



NTAS

National Terrorism Advisory System
Interim Stakeholder Information Handbook



Homeland
Security



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Introduction

The threat to our Nation

Since 9/11, our nation has faced a persistent and evolving threat from terrorism. This threat demands that we continually change and improve the way we keep our country safe.

In this threat environment – more than ever – we know that our security is a shared responsibility. That’s why we are constantly expanding our collaboration with all stakeholders – state and local governments, communities, critical infrastructure, non-profits, businesses, and international partners. We also know that the best security strategy is one that gets the public involved; one that lets Americans know how they can help to secure our country. This has been this Administration’s focus: strengthening our country’s defenses by getting all stakeholders – including the public – the information and resources they need in order to play their part in helping to secure the country.

The NTAS Interim Stakeholders Handbook

So, in partnership with our stakeholders, the new National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) provides the means to share heightened terrorism threat information across our nation and allow authorities and stakeholders to take protective action. This new system is in addition to the normal flow of threat information provided to the American people and key sector stakeholders on a regular basis.

This is an interim stakeholder information handbook for NTAS, and is intended to provide the basic necessary information about the system and to spotlight key points where stakeholders are involved both in the decision processes and execution activities. The interim handbook is just a first step towards joint development of a more comprehensive NTAS stakeholder doctrine. DHS will coordinate refinement and content of this handbook as a joint effort in the future with all stakeholders.

Federal Plans and NTAS

Certain Federal documents, such as the National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP) and some security related regulations, still carry references to the color-coded Homeland Security Advisory System. These will be revised soon to reflect NTAS. Any questions about HSAS legacy plan content or procedures affected by NTAS should be referred to the appropriate DHS stakeholder component.

Federal Funding and NTAS

States and localities may have the flexibility to use existing grant dollars to support costs associated with implementing protective measures as a result of an NTAS alert.

DHS Offices - Stakeholders

Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA)	Governor's Offices and Homeland Security Advisors stakeholders
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	States/Territories Emergency Management stakeholders
Office of Legislative Affairs	Congressional stakeholders
Office of Policy (PLCY)/Private Sector Office	Private Sector stakeholders
PLCY/Office of International Affairs	International stakeholders
PLCY/Office of State and Local Law Enforcement	State/Local and Law Enforcement stakeholders
Intelligence and Analysis	DHS Intelligence Enterprise State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers Intelligence Community stakeholders
Office of Operations Coordination and Planning	DHS and Interagency Operations stakeholders
National Protection and Programs Directorate/Infrastructure Protection	Critical Infrastructure stakeholders

I - OVERVIEW

The following principles will guide NTAS:

- A system in which the American public can have confidence.
- A system designed to communicate:
 - In clear and concise language readily understandable by the American public;
 - Detailed information without jeopardizing sources, collection methods, or disrupting an active investigation;
 - Protective measures tailored for a specific sector including components of the Federal government, State, local, and tribal entities, critical infrastructure entities, and selected private sector partners; and
 - A set duration date, where information is re-evaluated on regular basis.
- A system that is consistent, agile, and facilitates rapid modification with minimal effort.

Issuing an NTAS alert requires approval by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary. NTAS Alerts may be issued to the general public, to specific and discrete stakeholders, or to geographical regions if the situation warrants. NTAS Alerts complement existing steady state advisories and notifications already issued by DHS, such as the Joint Intelligence Bulletin (JIB) and other regular threat assessment products.

NTAS ALERTS

NTAS Alerts are designed to notify the public and/or institutions (defined in this document as the Federal government, state and local governments, critical infrastructure and the private sector) of specific and credible terrorist threats of a limited duration. A specific and credible threat is based on intelligence reporting from a reliable source(s) that includes enough detail of attacker, target, method, capability, or timing to permit countermeasures or pre-emptive protective actions.

The alerts are described as either “Imminent” or “Elevated” and may recommend certain protective measures or suggest looking for specific suspicious behavior.

Information from a terrorist threat may lead to different NTAS Alerts within geographical areas or critical infrastructure sectors. For example, it may be determined that the alert level may be Imminent for airline transportation at a specific airport while the alert level may be Elevated for a metropolitan area.

- **Elevated Alert** warns of a credible terrorist threat against the United States and its territories that is general in both timing and target, or details significant trends and developments in terrorism such that it is reasonable to recommend implementation of protective measures to thwart or mitigate against an attack.
- **Imminent Alert** warns of a credible, specific, and impending terrorist threat or on-going attack against the United States and its territories that is sufficiently specific and credible to recommend implementation of protective measures to thwart or mitigate against an attack.

