21 September 2017

(U) Simple Chemical Threat Tactics

(U//FOUO) Chemical Splash and Spray Attack: Rare but Potential Tactic for Violent Extremists in Homeland

(U//FOUO) **Scope.** This *Assessment* highlights the emerging criminal tactic of throwing acids or spraying unknown potentially toxic liquids in the faces or vicinity of intended targets, and underscores its likely appeal to violent extremists as a standalone tactic or for use in combination with conventional weapons. It is intended to inform stakeholders of the likelihood that violent extremists would use this tactic to cause physical harm and disrupt the operations of civilians, law enforcement personnel, first responders, government officials, critical infrastructure operators, or other individuals. This *Assessment* examines foreign and domestic incidents, including those that have disrupted infrastructure and transportation operations since 2011, and highlights a small number of notable cases. It also is intended to support future iterations of the DHS Science and Technology Directorate's Chemical Terrorism Risk Assessment by examining trends, tactics, and chemical materials involved in potential domestic chemical attacks. The information is current as of 29 August 2017.

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A), the Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center, and the Delaware Valley Intelligence Center. Coordinated with FEMA, NPPD, OHA, FBI, JCAT, and NCTC.

(U) Key Judgments

(U//FOUO) We assess that terrorists likely view tactics involving throwing or spraying acids and a variety of chemical liquids, hereafter referred to as a chemical spray and splash attack (CSSA), as a viable tactic to cause injury and disrupt critical infrastructure, judging from open source reporting describing terrorist social media posts and terrorist and violent extremist use of this tactic overseas. An analysis of a small number of incidents described in media reporting revealed that CSSAs are commonly used by criminal actors to further criminal activities and by violent extremist groups overseas to create fear, intimidate, punish, and disfigure individuals and groups that resist their control or ideology in their area of operations; the tactic, however, has rarely been operationalized by actors in the Homeland. We note, however, that homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) and lone offenders likely would find this tactic appealing and could easily adapt it to the Homeland, as it requires no specific technical expertise and the materials most often associated with criminal attack are usually unregulated and widely available.

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(U//FOUO) We assess that anarchist extremists, other domestic terrorists (DTs), and criminal actors are the most likely US-based violent extremists to use CSSAs based on our analysis of past and present DT use of this tactic and on open source reporting of unaffiliated criminal actors using acids, toxic industrial chemicals, and other chemical incapacitating agents in attacks in the Homeland. They have used CSSA tactics against law enforcement, institutions, ideological opponents, protesters, and mass gatherings, especially those associated with political or social causes, judging from a body of open source reporting. These actors rarely used CSSAs to cause fatalities, but previous incidents have demonstrated that domestic CSSAs can cause significant bodily harm and disrupt law enforcement and first responder operations.

(U//FOUO) While foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) and violent extremist groups have operationalized CSSA overseas and have made recent calls for such attacks in the Homeland, we lack specific information indicating that HVEs or lone offenders would be receptive to this tactic or would seek to incorporate CSSAs into attacks inside the United States; we assess, however, that many of the factors likely driving criminal use of CSSAs—such as the ability to harm individuals, cause infrastructure disruption, possibly evade capture following an attack, and/or perpetrate repeat attacks—likely would also make this tactic attractive to terrorists, especially violent extremists lacking training, and the access or desire to use explosives or firearms.

(U//FOUO) Strong acids and caustic chemicals are frequently used in CSSAs, but we assess attackers are just as likely to choose other commercially available chemicals such as pepper spray, bleach, ammonia, solvents, and other irritating, foul smelling, or toxic industrial chemicals, based on the variety of materials used for CSSAs domestically and abroad. First responders treating victims of CSSAs may face secondary dermal and inhalation hazards depending on the type of chemicals used.

(U//FOUO) What is a chemical spray and splash attack?

