

~~SECURITY-IN-CONFIDENCE~~

NCTC

# NATIONAL SECURITY PUBLIC INFORMATION GUIDELINES

NATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE

~~SECURITY-IN-CONFIDENCE~~

FOI-1

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These guidelines were produced in consultation with media liaison officers from the Australian Government and State and Territory agencies involved in national security issues. They were endorsed by the National Counter-Terrorism Committee in June 2008 and will be reviewed regularly.

They should be read in conjunction with the *National Counter-Terrorism Plan* (available at [www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au)) and the *National Counter-Terrorism Handbook* (available from your National Counter-Terrorism Committee representative as this is a classified document).

Information contained throughout these guidelines is classified **SECURITY-IN-CONFIDENCE** and should be handled in accordance with the *Protective Security Manual*. An unclassified version of these guidelines is available from [www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au).

Additional copies of this document are available from:

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The Contact Directory referred to on page 18 will be distributed by the Attorney-General's Department as it is updated.

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**NATIONAL  
SECURITY PUBLIC  
INFORMATION  
GUIDELINES**

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## INTRODUCTION

These guidelines provide a framework for the Australian Government and State and Territory agencies responsible for public information and media activities relating to national security issues and incidents. They supplement and are consistent with the *National Counter-Terrorism Plan (NCTP)* and the *National Counter-Terrorism Handbook (the Handbook)*.

The guidelines apply to day-to-day national security activities in addition to providing an appropriate response in the event of a terrorist threat or incident. Essential operational information is covered by State/Territory media plans in their jurisdictional standing arrangements and the appendices to this document.

All national security agencies have an ongoing role in ensuring that information and media liaison activities work to:

- improve the understanding of the public of Australia's national security organisations and systems
- generate confidence in Australia's ability to respond to any terrorism threat or activity; and
- create public trust that governments and national security agencies are open and accountable, and will release all information possible within the confines of operational and security considerations.

Arrangements for coordination of public information and media activity in relation to a heightened counter-terrorism level(s) of alert or terrorist incident are outlined in Appendix 1.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Public safety is the highest priority.
- Information flow should be provided regularly to keep the public informed and should only be restricted in the interests of safety and/or operational security.
- Public information and media responses/releases must undergo all necessary clearances by the responsible agency/ies preparing the response/release.
- Agencies must coordinate messaging to ensure consistency of information being provided.
- Media speculation must be addressed promptly by the relevant agency, ensuring that messaging remains coordinated and consistent with other information being provided.
- Agencies must not make unapproved comment on, or speak on behalf of, another agency's area of responsibility.
- All agencies have a responsibility to ensure adequate training and resources to respond to any situation/incident.

## CORE RESPONSIBILITIES

Senior public affairs officers are responsible for ensuring that they and junior public affairs officers are versed in their own agency's public information/media response mechanisms to enable the timely development and clearance of accurate talking points and media statements/briefings.

Senior public affairs officers are responsible for ensuring that they are cognisant of their agency's role in the event of an incident and their role in the timely provision of cleared talking points to AGDPAB for their coordination of whole-of-government public information.

Each State and Territory jurisdiction is to continue to review its local media management arrangements to ensure appropriate linkages within each jurisdiction and between jurisdictions and the Australian Government.



## THE NATIONAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Activities outlined in these guidelines are referenced against the levels of national counter-terrorism alert in the NCTP. Each State and Territory Government will determine its response to a terrorist incident based on an assessment of the risk. This could include activating a State/Territory Crisis Centre.

The National Terrorism Public Alert System (then known as the National Counter-terrorism Alert System) was introduced in September 2008 to allow a more flexible approach to specific identified risks or incidents. The Alert System means alert level(s) can be applied where necessary across the nation, jurisdiction(s), industry/business sector(s) or geographic location(s).

The Australian Government, in close collaboration with impacted States and Territories, may change an alert level where necessary for one or more impacted jurisdiction(s), industry/business sector(s) or geographic location(s).

The four alert levels are:

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Low</b>     | Terrorist attack is not expected.             |
| <b>Medium</b>  | Terrorist attack could occur.                 |
| <b>High</b>    | Terrorist attack is likely.                   |
| <b>Extreme</b> | Terrorist attack is imminent or has occurred. |

## PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS ON THE ALERT LEVELS

The Australian Government will take appropriate steps to notify the community of changes to a level(s) of national counter-terrorism alert, in collaboration with the relevant First Minister(s). Such announcements will be issued at the discretion of the Prime Minister or representative. Proposed actions for the different levels of alert are at Appendix 2.

