

READINESS STRESSED AT SEMINAR ON TERROR AGENT FROM FDLE OUTLINES MEASURES AT BCC CENTER

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York City and Washington, D.C., government experts have been warning local communities throughout the country that they need to be prepared for possible terrorist actions.

“We need to be aware of what is happening,” cautioned Special Agent Barry Lindquist of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. “It is going to happen again.”

Lindquist was speaking at a seminar on “Domestic Terrorism and the Business Community: Our Community Emergency Plan,” sponsored by the Miramar-Pembroke Pines Regional Chamber of Commerce.

“Business managers need to plan and to train their employees what to do in case of an attack,” Lindquist told nearly a dozen people who attended the session on Wednesday, April 30 at the Broward Community College Pines Center.

Lindquist said that just as families should know what to do and who to call if they are separated in an emergency, businesses need to have a similar plan for their employees.

“You need to have an evacuation plan,” said Scott Raines, Assistant Fire Marshall for Pembroke Pines. “Someone should keep track of attendance so they know who is in the building. You should know who is your liaison person with the police and fire departments. You should know if you have people with handicaps in the building or people taking medicine.”

Raines said that knowing whether anybody is still in the building can save rescue workers valuable time and prevent potential risks to those who might enter a building to rescue someone when there is no need.

“Our big thing is around planning and preparation,” said Raines, who explained that his office is willing to work with any small business owner in the community who wants to develop an emergency plan.

Lindquist also challenged business managers to prepare a “continuity of operations plan. You need to cross train so that multiple people will know how your business works.”

“We have an emergency response plan that we worked out with the police and fire department,” said Kevin Bryant, Operations Manager for the Pembroke Lakes Mall in Pembroke Pines. “We just ran a drill recently to make sure we know who to call in an emergency.”

Saying that security deals not only with terrorist threats, but with detecting crime and preparing for hurricanes, Bryant said that the mall operates its own in-house security firm and hires off duty police officers in uniform to provide protection.

“We are here to see what is available and to see if there is anything that we missed,” he said.

The chamber sponsored the event to help local businesses prepare for any emergency. “Many of our local institutions such as hospitals, the fire department and schools have put an incredible emergency plan together,” explained Stella Tokar, the chamber’s executive director. “We also want the business leaders, if they do not have an emergency plan, to learn how to develop one.”

While many people equate terrorism with radical foreign groups, terrorists can also be home grown as evidenced by the bombing of the Federal office building in Oklahoma City in 1995. “You need to know your property and know your employees,” warned FBI Special Agent Scott Hahn. “You need to secure your air conditioning system and utility areas and inspect your vehicles.”

Hahn cautioned business owners to “find a way to make sure that your property and employees are secure and to control access to your business.”

Responding to a question from Pastor Pete Tokar of Miramar’s Florida Bible Church that operates a school, officials said that all schools ought to limit access to classrooms and other school property.

“But, call the fire inspector’s office first,” cautioned Raines. “If you are going to make changes in how people get out of a building they may not comply with the fire code. Sometimes fire safety conflicts with the security business.”

Local officials said that in addition to planning for an emergency, local businesses and citizens need to be involved and on the lookout for unusual or suspicious situations.

“We have visited apartment building and gas station owners and asked them to be involved,” said Major Patrick Lynn of the Pembroke Pines Police Department. “Some of them have called us with information and we have passed it on to the FBI.”

“The role of observation is integral,” Raines said. “We must be aware of our neighbors and what is around us in our location.”

Lynn and the other officials at the seminar agreed that cooperation between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies is better than it ever was.

“We have developed a Joint Terrorism Task Force, which works together on a local level,” Lindquist said. Representatives of governmental agencies such as police, fire rescue and emergency services departments meet together regularly to coordinate plans

and share resources. “Some of these jurisdictions overlap, but that is an asset, not a hindrance,” he said.

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