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Increased terror risk 'demands explosive security measures'

12 Nov 10

By **Ian Penfold**

Ian Penfold, UK architectural manager at Solar Gard, on the way that safety film can help protect against explosive attacks...

It is a topic that has dominated our headlines for the last ten years, but instead of diminishing over that time, the threat of terrorism appears to be growing more prevalent in today's society.

With countries across the world warning of the risks of terrorist attacks in the UK and Europe, and major worldwide events like the London Olympics on the horizon, business owners should be regarding safety as an issue they cannot afford to take lightly.

The risk does not apply solely to large cities; the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) now advises that building designers take counter-terrorism measures into consideration when designing public open spaces. This reflects the threat posed not just to large office buildings, but to public areas such as night clubs and shopping centres.

Warnings cannot be ignored

A bomb explosion is not a scenario any of us like to entertain, but with the UK terrorist threat level standing at 'Severe' it is one that cannot be ignored either.

Companies are investing in ever more advanced surveillance equipment and alarms to prevent an attack from happening, but few are currently taking steps to mitigate the damage caused if an explosion does occur.

In a bomb blast, 90 percent of injuries are caused by flying glass, rather than the explosion itself. It is vital, therefore, that steps be taken to ensure that glass windows, partitions and walls are sufficiently protected.

In an explosion, glass particles can travel at speeds of up to 150 mph. If a bomb explodes 400 metres away, glass from a broken window can hit a wall, five metres away, at a speed of 75 metres per second.

In this scenario, glass particles of any size, even from strengthened windows that are designed to shatter into small pieces, are unquestionably lethal.

Safety window film

In order to protect staff and the general public, UK businesses have a responsibility to ensure that glass can be held together as one piece in the event of an explosion. One of the quickest, easiest and cheapest ways to do this is to install safety window film.

By reinforcing existing glass and helping to hold broken pieces together in the event of an explosion, safety window film greatly reduces the chance of glass causing property damage, injury or death.

Because the latest safety and security films are flexible and able to stretch, they can absorb a significant amount of the shockwave caused by an explosion.

Ordinarily the force of an external bomb blast would push glass inward to the point of breaking, sending shattered glass throughout the building and jeopardizing everything in it.

However, with safety film, even after the glass breaks, the film is able to "bend" with the force of the wave and hold the glass together as one piece.

Check with an installer

Terrorist attacks on London over the last twenty years have prompted many companies to install protective window film to protect against explosions. But like all security solutions, window film must be tested to check its integrity over time.

Many companies neglect to do this, or even forget that window film has been installed. Every few years, building owners should consult with a professional window film installer to ensure their film is still performing correctly.

The UK's terror threat should not be seen as pure scaremongering; it reflects the heightened risks of the world we live in and businesses need to act accordingly.

Window film represents one of the easiest ways to ensure that, in the event of an explosion, the dangers of flying glass are drastically reduced, probably saving lives in the process. The time to act, regrettably, is now.

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In the US, most large companies use the www.blastgard.com fragment retention film. However, I know the Shattergard company also sends installers overseas.

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