Through established procedures and collaboration, State and Territory police and Australian Government agencies provide ongoing information on possible threats and acts of terrorism to the Attorney-General's Department Coordination Centre (AGDCC) or other relevant stakeholders.

Should an incident(s) occur, or threat(s) emerge/be identified, the Attorney-General's Department would make recommendations to the Attorney-General for a change to the alert level(s) or an Australian Government Crisis Committee (AGCC) or National Crisis Committee (NCC) would be convened.

Following consultation with affected jurisdiction(s) or industry/business sector(s) the AGCC/NCC would then make a recommendation about whether an alert level(s) should be changed. Where there is insufficient time to convene either committee, the NCC Chair may recommend upgrading the alert level(s) in collaboration with affected jurisdiction(s) or industry/business sector(s).

The alert level informs:

- national and jurisdictional preparation and planning
- locations and/or industry/business sectors to which the alert levels apply may be specified
- levels of precaution and vigilance to minimise the risk will be dictated by the alert level; and
- should be used as the basis of public discussion of the risk to Australia, or specific jurisdiction(s), industries/business sector(s) or geographic locations.

The AGDCC will notify jurisdictions of any change or anticipated change to the alert level(s) prior to a public announcement wherever possible. The Australian Government, through the Attorney-General's Department Public Affairs Branch (AGDPAB) will follow up with Australian Government and relevant jurisdictional media units.

The lead time in alerting agencies of a change in alert level(s) is likely to be extremely short, but it is important that all agencies act in a unified way to reinforce the nature of the alert. As soon as agreement has been reached and a public statement prepared, AGDPAB will distribute the public statement to all State/Territory police MLOs, all State/Territory Premiers'/Chief Ministers' Departments, all NCTC agency MLOs and New Zealand. AGDPAB will also provide Australian Government-cleared talking points to all NCTC agencies.

Operational and policy responses to an incident or a heightened alert may include activation of the national counter-terrorism arrangements under the NCTP. This could include activation of the National Crisis Committee and State/Territory Crisis Centres.

## NATIONAL TERRORIST SITUATION

A terrorist incident may be declared a *National Terrorist Situation* by the Australian Government as outlined in the NCTP. If a National Terrorist Situation is declared, overall responsibility for policy and broad strategy in relation to the incident transfers to the Australian Government, in close collaboration with relevant States and Territories.

Particular care should be taken to ensure that public communication messages do not compromise operational issues or confuse members of the public. In that regard, use of the term *National Terrorist Situation* in public comment should be avoided, as the term is intended only to have operational meaning within the counter-terrorism community.

Coordination and consultation on public messaging will be conducted through the AGDPAB and designated contacts in each State and Territory according to jurisdictional standing arrangements.

During a National Terrorist Situation, national public announcements, including in relation to the Australian Government taking over responsibility for broad policy and strategy of an incident, may be issued at the discretion of the Prime Minister, the Commonwealth Government's Attorney-General or other senior Commonwealth Government Ministers, wherever possible in consultation with the States and Territories.

The Premier/Chief Minister or a designated spokesperson will perform this role for the States and Territories. Police will remain responsible for on-the-ground operational public information and media liaison according to their standing arrangements, in consultation with other affected agencies or organisations.

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Other spokespersons may be called upon to provide comment or reinforce key facts during a situation/incident. For example, the Australian Government Chief Medical Officer has a role in issuing public health warnings and statements in relation to threats to public health.

Every effort will be made to ensure that media releases and comments are coordinated between State, Territory and Australian Government Ministers by the relevant agencies via their Minister's media advisors, prior to issue.

## IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LIAISON AND PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

1. In the event of a national security incident or a period of heightened counter-terrorism alert it will be critical to:
  - » provide appropriate advice for public safety
  - » ensure that authorities provide accurate and timely information
  - » work with operational areas to ensure the satisfactory management of public information during the threat period or resolution
  - » prevent an information vacuum which would encourage speculation, mistrust and misinformation
  - » build and maintain public confidence in the ability of authorities to prevent or resolve the incident
  - » where appropriate reassure public outside the jurisdiction(s), industry/business sector(s) or geographic location(s) where a specific alert level change applies; and
  - » be conscious of the fact that national security public information and media activity is likely to be closely monitored by potential or actual terrorist operatives.

