

Keep the situation in perspective: While the animal rights agenda calls for all animal research to be ended, only a small number of activists are willing to commit acts of violence or intimidation. A police official recently said that as a scientist who works with animals, you have a better chance of being struck by lightning than you do being the target of animal rights militants.

Prepare, prepare, prepare: Insure that your institution has an up-to-date crisis plan – not one written a decade ago and that has since been collecting dust on a shelf. See what needs to be revised – are there new facilities, different species of research animals, ‘hot-button’ research in place since the plan was drafted? These all need to be considered. Members of your Crisis Management Team need to know their roles and conduct tabletop crisis exercises periodically to stay ready.

Know the threat: Stay current on the tactics and trends of the movement by subscribing to the email news digests offered by Americans for Medical Progress (amp@amprogress.org), and contact us at 703 836 9595 if you have specific concerns. Become a member of your state’s biomedical research association (see www.statesforbiomed.org). Often, the FBI provides presentations on the status of the threat, and prescriptives, to select audiences in the research community. Arrange this through your local FBI field office.

Get to know law enforcement: If your security personnel do not already have strong connections with local, state and federal law enforcement already, get to know them now, BEFORE there is an incident. The local FBI - Joint Terrorism Task Force is a good first step. Explain that your facility could be a target of activists, and invite them to survey. If necessary, hire a security firm to conduct a risk analysis/vulnerability audit of your facility and the homes of key personnel. (AMP can provide recommendations of firms that do this.)

Avoid a siege mentality: A key component of any security plan is public outreach. Be as transparent as possible, and responsive to community concerns. Have key personnel speak at Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and similar meetings – emphasize the economic benefits of your research to the local community, as well as the health benefits. Liaise with the local school system to provide speakers, and if practicable, tours of your facility. Develop a strong relationship with local newspaper, radio and TV reporters and editors: keep them posted on potential news and feature items. Arrange for lawmakers – from city councilors to U.S. Senators – to meet your scientists and tour your facility. The capital you build now within your community can be drawn on for support should you face activist targeting. Know that a large majority of Americans support the work that you do.

Stay alert: Activists usually conduct extensive research before targeting a facility or individual. Warn staff not to give sensitive information over the phone, to a visitor, or via email – this includes the names of scientists and others working with animals, location of animal facilities, and the species and number of animals on the premises. Train those who open mail or receive packages to be alert to suspicious articles. Have your security chief, or the local police, lecture staff on personal security measures. Also watch for signs – such as an employee visiting the facility off-shift - that an activist might be infiltrating your institution.

If you are threatened: Do not confront activists directly. Report any incidents through the institutional chain of command. Police should also be notified immediately. It is important that all suspicious activity be logged for possible future use by law enforcement. Write down license plates, descriptions of unusual visitors, phone calls, etc. Do NOT delete any e-mails you receive from activists.

Support those who are targeted: If an individual is singled out for her/his research, it is important that the institution provide the necessary resources to ensure the person and his/her family are seen through the situation. This may include temporary assignment of private security, information for neighbors of those who face ‘home protests’ from the activists, designation of a member of the Crisis Management Team to coordinate all assistance, counseling, legal support, etc. Staff needs to know the institution stands solidly behind them. Also, it is a moral imperative that scientific and professional societies recognize the threat of animal rights militancy and strongly renounce the tactics when they are used against members of their organizations.