Assessing the likelihood of a suspected terrorist threat requires subjective judgments within a dynamic threat environment. Current information on any threat is typically perishable and changes over time. Judgments are based on available data and recommendations to senior leadership must be made in a timely manner. The recommendation must be appropriately and quickly informed and cannot overly constrain the decision maker's flexibility. Decisions will be made in the context of threat products and briefings issued on a regular basis, as well as what can be shared and the specificity of the recommended countermeasure or pre-emptive protective action.

II - PROCESS

This section summarizes the NTAS Alert process and provides amplifying information regarding relevant activities or coordination that may involve DHS stakeholders. This process is designed to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week and reflects the reality that threat information is typically perishable and will change over time. As a result, this process must be agile and must facilitate timely coordination, recommendations, decision making, and action.

The NTAS process is triggered by a threat of a terrorist attack, or an actual attack, with potential for follow on attacks. This initial threat information may come from the intelligence community (IC); Federal, State, or local law enforcement (LE), the private sector; critical infrastructure or key resources (CI-KR) sectors or other sources. Depending on the specificity and credibility of a given threat, DHS may choose to convene its senior leaders at a meeting of the Counterterrorism Advisory Board (CTAB). In addition, based on the unique facts and circumstances of a threat, select members of the interagency, as well as other homeland security stakeholders, may be asked to provide input to the CTAB when it convenes to discuss matters related to NTAS.

After the CTAB convenes, DHS leaders and other appropriate Federal entities will discuss whether or not to recommend issuing an NTAS Alert as well as the scope of the potential alert. This recommendation will be forwarded to the DHS Secretary.

After reviewing the available information, the Secretary of Homeland Security will decide, in coordination with other Federal entities, whether an NTAS Alert should be issued. While it is intended for NTAS Alerts to be disseminated near simultaneously to all appropriate homeland security partners and stakeholders, the sequencing of dissemination will be based on the nature of the threat.

NTAS Alerts will have an expiration date or "sunset provision," meaning that individual threat alerts will be issued with a specified end date.

After the alert is issued, any recommended actions and/or protective measures will be implemented and their effects will be periodically assessed until a determination is made to modify, extend, or end the alert.



SUMMARY

The Secretary of Homeland Security informs the public and relevant government and private sector partners about a potential or actual threat with this alert, indicating whether there is an “imminent” or “elevated” threat.

DURATION

An individual threat alert is issued for a specific time period and then automatically expires. It may be extended if new information becomes available or the threat evolves.

DETAILS

- This section provides more detail about the threat and what the public and sectors need to know.
- It may include specific information, if available, about the nature and credibility of the threat, including the critical infrastructure sector(s) or location(s) that may be affected.
- It includes as much information as can be released publicly about actions being taken or planned by authorities to ensure public safety, such as increased protective actions and what the public may expect to see.

AFFECTED AREAS

- This section includes visual depictions (such as maps or other graphics) showing the affected location(s), sector(s), or other illustrative detail about the threat itself.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- This section provides information on ways the public can help authorities (e.g. camera phone pictures taken at the site of an explosion), and reinforces the importance of reporting suspicious activity.
- It may ask the public or certain sectors to be alert for a particular item, situation, person, activity or developing trend.

STAY PREPARED

- This section emphasizes the importance of the public planning and preparing for emergencies before they happen, including specific steps individuals, families and businesses can take to ready themselves and their communities.
- It provides additional preparedness information that may be relevant based on this threat.

STAY INFORMED

- This section notifies the public about where to get more information.
- It encourages citizens to stay informed about updates from local public safety and community leaders.
- It includes a link to the DHS NTAS website <http://www.dhs.gov/alerts> and <http://twitter.com/NTASAlerts>

If You See Something, Say Something™. Report suspicious activity to local law enforcement or call 911.

IV - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General FAQs

HOW DO NTAS ALERTS RELATE TO OTHER ALERT OR WARNING SYSTEMS, LIKE THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FORCE PROTECTION CONDITION, OR THE COAST GUARD'S MARITIME SECURITY LEVELS?

NTAS Alerts are separate from regular intelligence and information threat assessments and local warning systems, like Force Protection Conditions or Maritime Security Conditions. NTAS Alerts are issued by DHS in response to credible threats after they are coordinated with Federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, critical infrastructure, and private sector partners. However, other agencies may use their warning systems to supplement an NTAS Alert.