## COMMUNICATION COORDINATION

2. AGDPAB will have overall responsibility for coordination of all Australian Government public information and media activity in relation to a heightened counter-terrorism level of alert or terrorist incident.
3. AGDPAB is not responsible for the clearance of agency/jurisdiction information.
4. States and Territories are responsible for public reassurance if alert level(s) are changed within their jurisdiction.
5. Coordination of public information in the States and Territories will be in accordance with their standing arrangements and may vary across jurisdictions.
6. AGDPAB will also act as the coordination point between Australian Government agencies and the States and Territories. AGD media liaison officers (MLOs) may be co-located with the relevant State/Territory media unit as required.
7. AGDPAB will advise all appropriate agencies of coordination arrangements and contact details.
8. If a terrorist incident or issue, including any alert level changes, involves industry or non-government organisations, appropriate steps should be taken to consult and coordinate with all relevant stakeholders, according to Australian Government and State/Territory standing arrangements.
9. AGDPAB is responsible for coordinating the maintenance of up-to-date draft holding statements that can be rapidly updated, cleared and distributed by relevant agencies and jurisdictions. The AGDPAB is not responsible for clearing agency/jurisdiction information, but ensuring wide dissemination through established communication channels (eg websites, hotlines, media).

These holding statements are to include:

- a. accurate and timely information (within operational and investigative constraints)
  - b. sympathy and support/assistance to victims and their families
  - c. praise for the first responders and recovery/consequence workers
  - d. condemnation of the acts and continued fight against terrorism
  - e. public reassurance in cases where alert level(s) are changed
  - f. encouragement for the community to be responsible in both their response/reaction to the incident and vigilance; and
  - g. praise for responsible reactions by the community (where appropriate).
10. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for coordinating AGDPAB distributed whole-of-government information to Australian posts overseas.
11. Each Australian Government agency is responsible for liaison within their own agency and with their ministerial media adviser/s.

## RELEASE AND DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION

12. Information being released into the public domain should in no way compromise operational security or ongoing investigation/s.
13. AGDPAB will maintain up-to-date contact and distribution mechanisms to facilitate timely distribution of information to Australian, State and Territory agencies with national security responsibilities.
14. It is crucial that MLOs coordinate their activities to maintain a continual flow of information.  
This should include the provision or sharing of:
- » details of information released
  - » matters covered at briefings and press conferences

- » draft media releases or talking points requiring clearance; and
  - » media statements
15. Where possible, early advice of major initiatives, either operational or policy, should be provided to other relevant agencies.
16. State and Territory agencies are responsible for maintaining effective communication channels within their jurisdiction to enable prompt distribution of key messages and materials.

## KEY MESSAGES

17. As outlined in the strategy to promote public understanding of the national counter-terrorism arrangements, key messages are to be non-political, simple, clear and relevant and aim to:
- » Educate the community about our preparedness to respond to terrorist incidents, what to expect and preparations to take; and/or
  - » Reassure the community that timely and honest information will be available prior to and during an incident; and/or
  - » Engage the community to play a role in prevention of attacks and in responding appropriately after an attack.
18. In developing information for public dissemination it is important to consider all elements of the Australian community and other target audiences. Target audiences are identified in Appendix 3.

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## APPENDIX 1

### PUBLIC INFORMATION AND MEDIA LIAISON DURING A TERRORIST INCIDENT

1. Critical to the successful resolution of any terrorist incident is the timely and effective coordination of accurate public information. How an incident is reported by domestic and international mass media outlets and how journalists themselves judge the actions of government agencies will shape public confidence and influence views on whether the incident is successfully resolved.
2. It is important for agencies to establish and maintain a cooperative and professional working relationship with the media – not an adversarial one. This will be best achieved if agency media liaison officers (MLOs) and journalists have mutual recognition of the different pressures and constraints under which they each work.
3. During an incident there will be enormous pressure on journalists for 'new information' to be delivered to meet broadcast or print deadlines. Because of this, an information vacuum could encourage the spread of misinformation, mistrust and speculation. It is vital that the media is provided with accurate information and regularly updated on developments, subject to the agreed operational clearance processes for release of information.
4. Journalists will also be expected to have some degree of knowledge of terrorism and incident resolution techniques, or alternatively to source an interview with an academic or interest group 'terrorism expert'. To help the flow of accurate and verifiable information, government spokespeople must be identified, briefed and available for interview as soon as possible. Nominated official spokespeople with an accurate understanding of the situation will help balance any ill-informed 'expert' analysis of operational options or the presentation of speculation and rumour as credible information.

