

# Can terrorists go chemical?

**Experts: Yes, but massive casualties are highly unlikely**

By **CHARLES J. HANLEY**  
AP Special Correspondent

AMMAN, Jordan — After the warehouse raid in northern Jordan, the word from authorities horrified the people of Amman.

Terrorists linked to al-Qaida had assembled a fearsome array of chemicals and planned a bombing that would send a 2-mile-wide "poison cloud" over this Middle East capital, killing as many as 80,000 people, military prosecutors said.

Osama bin Laden's foot soldiers had finally concocted a weapon of mass destruction.

A year later, in the hard light of scientific scrutiny, that sinister scenario looks more fictional than factual.

"Eighty thousand! That would have been like Hiroshima. And that was an atomic bomb," says Samih Khreis, one of the alleged plotters' lawyers.

The defense attorneys aren't alone in scoffing at the "WMD" claim. International experts checking the suspects' supposed list of chemicals — from the industrial compound ammonium to the explosive nitroglycerin — say either the defendants or the Jordanian authorities, or both, had little inkling about the makings of a chemical weapon.

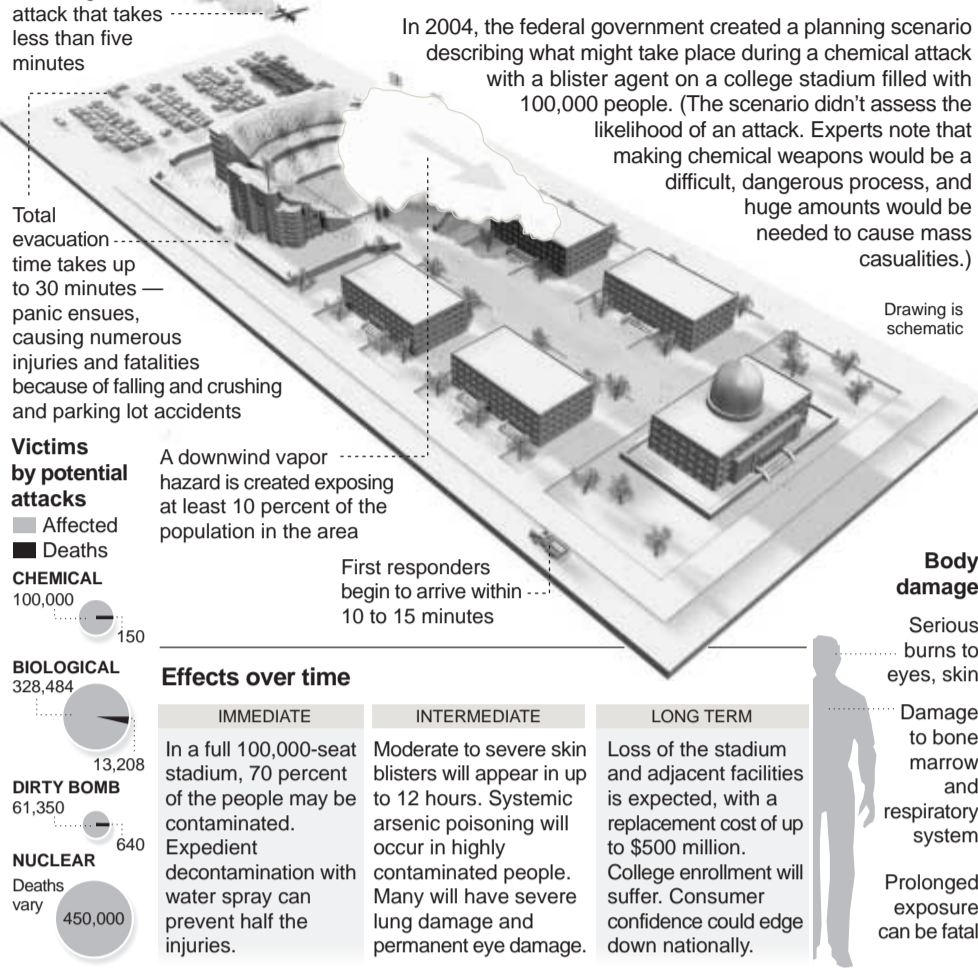
The compounds "may generate some toxic byproducts, but they're unlikely to result in significant deaths by poisoning," said Ron G. Manley of Britain, a former senior U.N. adviser on chemical weapons.

The poison cloud of Amman is one more dubious episode in the story of the terrorist quest for doomsday arms, a dark vision that has become an axiom of today's counterterrorist strategy. Four years into the "global war on terror," half the Americans surveyed this summer said they worry "a lot" about the possibility of such a WMD attack, according to the U.S. polling firm Public Agenda.

