, and toxins that could be used in an attack. Category A Biological Diseases are most likely to cause the greatest harm. They include:

- Anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*)
- Botulism (*Clostridium botulinum toxin*)
- Plague (*Yersinia pestis*)
- Smallpox (*Variola major*)
- Tularemia (*Francisella tularensis*)
- Hemorrhagic fever caused by Ebola virus or Marburg virus.

Bombings

Bombings are the most common type of terrorist act. Typically, improvised explosive devices are inexpensive and easy to make. Bombs can range from smaller packages to vehicle-borne bombs that are capable of catastrophic damage. Modern devices are smaller and harder to detect and have destructive capabilities.



Terrorists responsible for this bombing can use materials readily available to the average consumer to construct a bomb.

Cyber Terrorism

Cyber terrorists use information technology to attack civilians and draw attention to the terrorists' cause. They may use information technology, such as computer systems or telecommunications, as a tool to orchestrate a traditional attack. More often, cyber terrorism refers to an attack on information technology itself in a way that would radically disrupt networked services. For example, cyber terrorists could disable networked emergency systems or hack into networks that house critical financial information. There is wide disagreement about the extent of the existing threat by cyber terrorists.

Hijackings and Skyjackings

Hijacking is seizure by force of a surface vehicle, its passengers, or its cargo. Skyjacking is taking of an aircraft, which creates a mobile, hostage barricade situation; provides terrorists with hostages from many nations; and draws heavy media attention. Skyjacking also provides mobility for the terrorists to relocate the aircraft to a country that supports their cause and provides them with a human shield, making retaliation difficult.

Intentional Hazardous Materials Release

Intentional hazardous materials release is intentional leak, spillage, discharge, or disposal of hazardous materials or substances (such as explosives, toxic chemicals, and radioactive materials) (DHS 2018). This could include the intentional release of chemicals commonly used in industry, or the release of chemical agents as a weapon. This might involve attacking hazardous material storage facilities or attacking storage containers in transit. Intentional hazardous materials can have a significant impact on human health and the environment.

Kidnappings and Hostage-Takings

Terrorists use kidnapping and hostage-taking to establish a bargaining position and to elicit publicity. Kidnapping is one of the most difficult acts for a terrorist group to accomplish, but a successful kidnapping can gain terrorists money, release of jailed comrades, and publicity for an extended period. Hostage-taking involves seizure of a facility or location and taking hostages present in that facility. Unlike a kidnapping, hostage-taking provokes a confrontation with authorities. It forces authorities to make dramatic decisions or to comply with the terrorist's demands. It is overt and designed to attract and hold media attention. The intended target is the audience affected by the hostage's confinement, not the hostage.

Nuclear/Radiological Terrorism

Nuclear/radiological terrorism refers to a number of different ways nuclear materials might be exploited as a terrorist tactic. These methods include attacking nuclear facilities, purchasing nuclear weapons, or building nuclear weapons or otherwise finding ways to disperse radioactive materials.

4.3.20.2 Location and Extent

Terrorism can occur anywhere within Westmoreland County depending on the individual's or organization's agenda. Any facility or structure is vulnerable to a terrorist attack, as terrorists have historically sent chemical or biological agents through the mail. High-risk targets include local, county, state, or federal government facilities; major venues and gathering places; sites with historical, cultural, or other significance; and critical infrastructure. Damage to or disruption of operations at government facilities could profoundly impact Westmoreland County's population, even if the terrorism event is relatively small-scale.



An important consideration in evaluating terrorism hazards is the existence of facilities, landmarks, or other buildings of international, national, or regional importance. While Westmoreland County has many notable landmarks from a local historical perspective, there are no sites that are considered significant landmarks in terms of national or international importance. Nonetheless, terrorism can take many forms, and terrorists have a wide range of personal, political, or cultural agendas. Therefore, there is no location that is not a potential terrorist target. Two types of terrorist activity are particularly relevant to Westmoreland County: agroterrorism and intentional hazardous material releases. Agroterrorism is the direct, intentional, generally covert contamination of food supplies or introduction of pests and/or disease agents to crops and livestock. Approximately 20 percent of Westmoreland County’s land area is dedicated to agriculture.

Although Westmoreland County does not have a large number of facilities that could be considered nationally important targets, it does have critical infrastructure which if attacked could have significant effects at the local or regional level. Critical infrastructure can include: commercial facilities, communication systems, dams, emergency services, energy facilities, food and agriculture, government facilities, healthcare facilities, transportation systems, and water distribution systems (DHS 2018). Several major transportation routes and gas transmission pipelines traverse Westmoreland County, making intentional hazard material releases a potential threat to citizens and the environment. This hazard is addressed in Section 4.3.16 (Environmental Hazards). In addition, there are several bridges and railways (discussed in Section 4.3.21 [Transportation Accidents]) that connect Westmoreland County to the Pittsburgh metropolitan area that could be considered potential targets. A complete list of critical facilities is included in Appendix I.