5. The willingness of the public to trust authorities with national security and saving the lives of people during a critical incident depends on how competent and honest they perceive the authorities to be. During a terrorist incident the community will accept a spokesperson explaining that, for national security reasons, there will be operational and intelligence information that they cannot comment on, speculate about or confirm. The community will not accept that no spokesperson is available or that the authorities have no obligation to confirm basic information on the incident or take responsibility for reassuring them about their personal security.

### Forward planning

6. All agencies should plan ahead for the media and public information implications in different scenarios that a terrorist situation could take in both the domestic and international environment.
7. Lead agencies should consider the impact of the occurrence on any specific industry or organisation and liaise with the relevant stakeholders as to what communication should be made with them and when.
8. All agencies should consider steps to ensure that they will be able to resource their media liaison activities on a 24-hour basis should the event take a long period of time to resolve.
9. All agencies with national security responsibilities are to ensure that media and public affairs officers are appropriately trained in National Counter-Terrorism Committee (NCTC) media liaison arrangements. Additionally, senior public servants who are likely to represent their agency are to be appropriately trained in media management skills.

## Media and public information strategies

10. Media and public information activities must support operational policies and actions.
11. Media strategies must be developed and discussed with operational managers. The approval of these strategies and release of information must be coordinated. MLOs should use the standing arrangements within their organisations for contact with the media as a starting point, then use the arrangements set out in this document, noting that:
  - » each agency or jurisdiction releases only information for which it has responsibility
  - » no information is released at any point unless it has been cleared in accordance with standing jurisdictional arrangements; and
  - » a log of all public information activities and decisions, information received, clearances, products and distribution is maintained in line with the agency's standard operating procedures.

## Consistent, unified messages

12. Use the coordination arrangements of the National Counter-Terrorism Plan (NCTP) and detailed in these guidelines to ensure that contact between media liaison staff is made with all relevant agencies
13. Consider including other organisations who might be involved in a particular incident, eg airlines
14. Ensure there is coordination of comment to the media by all agencies and consider involving other partner agency MLOs in the lead agency team
15. Provide and maintain regular updates and ensure all agencies are briefed on information released to the media
16. Determine and agree on areas of responsibility; and
17. Inform the media of who is speaking about what.

## Build and hold public confidence

18. Use an appropriate spokesperson who is credible (appropriate rank, position), calm, briefed and adequately trained for the role
19. Develop key messages and repeat them
20. Anticipate causes of public panic or concern and prepare responses
21. Avoid alarmist rhetoric
22. Emphasise positive activity by the authorities; and
23. By closely monitoring the media, deal quickly with uncertainty and speculation.

## Prevent an information vacuum

24. Maintain a flow of accurate information to the media, keeping in mind the different deadlines that journalists have to meet (information does not always have to be a revelation or new)
25. Anticipate media issues and provide solutions
26. Develop longer-range plans to deal with potential media needs (ie forecast possible stories)
27. Identify key events and deadlines and take these into account when developing plans
28. Give general background explanations of national security structure and incident plans;
29. Identify, brief and make available spokespeople and appropriate 'experts'; and
30. Avoid having spokespeople unavailable for long periods.



