

Dirty Bombs

A dirty bomb is made of explosives, such as dynamite, and radioactive powder or pellets.

The purpose of a dirty bomb is to blast radioactive material into the air around the explosion, causing buildings and people to be exposed.

Why have dirty bombs become a current issue?

Dirty bombs could be used in a terrorist attack to frighten people and leave buildings unusable for a long period of time.

What are the sources of radiation for a dirty bomb?

The most harmful radioactive materials are found in nuclear power plants but increased security makes it difficult to get the materials from this source. There is a chance that the materials could come from low-level radioactive sources, such as hospitals, construction sites, and food irradiation plants.

What are the dangers of a dirty bomb?

The greatest danger of the dirty bomb comes from the blast itself. It is difficult to tell how much radiation might be present if the source of the radiation is unknown. If a low-level radioactive material has been used, not enough radiation would be present to cause severe illness from exposure to radiation.

What should I do if I am in an area where a dirty bomb has exploded?

Humans cannot see, smell, feel or taste radiation. If you are not severely hurt by the initial blast, you should:

1. Leave the immediate area on foot. Do not take buses, subways or trains because they may be contaminated.
2. Go inside the nearest building to reduce your exposure to any radioactive material.
3. Remove your clothes as soon as possible and put them in a sealed bag.
4. Take a shower or wash yourself as best as possible.
5. Be on the lookout for information from emergency and other medical personnel. Keep your television or radio tuned to local news networks.

Should I take potassium iodide (KI) if I am in an area where a dirty bomb has exploded?

Taking potassium iodide (KI) would probably not be beneficial for dirty bomb exposure, since it is not known at the time of the explosion what radioactive iodine was used. Taking KI is not recommended unless there is a risk of exposure to radioactive iodine. KI will only protect a person from radioactive materials and it will not protect other parts of the body from exposure to radiation. Follow the instructions of healthcare teams that are taking care of the situation.

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