Acts of terrorism can occur anywhere at any time of day. The National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) communicates information about terrorist threats by providing detailed information to the public, government agencies, first responders, airports and other transportation hubs, and the private sector. Information can be distributed through two mediums: Bulletins or Alerts. NTAS Bulletins are used to disseminate critical information regarding terrorism that may not relate to a specific threat (DHS 2018).

When a threat arises, the Secretary of Homeland Security announces an NTAS Alert and shares the news with the public. The alert may include specific information about the nature of the threat, including the geographic region, mode of transportation, or critical infrastructure potentially affected as well as steps that individuals and communities can take to protect themselves and help prevent, mitigate, or respond to the threat. The alert indicates whether the threat is elevated or imminent. Elevated threats are those that include no specific information about the timing or location. Imminent threats are threats believed to be impending or occurring very soon. The Department of Homeland Security will issue an NTAS advisory through their website, news media, its social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter (DHS 2018).

4.3.20.3 Range of Magnitude

The magnitude of a terrorism event depends on the scale of the attack, population involved, equipment and other key assets affected, and duration of the incident or exposure to the agent used. The effect of a terrorism event can vary depending on the type of attack and the magnitude of the event or events. Terrorism events can cause public fear regarding the use of mass transportation or leaving their homes in the event of a biological or nuclear attack. Communication systems, both public and private, can fail because of an overwhelming amount of usage or damage to its infrastructure. Healthcare facilities can become quickly inundated and must be prepared to triage injured patients, handle mass casualties, and conduct decontamination operations. The secondary hazards resulting from a terrorist attack depend on the size and scope of the incident. Some possible secondary hazards include widespread utility failure, health effects such as epidemics or pandemics, flooding (if a dam was destroyed), and environmental contamination.



The worst-case scenario for a terrorism event in Westmoreland County would be an active threat incident or a mass casualty event. The active threat incident would be a shooting or stabbing resulting in mass casualties similar to the Franklin Regional High School stabbing which occurred on April 9, 2014. Another type of worst-case scenario would be a mass casualty event in the form of a vehicular attack or an improvised explosive device which could result in a combination of mass casualties and fatalities. Generally speaking, any event which results in mass casualties or fatalities could overwhelm the capabilities of Westmoreland County, emergency services, and healthcare facilities/hospitals.

Furthermore, the threat of a nuclear attack is rare but should not be eliminated. There are still several countries in the world with nuclear capability, and other nations continue to try to obtain that capability. Any areas that are identified as high-risk areas or target areas would experience the direct effects of the weapon, including blast, radiation, extreme temperatures, wind, and light that is brighter than the sun. Depending on the size of the device, there could be total destruction within a 4-mile radius of the blast. Any survivors within a 20-mile radius can expect residual effects including fires, flooding, loss of power, fuel and water shortages, plus the release of other hazardous materials that may be in the area. People close to the blast would be killed. As the distance increases, more people will survive; however, people who do survive the initial blast may die due to an increase in exposure to gamma rays.

Because of Westmoreland County’s location within the Pittsburgh metropolitan area, should a major attack occur, Westmoreland County should expect to receive some exposure from radioactive fallout. Westmoreland County should also expect to see a surge of people from the Pittsburgh metropolitan area seeking safety.

4.3.20.4 Past Occurrence

Westmoreland County has never suffered an international terrorist attack. However, Westmoreland County has experienced domestic terrorism incidents. Table 4.3.20-1 displays terrorism incidents reported to Westmoreland County between 2007 and 2018. Between 2007 and 2018, 189 terrorism-related incidents were recorded, and the most common terroristic event was bomb threats.

Table 4.3.20-1. Terrorism Incidents/Suspicious Activity in Westmoreland County from 2007 to 2018

Date	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Active Threat	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	0	0	0	0
Bomb/Explosives	0	0	0	0	0	2	11	23	24	11	3	4
Bomb Threat	10	10	16	9	8	10	1	3	5	3	4	4
Suspicious Activity	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Suspicious Device/Package/Substance	1	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	6	2	1	1
Threatening/ Barricaded Subject; Hostage situation	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	2	0	0

Source: Westmoreland County 2019

Note: The “-” indicates that data was not previously categorized as this type of terrorist activity.

4.3.20.5 Future Occurrence

Based on historical events, Westmoreland County can expect to experience several terrorist threats or suspicious activities each year; however, few will result in an actual terrorist incident. Previous events in Westmoreland County have not resulted in what are considered significant terrorist attacks; the severity of a future incident cannot be predicted with a sufficient level of certainty. Based on the recent incident events, the future occurrence





of terrorism in Westmoreland County can be considered *highly likely* as defined by the Risk Factor Methodology probability criteria (refer to Section 4.4).