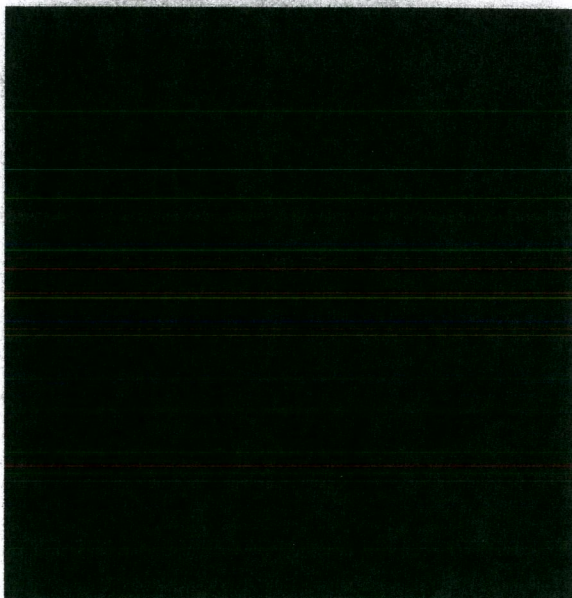
## Build and maintain media cooperation

31. At the media centres and briefing sites, identify a media assembly point and where possible provide resources for the media, eg visual stock footage if available, communication facilities, etc
32. Brief the media about their role in the incident (they are not just observers – they need to understand that the way they report the situation could affect the outcome of an incident)
33. Brief the media on the constraints of the situation, for example, the need for patience in resolving the incident; the dangers of live coverage of eye-witness accounts, which may create fear and alarm, of direct contact between the media and the terrorists, and of reporting police and where relevant Defence Forces' movements or tactics. Explain the reason behind strategies, eg reduction of stress on the negotiation process. Acknowledge the value of media cooperation and explain actions to avoid speculation
34. Contact media executives (where possible) to develop cooperation at management level (consider the advantages of using senior officers for this)
35. Seek or impose media blackouts only in extreme circumstances and in full consultation with the media
36. Seek information or images from the media, but don't demand it
37. Consider the use of media pool coverage to provide better and safer access near an incident scene
38. Remind the media that the terrorists may have access to their broadcasts (radio/TV) and could respond to what is being said
39. Respond swiftly to criticism and correct misinformation
40. Be aware of the needs of overseas and ethnic media, eg 24-hour clock, translation, etc
41. Do not display favoritism with the media, eg by providing 'exclusive' information or access

42. Ensure post incident that any commitments made during the incident are honoured
43. Make the media aware of the danger of inspiring 'copycats'
44. Request that the media check the accuracy of all material from other sources; and
45. Encourage the use of the National Security Website and jurisdictional websites to provide Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), incident details, casualty numbers, copies of statements, information on terrorist groups, etc as available and appropriate.

## Reinforce the aim of peaceful resolution in siege/hostage situations

46. Be aware that the media's treatment of the incident could affect the outcome



52. Underscore the benefit of patience; the public requires accurate information and not unfounded speculation; and
53. Emphasise any positive results of the negotiations.

S33(a)(i), S37(1)(c), S37(2)(b), S37(2)(c)

## Minimise terrorist propaganda

54. Concentrate on the criminality of the terrorists' actions -- not on the terrorists or their cause
55. Reiterate the rule of law and the legal, peaceful means available for protest
56. Suggest that the media avoid providing a platform for propaganda
57. Be prepared to deal with propaganda and correct inaccuracies in terrorists' messages and releases
58. Be aware of the power of images. They can reinforce your message or destroy its credibility
59. Encourage the media to verify information provided by the terrorists or their supporters and stress the need for accuracy and balance
60. Encourage the media to verify the accuracy of library material when researching background to avoid repeating inaccurate material; and
61. Identify officials or informed specialists who can speak to the media to reduce the likelihood of the media using ill-informed unofficial 'experts'.

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## APPENDIX 2

### CHANGE IN ALERT LEVEL(S)

1. The National Terrorism Public Alert System allows a flexible approach to specific identified risks or incidents. The Alert System means alert levels can be applied where necessary across the nation, jurisdiction(s), industry/business sector(s) or geographic location(s).
2. The Australian Government, in close collaboration with impacted States and Territories, will be able to change an alert level(s) where necessary for one or more impacted jurisdiction(s), industry/business sector(s) or geographic location(s).
3. The Australian Government determines the level of the national counter-terrorism alert on the advice of the National Security Division Heads from the Attorney-General's Department, based on assessments of the threat environment by the National Threat Assessment Centre in ASIO.
4. The alert level informs national and jurisdictional preparation and planning; locations and/or industry/business sectors to which the alert levels apply may be specified; levels of precaution and vigilance to minimise the risk will be dictated by the alert level; and should be used as the basis of public discussion of the risk to Australia, or specific jurisdiction(s), industries/business sector(s) or geographic locations.
5. Media units should review their own plans regularly to ensure they are prepared to respond to any increase in alert level(s).
6. Media Liaison Officers (MLOs) should consider the concerns of industry and interest groups and seek to proactively address them before they are raised in the media and potentially undermine public confidence. These groups may be a key tool in support of the operational management of the incident.

