



## 5.4.10 Terrorism

The following section provides the hazard profile (hazard description, location, extent, previous occurrences and losses, probability of future occurrences, and impact of climate change) and vulnerability assessment for the terrorism hazard in Livingston County.

### 5.4.10.1 Hazard Profile

#### Description

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), terrorism is “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”<sup>1</sup> Acts of terrorism include threats of terrorism, assassinations, kidnappings, hijackings, bomb scares and bombings, cyber-attacks (computer-based attacks), and use of chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological weapons (FEMA 2009). Various types of terrorism are discussed in the sections below.

#### Armed Attacks and Assassinations

Armed attacks include raids and ambushes. An assassination is the killing of a selected victim, usually by bombings or small arms. A drive-by shooting is a common technique employed by unsophisticated or loosely organized terrorist groups. Historically, terrorists have assassinated specific individuals for psychological effect.

#### Arson and Firebombing

Incendiary devices are inexpensive and easy to hide. Arson and fire-bombings are easily conducted by terrorist groups that may not be as well organized, equipped, or trained as a major terrorist organization. An act of arson or firebombing against a utility, hotel, government building, or industrial center portrays an image to the public that the ruling government is incapable of maintaining order.

#### Bioterrorism

Bioterrorism refers to intentional release of toxic biological agents to harm and terrorize civilians, in the name of a political or other cause. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified the viruses, bacteria, and toxins that could be used in an attack. Category A Biological Diseases are most likely to cause the greatest harm. They include:

- Anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*)
- Botulism (*Clostridium botulinum toxin*)
- Plague (*Yersinia pestis*)
- Smallpox (*Variola major*)
- Tularemia (*Francisella tularensis*)
- Hemorrhagic fever caused by Ebola virus or Marburg virus.

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Justice. “Terrorism.” <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/terrorism/pages/welcome.aspx>



### **Bombings**

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Bombings are the most common type of terrorist act. Typically, improvised explosive devices are inexpensive and easy to make. Modern devices are smaller and harder to detect, and have destructive capabilities. Terrorists responsible for this bombing can use materials readily available to the average consumer to construct a bomb.

### **Cyber Terrorism**

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Cyber terrorists use information technology to attack civilians and draw attention to the terrorists' cause. They may use information technology, such as computer systems or telecommunications, as a tool to orchestrate a traditional attack. More often, cyber terrorism refers to an attack on information technology itself in a way that would radically disrupt networked services. For example, cyber terrorists could disable networked emergency systems or hack into networks that house critical financial information. There is wide disagreement about the extent of the existing threat by cyber terrorists.

### **Ecoterrorism**

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Ecoterrorism is a term describing violence in the interests of environmentalism. In general, environmental extremists sabotage property to inflict economic damage on industries, businesses, or persons perceived as harming animals or the natural environment. Targets of ecoterrorist attacks have included fur companies, logging companies, and animal research laboratories.

### **Hijackings and Skyjackings**

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Hijacking is seizure by force of a surface vehicle, its passengers, or its cargo. Skyjacking is taking of an aircraft, which creates a mobile, hostage barricade situation; provides terrorists with hostages from many nations; and draws heavy media attention. Skyjacking also provides mobility for the terrorists to relocate the aircraft to a country that supports their cause, and provides them with a human shield, making retaliation difficult.

### **Kidnappings and Hostage-Takings**

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Terrorists use kidnapping and hostage-taking to establish a bargaining position and to elicit publicity. Kidnapping is one of the most difficult acts for a terrorist group to accomplish, but a successful kidnapping can gain terrorists money, release of jailed comrades, and publicity for an extended period. Hostage-taking involves seizure of a facility or location and taking hostages present in that facility. Unlike a kidnapping, hostage-taking provokes a confrontation with authorities. It forces authorities to make dramatic decisions or to comply with the terrorist's demands. It is overt and designed to attract and hold media attention. The intended target is the audience affected by the hostage's confinement, not the hostage.

### **Nuclear Terrorism**

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Nuclear terrorism refers to a number of different ways nuclear materials might be exploited as a terrorist tactic. These methods include attacking nuclear facilities, purchasing nuclear weapons, or building nuclear weapons or otherwise finding ways to disperse radioactive materials.

### **Location**

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Terrorism could occur anywhere in Livingston County, depending on the terrorist group's agenda. Any facility is vulnerable, as terrorists have historically sent chemical or biological agents through the mail. High-risk targets include local, county, state, or federal government facilities; major venues and gathering places; sites with historic, cultural, or other significance; and key infrastructure. Damage to or disruption of operations at government facilities could profoundly impact Livingston County's population, even if the terrorism event is relatively small-scale.



### Extent

Any acts of terrorism can occur anywhere at any time of day. The National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) communicates information about terrorist threats by providing detailed information to the public, government agencies, first responders, airports and other transportation hubs, and the private sector. When a threat is posed, an NTAS Alert will be announced by the Secretary of Homeland Security and will be shared with the public. It may include specific information about the nature of the threat, including the geographic region, mode of transportation, or critical infrastructure potentially affected, as well as steps that individuals and communities can take to protect themselves and help prevent, mitigate, or respond to the threat. The alert indicates whether the threat is elevated or imminent. An elevated threat is issued when no specific information is available about timing or location. An imminent threat is issued when the threat is believed to be impending or to very soon result in an incident. Alerts will be posted online and released to the news media for distribution. The United States Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) will also distribute alerts through its social media channels (USDHS 2013).

