

# **Hong Kong's Response to a Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear Attack**

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(Abstract)

## **Introduction**

The vast majority of international terrorist attacks involve the use of explosives. The main thrust of the Hong Kong counter terrorist effort concentrates on the ability to respond to bomb attacks. An emerging threat is the terrorist use of Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear (CBRN) weapons to kill, damage property and create fear.

A wide range of CBRN agents are available, but there are problems for the terrorist in their manufacture, storage and dispersal. The use of toxic industrial chemicals, some of which (e.g. phosgene) are also recognised chemical warfare gasses, is one major area of concern.

Hong Kong has been planning and preparing for CBRN attacks since 1998. The standing CBRN Planning Group (SRPG) has drawn up detailed plans for an inter agency response to such attacks. A subgroup of the SRPG, the CBRN Incident Advisory Group (RIAG), is permanently on immediate standby to provide technical advice and guidance on the response to an attack.

## **Dealing with CBRN threats**

Hong Kong receives several threats, usually by anonymous telephone call, to use CBRN agents or devices each year. These are evaluated by RIAG. Depending on the nature of the threat, the Hong Kong Police will check the target location either unobtrusively or after an evacuation has been put in place. The vast majority of threats are checked in a low key manner, with the public remaining unaware of the incident. This approach has proved highly successful.

## **Dealing with a CBRN device**

Once a device has been discovered the area will be evacuated and the device will be rendered safe by a Hong Kong Police Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team. Hong Kong EOD teams are trained and equipped to deal with explosive devices, CBR dispersal devices and Nuclear devices. Hospitals will be placed on standby by RIAG and Fire Services will also set up decontamination facilities. However, providing the EOD officers are successful, the incident can be shut down quickly, and the restoration of normality phase implemented. There have been many CBRN devices found in Hong Kong over the years, all have been found to be hoaxes after EOD action.

## **Dealing with a functioned CBRN device**

If a CBR device functions, the agent will be dispersed by the wind. Evacuation of people and control of ventilation are priority issues. Fire Services will organise the decontamination of victims at the scene and assist hospitals to decontaminate victims who self report, as necessary. An EOD CBRN team will seal the device to stop further emissions. The RIAG system will be used to keep all agencies aware of the problem and keep the response focused. Plans also exist to deal with the consequences of a nuclear device functioning in Hong Kong.

The philosophy is to ensure that all victims are decontaminated before they enter hospital. Decontamination is always the first stage of treatment, and in many cases may be the only treatment that is required. Hospitals will be informed through RIAG of the type of agent involved so that medical staff can prepare themselves psychologically and prepare the necessary drugs and procedures before the victims arrive.

## **Dealing with sudden outbreaks of disease**

DH are the lead agency in this case. RIAG assistance will be used to assist the decision making process. RIAG members are trained in the effects of military biological agents and will be able to assist in determining whether the event is an attack or a natural outbreak. RIAG also provides external advice on quarantine and vaccination protocols.

## **Conclusions**

Hong Kong has a robust CBRN response plan. It is well rehearsed and based on the lessons learnt from regular exercises, CBRN attacks and incidents that have occurred overseas. Professional and open minded medical staff have a key role to play in treating victims after decontamination.

## **Brief C.V. – Mr. Dominic Brittain**

Dominic Brittain was first trained in Nuclear, Biological and Chemical warfare in 1978 in the UK. In 1993 he organised the Hong Kong operational response to CBRN incidents as a Bomb Disposal Officer with the Police Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Bureau. In 1998 he convened an interagency Think Tank to consider the wider response to CBRN terrorism. As a result of the Think Tank's report, the HKSAR Government created the Standing CBRN Planning Group and he was appointed chairman.

Dominic Brittain has extensive operational bomb disposal experience and has presented papers on CBRN terrorism in the UK, USA, Germany, Australia, Singapore and Thailand.