**LOW ALERT: Terrorist attack is not expected**

**MEDIUM ALERT: Terrorist attack could occur**

7. Australia has been at a medium level of national alert since September 2001.
8. All NCTC agencies should undertake ongoing public education and information activity to encourage public and media understanding of, and confidence in, Australia's national security arrangements as outlined in the strategy to promote public understanding of national counter-terrorism arrangements.
9. All agencies with national security responsibilities should continually review and, if necessary, strengthen, their public information preparedness for responding to an incident or increase in alert level(s).

**HIGH ALERT: Terrorist attack is likely**

10. The Prime Minister or representative may, in collaboration with Premiers, Chief Ministers or other relevant ministers, decide to make a public statement about the increase in alert level(s). This could be in the form of a written announcement and/or press conference. Once the decision is made, the preparation, clearance and distribution of the statement will be undertaken as a priority.
11. AGD Public Affairs Branch (AGDPAB) will distribute the public statement to all State/Territory police MLOs, all State/Territory Premiers'/Chief Ministers' Departments, all NCTC agency MLOs and New Zealand.
12. AGDPAB will coordinate Australian Government supporting key facts that have been cleared by the respective Australian Government agencies, and distribute to all NCTC agencies and jurisdictions.

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13. Premiers or Chief Ministers of affected jurisdictions are also likely to provide a public statement containing jurisdiction-specific information, following the Prime Minister's announcement. This statement will be provided in advance to AGDPAB for distribution to all State/Territory police MLOs, all State/Territory Premiers'/Chief Ministers' Departments, all NCTC agency MLOs and New Zealand.
14. All agencies and jurisdictions with national security responsibilities should immediately review and, if necessary, strengthen, their preparedness for responding to an incident.
15. If an increased alert is announced, relevant agencies should review all target audiences and consider what information is appropriate to be released. This information and activity should be cleared in accordance with standing arrangements.
16. During a period of heightened alert there is also likely to be an increase in the number of false alarms and deliberate hoaxes. It is important in the initial notification of an occurrence that caution is taken not to prematurely attribute it as a terrorist incident and to fully clarify the circumstances of the incident.
17. MLOs should encourage the media not to provide coverage to hoaxes and false alarms, as this can encourage further hoaxes. If necessary, contact with the management of media organisations should be made about this issue.
18. MLOs should encourage the media not to provide detailed coverage of operational security issues, including the specific security arrangements at public buildings or events. Similarly, articles speculating on possible terrorist scenarios or sites should be discouraged.
19. All information contained on websites (such as the National Security Website: [www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au)) and being provided by public information lines (such as the National Security Hotline: 1800 123 400), should be reviewed to ensure it is current, accurate and strategic.

#### **EXTREME ALERT: Terrorist attack is imminent or has occurred**

20. The Prime Minister or representative may, in collaboration with Premiers, Chief Ministers or other relevant ministers, decide to make a public statement about the increase in alert level(s). This could be in the form of a written announcement and/or press conference. Once the decision is made, the preparation, clearance and distribution of the statement will be undertaken as a priority.
21. If there is information that a terrorist attack is imminent or has occurred, coordinating agencies must immediately notify all MLO contacts in other national security agencies.
22. Coordinating and lead agencies should agree what information may be released.
23. Premiers or Chief Ministers of affected jurisdictions are also likely to provide a public statement containing jurisdiction-specific information, following the Prime Minister's announcement. This statement will be provided in advance to AGDPAB for distribution to all State/Territory police MLOs, all State/Territory Premiers'/Chief Ministers' Departments, all NCTC agency MLOs and New Zealand.
24. Marshal resources, including additional MLOs and technical resources, to meet likely situations.
25. Continually review information on websites and public information lines.