Concerns emerged in the 1990s when the Soviet Union's collapse left nuclear and other arms vulnerable to theft. Worries grew as "recipes" for mass-casualty weapons flashed around the Internet. In 1998, al-Qaida leader bin Laden told Time magazine that acquiring such arms to

## SCENARIOS OF TERRORISM

### Unfolding of a chemical attack



SOURCE: The Homeland Security Council

defend Muslims "is a religious duty." Three years later in Afghanistan, the U.S. military found al-Qaida documents, crude equipment and other evidence of chemical and biological experimentation.

Al-Qaida's intent is clear, says a key U.S. intelligence analyst.

"The intent is there and you can see it in the 'fatwas' justifying the use" of WMD, Donald Van Durn of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division said in a Washington interview.

One fatwa, or Muslim religious decree, issued by radical Saudi cleric Nasser al-Fahd in 2003 at bin Laden's request, "authorized" the use of ultimate weapons "if the infidels can be repelled from the Muslims only by using such weapons."

Amid all the warnings, boasts and chilling tales, however, the daunting difficulties of fielding such weapons usually go unmentioned — along with al-Qaida's glaring lack of expertise and stable home base, the unreliability of Internet "formulas," and the progress made worldwide in locking down the raw materi-

als of the most destructive arms.

The only known terrorist use of a chemical weapon occurred in 1995 in the Tokyo subway system, when Aum Shinrikyo cult members punctured plastic bags of sarin, unleashing nerve-agent vapor that felled thousands of commuters.

The cult, including scientists, is believed to have spent millions of dollars on the demanding, dangerous production process, but came up with only impure sarin. It killed 12 people — hardly a mass-fatality terror attack, specialists point out.

Some analysts say the facts of chemistry may mean little in the end for those who want to terrorize populations, as long as the word "chemical" is heard on air or seen in headlines.

"One needs only to look at the adjectives used by the media to describe chemicals to understand why the general public is frightened: toxic, killer, lethal, deadly," said Oregon toxicologist Dr. Robert Hendrickson, of the Oregon Health and Science University.

## Halloween

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Survey Research Center at Ohio University found remarkable variation in attitudes about Halloween and even in the numbers of trick-or-treaters who were received last year.

"It's an old holiday. Halloween is particularly popular in places where people have been doing it for years and that's the Northeast," said University at Albany sociologist Richard Lachmann.

An average of 43 trick-or-treaters were welcomed last year by Roman Catholics living in the Northeast. But the average was only 19 trick-or-treaters at the homes of Southern Protestants

who describe themselves as spiritually "born again."

"There is not a whole lot that fundamentalists find acceptable about Halloween or even All Saints Day, which, after all, is primarily a Catholic holy day," said Jo Paoletti, an American studies scholar at the University of Maryland. "They are pretty unhappy with all of the pagan symbols that accompany Halloween."

The survey asked: "Do you think Halloween is generally a good, wholesome activity for children, or do you think it is not good or wholesome for kids?" Seventy-three percent said they approve of the children's festival, 20 percent object to Halloween and 7 percent were undecided.

People who describe themselves as "very conservative" were three times more likely to

disapprove of Halloween than were self-described "very liberal" folk. Evangelical Protestants were twice as likely as Catholics to dislike children's festival.

Two Sussex County clergymen largely stuck with their region on the question of Halloween.

There's nothing wrong with dressing up, said the Rev. Thomas Diamond, the pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Newton.

"We don't come right out and condemn Halloween," Diamond said, "but we do not encourage people to wear demonic outfits."

Halloween is based on an old church tradition of Hallowed Eve, a night that evil spirits could roam, Diamond said.

Monsignor Paul Knauer, of Our Lady of the Lake Roman Catholic Church in Sparta, said Halloween is a fun holiday for children to get

free candy.

"Halloween is a harmless celebration for kids to enjoy," Knauer said. "It's a fun night for the kids."

The majority of people do not associate the holiday with evil, Knauer said.

"There's a lot of evil and bad things in the world and Halloween isn't one we should be focusing on," he said.

The survey was conducted by telephone from Oct. 9-23 at the Scripps Center in a project sponsored by Scripps Howard News Service and the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University.

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. *New Jersey Sunday Herald Staff Writer Jeanette Calo contributed to this report.*

## Vernon Inn

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approached us. He and his wife came in for dinner and they looked around and he gave me his card. ... So they came in and did their thing. It was actually a lot of fun for us, too — sometimes we'd be here with them and stuff, but we made too much noise, so we had to leave.

