

TECHNOLOGY BRIEF

Prioritizing terror targets moves to front burner

Even as the 7-7 London terror attacks have ramped up discussion about domestic homeland security, a year-old federal project at the University of Southern California and University of Wisconsin–Madison is helping the United States prioritize possible terror targets and develop effective risk-reduction and resource-allocation strategies.

“The project will help in prioritizing the myriad possible security threats we currently face, and in identifying cost-effective strategies for investing in security improvements,” says Vicki Bier, a UW professor of industrial engineering and

engineering physics. “This is important since we cannot possibly defend against all possible threats, so must allocate our limited resources wisely.”

The project, the Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events, or CREATE, is headed by Detlof von Winterfeldt, deputy dean of usc’s School of Policy, Planning, and Development. von Winterfeldt’s expertise is in

decision and risk analysis applied to environmental, technology and security problems. Previously, he provided oversight of the risk and economic analysis teams and conducted a major case study of the risks of dirty bomb attacks on the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Bier, the lead investigator in the area of risk analysis, is heading a group investigating the risks and economic implications of terrorism. Their work will culminate with recommendations to the DHS on what risk-reduction strategies could successfully thwart an event. Overall, the group’s work will provide insight into related homeland security issues, such as the allocation of resources among different types of threats.

Bier says her part of the effort “emphasizes the importance of thinking about how terrorists may adapt their strategies in response to our defensive measures, in order to make sure that our defenses do not merely cause terrorists to deflect their attacks to other, equally damaging targets.”

— Douglas Page



Jim Beal/UW–Madison College of Engineering

Larry Bank and Vicki Bier of the University of Wisconsin Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering review blueprints for potential vulnerabilities.