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## Notification of a possible terrorist incident

26. In many cases, when the first information about an incident arrives, it is difficult to know whether it is a false alarm, a hoax, a non-terrorist criminal matter or a terrorist incident
27. Do not assume the initial information is complete or accurate
28. Do not label any occurrence as a terrorist incident until it is verified by the lead agency
29. Lead agencies and coordination agencies are to consult with each other, clarify the current status of the incident and ensure contingency planning is underway
30. Develop key facts statements
31. Identify likely expert and official spokespeople for use in media briefings
32. Public information coordination agencies should give early notification to designated MLOs within other national security agencies, emphasising the preliminary nature of the information
33. Lead agencies are to draft and coordinate clearance of key facts/and/or statements
34. Commence drafting any written material or briefing that may be required urgently if the situation escalates; and
35. Further review all information contained on websites and public information lines to ensure it is current, accurate and strategic.

## Progression of a terrorist incident

36. Agencies should consider co-location of some MLO staff at key locations
37. Consider a schedule and distribution source for regular media briefing
38. The accuracy and appropriateness of all incident information on websites and information lines must be regularly reviewed and updated as the incident progresses
39. Agencies should consider the impact of the incident on specific interest groups and industries and communicate with them accordingly
40. Broad security measures, which are often put in place immediately in response to an incident, will also widen the level of disruption and public concern. Every effort should be made to inform and reassure people so that unnecessary anxiety and rumours do not spread, which may reduce public confidence in the authorities' ability to resolve the incident; and
41. In a terrorist incident, AGDPAB will upload onto the National Security Website, any approved State/Territory or Australian Government media statement/s or briefing/s, in order to act as a single source of information for the media and public. It will also include links to related agency sites. State/Territory websites will be managed in accordance with their jurisdictional plans.

## Clarification if the incident is not terrorist-related

42. If more information becomes available and the occurrence is clarified as not being a terrorist incident, public information coordination agencies should notify the other national security agencies, and their State/Territory/Australian Government contacts.
43. State/Territory police, in consultation with any other lead agency, should consider what closing statement, if any, is to be made.

## Lowering of alert level(s)

44. The consultation process for lowering an alert level(s) will be similar to that employed for raising levels. When a decision is made to lower a counter-terrorism alert level(s), the AGDCC will notify NCTC members. AGDPAB will follow up with NCTC media units.

## Consequence management and recovery

45. All MLOs must continue to coordinate and distribute information after the initial incident/situation has been resolved
46. A wide range of emergency management organisations and health-related agencies could be involved in the management of the consequences of a terrorist incident
47. Issues relating to consequence management, such as assistance to any victims, notification of families, management of hospital and health-related issues should be clearly identified as separate from ongoing national security issues
48. All jurisdictions should continue to upload public information to their websites and ensure that links are maintained to the National Security Website ([www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au)) and those of other relevant consequence management agencies; and
49. In a terrorist situation the NCTP and *National Security Public Information Guidelines* take precedence over emergency response plans.

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## APPENDIX 3

### TARGET AUDIENCES

1. In developing media and information strategies and related products it is important to consider all likely target audiences and conduits for information. They include the following:

#### The general public

2. All agencies should maintain up-to-date information that explains their role in relation to national security and refers to other materials that provide a broader overview of national security arrangements. These materials should be available in a range of formats, including websites.
3. During a terrorist incident, or when there is a heightened level of counter-terrorism alert, other direct avenues of communication may also need to be considered following announcements made by primary spokespeople. It is important that these be consistent with agreed communication arrangements.
4. Messages and materials may need to be tailored, within the broader communication effort, for segments within the Australian community and should take into account particular methods of engagement and delivery, such as:
  - » people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
  - » people with disabilities
  - » people or groups who may feel vulnerable in the event of a terrorist incident, including those who have had previous exposure to trauma or persecution
  - » people whose religious beliefs or racial origins may make them a target of discriminatory behaviour; and
  - » people with duty of care, or responsibility for others.

### The media

5. It is important that Media Liaison Officers (MLOs) maintain ongoing relationships with the media, which can be both an information conduit and a specific target audience.
6. In times of heightened alert or an incident, Australian media should be given priority in the interests of ensuring the community has optimal access to information about public safety.
7. Journalists unfamiliar with national security will be covering issues and events as they unfold. These journalists will generally follow the lead of the experienced media but it is important that background information is readily available to avoid misinterpretation because of a lack of knowledge of national security arrangements.
8. MLOs should ensure their agencies have:
  - » sound understanding of their agency and/or jurisdictional arrangements
  - » good background information on their roles and responsibilities in relation to national security matters
  - » effective information distribution systems, including websites
  - » strong relationships and contacts within the media; and
  - » trained staff for media liaison during terrorist incidents.

