



**Information Bulletin**  
**Title: Swimmer Attack Indicators and Protective Measures**  
**Date: August 22, 2003**

**ATTENTION:** Maritime Industry and Owners and Operators of Maritime Facilities

## **OVERVIEW**

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Information Bulletins are informational in nature and are designed to provide updates on the training, tactics, or strategies of terrorists. The following information is meant to advise the maritime industry and owners and operators of maritime facilities of a number of incidents of suspicious activity and possible surveillance of maritime facilities around the U.S. over the past few months.

While DHS possesses no specific information indicating that a swimmer attack of any kind is currently being planned in the United States, such targeting would be consistent with Al-Qaeda's stated objective to disrupt and undermine vital economic interests in this country and to cause mass casualties and panic.

This Information Bulletin provides general characteristics of terrorist surveillance activities and general protective measures concerning the same. The recent increase in reporting of these suspicious incidents may be a direct result of heightened public and law enforcement/security community awareness to the current domestic threat environment. This Bulletin was developed in collaboration with the FBI which has issued this information to the law enforcement community. It further provides specific protective measures tailored to owners and operators.

## **DETAILS**

Although there is no evidence of international terrorist groups planning to utilize scuba divers to carry out attacks within the United States, there is a body of information showing the desire to obtain such capability. During the past two years there have been numerous incidents that have occurred involving suspicious individuals possibly conducting surveillance of port facilities, cruise ship docks, naval bases, dams, bridges and power facilities in the United States. Also, there has been law enforcement reporting of suspicious individuals having queried marine shops and schools concerning equipment and training.

### **Indicators:**

The following indicators may point to possible terrorist planning. Alone, each indicator can result from legitimate recreational and commercial activities; however, multiple indicators combined with other information can possibly suggest a terrorist threat or impending attack.

Unusual requests for training as well as certain characteristics of training could represent potential terrorist interest in using diving to conduct terrorist activity. These indicators may include:

- Requests for specific specialty training, including odd inquiries that are inconsistent with recreational diving.
- Requests to learn advanced skills that can be associated with swimmer attack training, including training with rebreathers, deep diving, conducting “kick counts” or receiving navigation training.
- Rapid progression of diver training and certifications, particularly if the training is routinely attended by the same students.
- Training routinely conducted between the same two or three individuals.
- Training sponsored by groups or agencies not normally associated with diving.
- Training given by instructors who do not advertise and appear to have little means of visible support, especially those with a history of extremist views.
- Training conducted in remote or atypical locations or restricted areas.
- Threats, coercion or attempts to bribe trainers for certification.

Suspicious attempts to purchase specialized marine equipment may provide indication of pre-operational activity. Other indicators may include:

- Individual purchases of common gear in excessive quantities.
- Attempts to rent advanced gear without required certifications or attempts to rent gear that is inconsistent with the stated purpose of the diving report.
- Volume purchasing inquiries related to Swimmer Delivery Vehicles (SDVs) and Diver Propulsion Vehicles (DPVs).
- Exclusive purchases of darkened gear or after market painting.
- Attempts to purchase large magnets, large diameter PVC pipe or empty compressed gas cylinders or theft of same.
- Attempts to purchase advanced gear such as rebreathers or other equipment used in mixed gas diving by individuals who appear to lack expertise in the use of the equipment.

Logistical planning for swimmer attacks may include characteristics such as:

- Groups of individuals, especially those with no visible means of support, sharing a common address near the water.
- Attempts to take diving equipment, particularly advanced gear, without the required certifications on commercial flights.
- Cash purchases of small boats or personal watercraft from private individuals.
- Invalid or unusual explanations of visitor, employment or student status.
- Employment attempts at diving equipment dealers or rental shops.

Surveillance and probing of potential targets is consistent with known practices of terrorist organizations that seek to maximize the likelihood of operational success through careful planning. Possible indicators of surveillance may include:

- Attempts to photograph or loiter without permission near restricted areas or sensitive sites.
- Unusual behavior or activity by employees, vendors, visitors, contractors at a sensitive site.

## **PROTECTIVE MEASURES**

If a terrorist swimmer attack is suspected or impending, although not all-inclusive, the following protective measures may assist with countering an attack:

- For a potential terrorist target, identify the likely approach of attack. Typically swimmers use the current to their advantage. Attack swimmers will have difficulty swimming against water speeds of 1 knot and above. Note the speed and direction of the current in relation to the target you are trying to protect.
- Post sentries on potential targets. Instruct personnel to look for unauthorized divers or in the case of dark waters, look/listen for bubbles emanating from open-circuit diving equipment.
- Rig above and below water lighting to assist lookouts and sentries with spotting a diver threat. Direct lighting to illuminate 100 meters out.
- Make use of picket boats and establish 100 meter perimeter.
- For ships and watercraft:
  - Because swimmers traditionally target a ship's screws and rudders in order to incapacitate a ship, periodically cycle rudders and rotate propellers at high RPMs.
  - Set highest damage control condition.
  - Periodically activate vessel's SONAR. This technique may assist with repelling swimmer attacks as well as detecting submersibles.
  - If an attack is imminent, consider getting underway.
  - Consider using radar at blind spots to detect small boat approaches.

**DHS encourages recipients of this Information Bulletin to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to local law enforcement, local FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force or the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC). The HSOC may be contacted at: Phone: (202) 282-8101.**

**DHS intends to update this bulletin should it receive additional relevant information, including information provided to it by the user community. Based on this notification, no change to the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS) level is anticipated; the current HSAS level is YELLOW.**