4.3.20.6 Vulnerability Assessment

Impact on Life, Health, and Safety; General Building Stock, Critical Facilities, and the Economy

The probability of Westmoreland County becoming a terrorist target should remain relatively low; however, because of its proximity to other more vulnerable areas, its vulnerability and potential for secondary impacts is increased. Westmoreland County may experience some serious issues with influx of people from the more metropolitan areas to the east in situations of terrorism and/or nuclear threats to these areas. This influx of population in these critical situations would stress the facilities of Westmoreland County and its municipalities.

Since the probability of terrorism occurring cannot be quantified in the same way as that of many natural hazards, it is not possible to assess vulnerability in terms of likelihood of occurrence. Instead, vulnerability is assessed in terms of specific assets. By identifying potentially at-risk terrorist targets in a community, planning efforts can be put in place to reduce the risk of attack. All communities in Westmoreland County are vulnerable on some level, directly or indirectly, to a terrorist attack. However, communities where the previously mentioned potential targets are located should be considered more vulnerable. Site-specific assessments should be based on the relative importance of a particular site to the surrounding community or population. Threats that are known to exist and vulnerabilities include:

- Inherent vulnerability:
 - Visibility – How aware is the public of the existence of the facility?
 - Utility – How valuable might the place be in meeting the objectives of a potential terrorist?
 - Accessibility – How accessible is the place to the public?
 - Asset mobility – Is the asset’s location fixed or mobile?
 - Presence of hazardous materials – Are flammable, explosive, biological, chemical, and/or radiological materials present on-site? If so, are they well secured?
 - Potential for collateral damage – What are the potential consequences for the surrounding area if the asset is attacked or damaged?
 - Occupancy – What is the potential for mass casualties based on the maximum number of individuals on-site at a given time?

- Tactical vulnerability:
 - Site Perimeter*
 - Site planning and Landscape Design – Is the facility designed with security in mind – both site-specific and with regard to adjacent land uses?
 - Parking Security – Are vehicle access and parking managed in a way that separates vehicles and structures?
 - Building Envelope*
 - Structural Engineering – Is the building’s envelope designed to be blast-resistant? Does it provide collective protection against chemical, biological, and radiological contaminants?
 - Facility Interior*
 - Architectural and Interior Space Planning – Does security screening cover all public and private areas?
 - Mechanical Engineering – Are utilities and HVAC systems protected and/or backed up with redundant systems?



- Electrical Engineering – Are emergency power and telecommunications available? Are alarm systems operational? Is lighting sufficient?
- Fire Protection Engineering – Are the building’s water supply and fire suppression systems adequate, code-compliant, and protected? Are on-site personnel trained appropriately? Are local first responders aware of the nature of the operations at the facility?
- Electronic and Organized Security – Are systems and personnel in place to monitor and protect the facility?

To reduce their vulnerability to terrorism hazards, Westmoreland County belongs to the Pennsylvania Region 13 Task Force (Region 13), a group of 13 counties that collaborate to prevent, protect against, prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against terrorism and other hazards on a regional level. Like the other regional task forces in Pennsylvania, Region 13 is funded by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) using DHS’s Homeland Security Grant Program’s State Homeland Security Program (SHSP). The counties of Region 13, including Westmoreland County, use this funding to conduct emergency planning, training, and exercise activities, and to purchase equipment to reduce the region’s vulnerability to terrorism.

Impact on the Environment

The impacts of terrorism can vary in severity from nominal to catastrophic and are contingent upon the method of the attack, the volume of force applied, and the population density of the attack site. There may be significant loss of life for humans and animals as well as economic losses. Additionally, the impact of the attack itself may be exacerbated by the fact that human services agencies like community support programs, health and medical services, public assistance programs, and social services can experience physical damage to facilities, supplies, and equipment as well as disruption of emergency communications. There may also be ancillary effects of terrorism such as urban fires or, in the case of a radiological device, radioactive fallout that can multiply the impact of a terrorist event (PEMA 2018).

Future Growth and Development

Areas targeted for potential future growth and development in the next five to ten years have been identified across Westmoreland County (further discussed in Section 2.4 of this Hazard Mitigation Plan [HMP]). Any areas of growth could be potentially impacted by the terrorism hazard because Westmoreland County is exposed and potentially vulnerable.

Effects of Climate Change on Vulnerability

Because terrorism is a human-caused hazard, climate change is not anticipated to affected vulnerability associated with terrorism.

Additional Data and Next Steps

Any additional information regarding localized concerns and past impacts will be collected and analyzed for the HMP update. These data will be developed to support future revisions to the plan.