### The international media

9. In the event of a major terrorist incident there would be extensive international media interest, initially from foreign correspondents based in Australia. Later, depending on the nature and scale of the incident, journalists based overseas could also be expected to arrive in Australia to undertake first hand coverage.
10. International media will almost certainly take the 'story' in new directions and could be seeking 'angles' relevant to their home audiences, eg how many foreign nationals died/were injured.

11. It is reasonable to expect that in the early stages of a terrorist incident, foreign media in Australia would draw on the same sources of information as local media. However, they would not necessarily be as familiar with these sources as the Australian media.
12. It will therefore be important to advise foreign correspondents in Australia where they can go to get access to official sources of information and spokespeople. It will also be important for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's overseas posts to have quick access to relevant website details and key facts for dissemination to international media.
13. Basic steps should include:
  - » alerting foreign correspondents through the International Media Centre/ Foreign Correspondents Association in Sydney of official contact points for information (contact details needed)
  - » tasking posts to report on international media coverage
  - » providing posts with appropriate website contact details and key facts to respond to international media interest; and
  - » establishing appropriate links between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website ([www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au)) and other relevant sites.
14. As part of the consequence management response:
  - » advise posts once all-clear is announced; and
  - » provide key facts in consultation with the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism on Australia as a safe tourist destination.

## Interest groups and industries

15. All NCTC agencies should consider what public information relating to national security and their particular areas of responsibility may be needed by industry and interest groups. Information should be available to these stakeholders on an ongoing basis.
16. Agencies should work with industries to identify the information needs of their clients and develop cooperative arrangements, which may involve MLOs facilitating information flows. For example, in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological (CBR) incident, health workers and hospitals may need information that they can give directly to people seeking advice; while during an aviation security incident, airline passengers may seek information on security measures directly from airlines.
17. Specific incidents may also result in local governments and managers of utilities such as electricity, gas and water services being affected and becoming the focus of media attention. It is important that these organisations are encouraged to be involved not only in any operational or consequence management issues but also in the information coordination processes.



## ATTACHMENT A

### RESOURCES

#### Fact Sheets and Holding Statements

- Under the strategy to promote public understanding of the national counter-terrorism arrangements, information for use immediately on the declaration of a national terrorist situation is to be prepared at both the National and State/Territory levels with priority information that members of the community will need.
- Australian, State and Territory agencies are responsible for preparing and maintaining holding statements according to their standing arrangements.
- The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department Public Affairs Branch (AGDPAB) will facilitate distribution of updated, agency cleared facts sheets and holding statements across jurisdictions and agencies.

#### National Security Media Liaison Contact Directory

The contact directory is maintained by the AGDPAB and is updated and circulated every two months. To receive regular updates, please e-mail changes of contact details to [publicaffairs@ag.gov.au](mailto:publicaffairs@ag.gov.au).

#### National Security Website

The National Security Website – [www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au) – provides a single access point for up-to-date national security information from the Australian Government. All Australian Government, State and Territory agencies with national security roles should maintain their own websites and provide active links to the National Security Website. Content is managed by AGDPAB. New links or updates should be sent to [publicaffairs@ag.gov.au](mailto:publicaffairs@ag.gov.au).

#### National Security Hotline

The National Security Hotline (1800 1234 00) has been established by the Australian Government to receive information from the public through a central reporting point and pass that information to relevant State, Territory and Australian Government agencies for investigation or other follow-up action. The Hotline also responds to enquiries and concerns from the general public in relation to national security issues. In the event of a terrorist incident or heightened level(s) of alert, the number of hotline operators can be quickly increased to provide a central point for disseminating key information. Scripts and updates are managed by AGDPAB.

#### Media monitoring

It is expected that all NCTC agencies will, in their normal media monitoring arrangements, include issues relating to national security and their responsibilities.

During an incident or period of heightened alert, agencies should activate an increased level of media monitoring. Should a particular issue or item be of interest, agencies should also draw it to the attention of other relevant agencies and AGDPAB.

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