HOW DOES NTAS AFFECT CURRENT INFORMATION SHARING?

NTAS does not replace current Federal, state, local, tribal, critical infrastructure, and private sector information sharing. It is a tool for the Secretary of Homeland Security to issue a timely warning about a specific terrorist threat.

WILL I STILL HEAR WARNINGS AT THE AIRPORT?

The color-coded HSAS warnings you have seen and heard in the past will no longer be used. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) may announce NTAS Alerts in the future if they have been issued as well as any other advisory information they deem appropriate for announcement in airports and other transportation hubs.

WHAT SHOULD THE PUBLIC DO WHEN AN ALERT IS ISSUED?

Each alert to the public will provide specific information for the public to use. Some of the information will be for individuals to protect themselves, while some may focus on what the public can do to assist authorities.

IN WHAT SEQUENCE WILL STATE, LOCAL AND TRIBAL LAW ENFORCEMENT BE CONTACTED IN THE EVENT OF AN NTAS?

Every effort will be made to inform state, local and tribal law enforcement prior to the dissemination of an NTAS Alert. However, if an event is unexpected and already underway, such as the tragedy perpetrated on 11 September 2001, everyone will be notified immediately and simultaneously with subsequent, credible updates issued to appropriate locations or sectors.

HOW WILL STATE, LOCAL, TRIBAL, AND TERRITORIAL (SLTT) LEADERSHIP BE INFORMED OF NTAS ALERTS?

SLTT partners will be informed of NTAS Alerts through DHS-led conference calls and through the issuance of the alert through email. The conference calls and alerts will contain specific information about the threat, the duration of the alert, affected areas, and recommended actions.

IN THE EVENT OF AN NTAS ALERT, CAN STATES AND LOCALITIES USE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY GRANT FUNDING FOR PROTECTIVE MEASURES IMPLEMENTED AS A RESULT OF THE ALERT?

States and localities will have the flexibility to use existing grant dollars to support costs associated with implementing protective measures as a result of an NTAS alert.

IF MY AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT THE TARGET OF THE NTAS ALERT, BUT MY DEPARTMENT, OFFICE OR LOCAL LEADERSHIP FEELS IT IS NECESSARY TO INCREASE OUR SECURITY POSTURE, WILL FEDERAL FUNDING BE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE INCREASE?

No. If a state, local or tribal law enforcement agency or government makes the independent decision to increase security posture the costs will be borne by that decision making body and not the Federal Government.

HOW WILL CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE BE INFORMED OF NTAS ALERTS?

Critical infrastructure partners will be informed of NTAS Alerts through DHS-led conference calls and through the issuance of the alert through e-mail. The conference calls and alerts will contain specific information about the threat, the duration of the alert, affected areas, and recommended actions.

WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION WILL BE SHARED WITH CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PARTNERS?

Information shared with critical infrastructure partners will be done with the objective of protecting the integrity and confidentiality of sensitive information. Information sharing will follow the existing NIPP partnership model. Any information shared is subject to control designation and/or classification.

HOW CAN PRIVATE SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS GET THE LATEST INFORMATION OR ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS DURING AN ALERT?

The DHS Private Sector Office (PSO) will provide additional information on its web page—<http://www.dhs.gov/privatesector>—including an updated list of questions received and answers given during specific alerts. In addition, private sector stakeholders are encouraged to email PSO contacts at private.sector@dhs.gov or call (202) 282.8484.

HOW LONG WILL ALERTS LAST?

NTAS Alerts have a “sunset provision,” meaning that individual threat alerts will be issued with a specified end date. Alerts may then be extended if new information becomes available or if the threat evolves significantly.

WILL DHS BE PROVIDING ANY TOOLS OR GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT SLTT PARTNERS IN CHANGING WEBSITES AND OTHER PUBLIC AFFAIRS MATERIALS THAT CURRENTLY HAVE INFORMATION ON THE COLOR-CODED HOMELAND SECURITY ADVISORY SYSTEM (HSAS)?

Yes. DHS is providing tools and guidance to support SLTT partners —from websites to posters. In addition, DHS will continue to work with homeland security partners to provide further guidance as needed on the implementation of the system. As the system is used and implemented, DHS will make improvements and course corrections as needed.

WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

For more information, visit the NTAS Alert Web site at www.dhs.gov/alerts. Information may also be available on State, local, tribal and territorial government websites.



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