The effect of a terrorism event can vary depending on the type of attack and magnitude of the event or events. A terrorism event can create fear among members of the public about using mass transportation or leaving their homes in the event of a biological or nuclear attack. Communication systems, both public and private, can fail because of an overwhelming amount of use or damage to the communications infrastructure. Healthcare facilities can become quickly inundated and must be prepared to triage injured patients, handle mass casualties, and conduct decontamination operations.

Most terrorist attacks occur with very little, if any, advanced warning. However, thwarting terrorist attacks is possible through aggressive intelligence monitoring and monitoring of individuals who exhibit radical tendencies. Warning signs of some terrorist attacks may appear, such as a suspicious package left unattended. Local, state, and federal officials, as well as the public, are responsible for recognizing warning signs of terrorism incidents and for taking appropriate actions to mitigate against possible attacks.

### Previous Occurrences and Losses

Between 1952 and 2021, FEMA issued two major disaster declarations as a result of terrorism in New York State. According to the 2017-2020 New York State Homeland Security Strategy, New York has been identified as the most likely target of terrorism within the United States. However, the County has not experienced any acts of terrorism.

### Probability of Future Events

Potential for future terrorism incidents in Livingston County is difficult to predict. Efforts of local, state, and federal officials must be coordinated to prevent occurrences of future terrorist incidents. However, despite the best efforts of these entities, the reality is that a terrorist attack may occur in Livingston County or the surrounding areas.

Identified hazards of concern for Livingston County were ranked in Section 5.3. Probability of occurrence, or likelihood of an event, is one parameter used for hazard rankings. Based on historical records and input from the Planning Committee, probability of occurrence of terrorism events in the County is considered “Rare” (not likely to occur within a particular year)

### Climate Change Impacts

No climate change impacts are associated with the hazard because terrorism is a human-caused hazard.



### 5.4.10.2 Vulnerability Assessment

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To understand risk, a community must evaluate what assets are exposed or vulnerable in the hazard area identified. All of Livingston County has been identified as the hazard area for terrorism events. Therefore, all assets in the County (population, structures, critical facilities and lifelines), as described in the County profile, are vulnerable.

#### Impact on Life, Health, and Safety

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For this HMP, the entire population in Livingston County is considered vulnerable to terrorism events. However, it can be inferred that individuals living in highly populated areas will have a greater exposure to terrorist incidents than those living in rural areas because terrorists typically prefer to affect the greatest number of individuals at a given location. Refer to Section 4 for a summary of population statistics for the County. A large-scale incident could kill or injure many residents in the immediate vicinity of the attack and could also affect people at a distance from the initial event.

#### Impact on General Building Stock

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All building stock in the County is exposed and vulnerable to the terrorism hazard because of accessibility, design, availability to roof access, driveways underneath buildings, unmonitored areas, proximities of structures to transportation routes, underground pipelines, and potential for a terrorist to strike any structure randomly. Refer to Section 4, which summarizes the building inventory in Livingston County.

#### Impact on Critical Facilities and Lifelines

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Critical facilities and lifelines are exposed to terrorist attacks, effects of which could be catastrophic. Dams, power stations, and government facilities are all examples of critical infrastructure and facilities that are vulnerable. Additionally, communications systems, first-responder stations, and emergency operations centers are all vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Disrupting one of these facilities or destroying critical infrastructure could result in devastating, cascading impacts on Livingston County. All critical facilities in the County are at risk to impacts from the terrorism hazard.

#### Impact on the Economy

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Measuring the economic impact of a terrorist attack on Livingston County is difficult. The initial impact can be measured in immediate costs, such as costs related to response to the event and those associated with immediate loss of productivity that results from closed businesses. The full economic impact includes long-term costs such as terrorism mitigation activities.

#### Cascading Impacts on Other Hazards

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Terrorism can impact utility failure events. Attacks on utilities can have a direct impact on utility failure or shutdown if the terrorism cannot be mitigated. Refer to Section 5.4.12 Utility Failure for more information about this hazard of concern.

#### Future Changes that May Impact Vulnerability

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Understanding future changes that effect vulnerability in the county can assist in planning for future development and ensure establishment of appropriate mitigation, planning, and preparedness measures. The county considered the following factors to examine potential conditions that may affect hazard vulnerability:

- Potential or projected development
- Projected changes in population



- Other identified conditions as relevant and appropriate, including the impacts of climate change

### **Projected Development**

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As discussed and illustrated in Section 4 (County Profile), areas targeted for future growth and development have been identified across the county. Areas of growth may become a target for terrorism depending on the type of development and the economic impacts it will have on Livingston County. Refer to Section 4, and Volume II Section 9 for more information about the potential new development in Livingston County.

### **Projected Changes in Population**

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According to the 2019 American Community Survey 5-year population estimates, the population of the County has decreased by approximately 3-percent since 2010. Even though the population has seen a slight decrease in the county, all persons living or traveling within Livingston County are at risk to terrorism events. Refer to Section 4, County Profile, which provides additional discussion on population trends.

### **Climate Change**

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There are no known impacts climate change will have on terrorism.

### **Change of Vulnerability Since the 2015 HMP**

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Overall, the County’s vulnerability to terrorism has not changed since the 2015 HMP, and the entire County will continue to be exposed and vulnerable to terrorism events.