**Diane:** Afterward, people starting going through pictures they took when we were renovating (in March 2003) and they were seeing the orbs (circular balls of energy captured on film).

**Q. Do you think that had anything to do with the building renovations?**

**Diane:** They came out more then. We heard a lot more and saw a lot more.

**Dan:** You could feel the presence. Cold on the back of your neck, seeing shadows, just the way the air moved. When we were renovating, I was here from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m., almost every day we were doing it. I was here by myself most of the time at night.

**Q. Do you think the ghost has cost you customers or attracted customers?**

**Diane:** A little of each. A lot of our kids' friends would be like, "We're not going in there, we're scared."

**Dan:** Some people are intrigued and get excited because Halloween's coming up. ... Some of the staff doesn't want to go to the basement. A lot of people don't like to go there.

**Q. Is that where most of the activity is?**

**Dan:** You never know. But you just got to figure the bar was originally in the basement and then somebody lived in the basement as an apartment until the (19)70s. I couldn't live down there. ... It's cold.

**Diane:** Some of the girls won't go downstairs to the basement by

themselves. There are some people who have never gone down there — they'll always send someone else. It's hysterical. I'm like, "No one is going to hurt you, I've been down there already today. If they were going to hurt you, they'd have hurt you years ago."

**Dan:** The people who live upstairs (say) the TV will just change channels and the owners will have to get out of bed to change back.

**Q. Do they see much activity?**  
**Dan:** They work here, so they're used to it.

**Q. So you do get used to it?**  
**Diane:** Oh, absolutely. You don't even think about it after a while. It's an old building.

**Dan:** If you're here all by yourself and the door opens and closes, there's no one here so you get used to it. You sit there and your hair stands on end, you get that cold breeze, and you just go "Oh well," look around, and that's it.

**Q. How do your daughters feel about it?**

**Dan:** Their room is one of the rooms that has a lot of orbs in it, and they hang out there and play like it's nothing. They say kids can talk to (ghosts) because kids are pure.

**Diane:** They sense things.  
**Dan:** They say that some kids' imaginary friends are angels. And they might have three of them to talk to.

**Diane:** Yeah, but if it's something like that, you hope it's family that's dead and not a complete stranger.

**Q. Do you ever talk to the ghosts?**

**Dan:** No, but for a while I was putting a beer out on the corner of the bar to see if they'd drink it. Never did.

*For more information on North Jersey Paranormal Research's investigation of the Vernon Inn visit the group's Web site at [www.njpr.org](http://www.njpr.org).*

## Ghosts

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bless the house or room to "remove anything they're afraid of," Diamond said.

"We would be calling upon God's presence to be in the house to remove all fear from the minds of the individual," he said.

Monsignor Paul Knauer, of Our Lady of the Lake Roman Catholic Church in Sparta, said the Catholic faith also rejects the idea of ghosts as portrayed in popular culture.

"We believe people have a spirit and soul, but ghosts in the sense usually taken, such as haunting and so on, and 'Casper the Friendly Ghost,' no," he said. "We certainly believe in evil spirits."

Knauer said there are real evils to fear in the world without worrying about ghosts.

"The really bad things — drugs, alcohol, misuse of sexuality, social injustice, prejudice, war, the poor — those are evil and terrible," he said. "We need to put our energy (toward) love of God and love of neighbor."

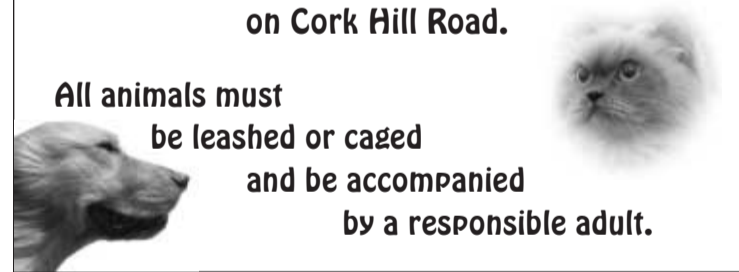
The Pulse of Sussex County, an ongoing survey of county residents prepared by Sussex County Community College's Office of Institutional Research for The New Jersey Herald, focuses on Sussex County's take on issues and trends. The telephone survey was conducted Sept. 28 and 29 by students in a statistics class taught by Mary DeHart and Bonnie Brooks at the college.

The margin of error for this poll is plus or minus 5.53 percentage points.

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