(U//FOUO) DHS uses the term CSSA to identify attacks in which the simple mechanical or crude dissemination of a liquid is used to intentionally harm, vandalize, or disrupt the activities of attack victims. Some common means of dissemination documented in previous CSSAs include:

- *(U//FOUO) Throwing harmful liquids from a bottle, cup, or container;*
- *(U//FOUO) Spraying harmful materials from a squirt bottle, aerosol can, or water gun; and*
- *(U//FOUO) Breaking bottles, balloons, or other vessels containing chemicals in the vicinity of victims or a targeted location.*

(U) ISIS Urges CSSA in the Homeland While Violent Extremist Operationalize the Tactic Overseas

(U//FOUO) We assess that terrorists likely view tactics involving throwing or spraying acids and a variety of chemical liquids, hereafter called chemical spray and splash attacks (CSSAs), as a viable tactic to cause injury and disrupt critical infrastructure, judging from open source reporting describing terrorist social media posts and terrorist and violent extremist use of this tactic overseas. An analysis of a small number of incidents described in media reporting revealed that CSSAs are commonly used by criminal actors to further criminal activities and by violent extremist groups overseas to create fear, intimidate, punish, and disfigure individuals and groups that resist their control or ideology in their area of operations; the tactic, however, has rarely been operationalized by actors in the Homeland. We note, however, that HVEs and lone offenders likely would find this tactic appealing and could easily adapt it to the Homeland, as it requires no specific technical expertise and the materials most often associated with criminal attack are usually unregulated and widely available. [a,b]

[a] (U//FOUO) DHS defines homegrown violent extremist (HVE) as a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by foreign terrorist organizations, but acting independently of direction by a foreign terrorist group.

» (U//FOUO) The Islamic State in Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS)-linked "Lone Mujihad" channel on the Europe-based messaging application Telegram, as of late 2017, urged US-based ISIS-supporters to attack "unbelievers" with sulfuric acid on public transportation.[1]

» (U) Violent extremists affiliated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria, since at least early 2015, were allegedly smearing or throwing acid in the faces of women from the Iraq-based Yazidi religious minority and Kurdish women who refused to be sex slaves or submit to forced marriages, according to open source reporting.[2,3] Additionally, ISIS-affiliated violent extremists publicly tortured and executed enemies, traitors, and those they deemed "immoral" by dipping them in vats of nitric acid, according to open source media describing accounts from sources claiming direct access.[4,5]

» (U) Individuals affiliated with Taliban branches in Afghanistan and Pakistan have thrown acid at young women who refused marriage or allegedly dishonored their family, according to open source media reporting and international aid organizations.[6,7,8,9] Members of both groups continue to openly advocate throwing acid in the faces of young girls who seek "Westernized" education.[10]

(U) In likely unrelated incidents, unknown actors in Germany disrupted air and rail transportation operations by releasing unknown irritating agents—most likely pepper spray—at Hamburg International Airport and on a commuter train in early 2017, according to open source media reports.[11,12,13]

(U//FOUO) Domestic Criminal CSSAs Rare; Targets Included Law Enforcement, Public Figures, and Infrastructure Operators

(U//FOUO) Our analysis of open source, law enforcement, and court records on worldwide CSSAs indicate that most cases involved personal grievances or "revenge" attacks, but some actors have used this tactic to rob stores to obtain weapons, perpetrate carjackings, cause vandalism, evade law enforcement, harass political opponents or those participating in protected activity, disfigure victims, and disrupt critical infrastructure operations.[14–20] In a small number of domestic CSSAs, such as those highlighted below, actors with unknown motivations have targeted law enforcement officers, public officials, people attending mass gatherings, and transit infrastructure.[21,22,23]

» *(U) In March 2017, an identified individual pled guilty to a conspiracy to commit assault following an admission in court to discussing a plot to disrupt the 2017 Inaugural Ball by releasing a foul-smelling acid in the vicinity of a building ventilation system.*[24]

» *(U) In January 2017, an unidentified individual attacked a Virginia-based police officer by throwing a caustic liquid in the officer's face outside a public business. The officer's injuries, while not life-threatening, involved significant burns to his eyes, face, and neck.*[25]

» *(U) In January 2017, a counter-protester in St. Paul, Minnesota sprayed chemical irritants during a women's march.*[26]

» *(U) In December 2016, two unidentified individuals attacked a Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) bus driver in Philadelphia with a liquid mixture, resulting in the disruption of transportation operations in the area and temporary hospitalization of the bus driver.*[27]

» *(U) In September 2012, a former soldier attacked a district court judge at his home by throwing an unknown clear liquid in the judge's face.*[28]

[b] (U//FOUO) DHS defines a lone offender as an individual motivated by one or more violent extremist ideologies who, operating alone, supports or engages in acts of unlawful violence in furtherance of that ideology, or ideologies that may involve influence from a larger terrorist organization or foreign actor.

(U//FOUO) Factors Driving Increased Criminal Use of CSSAs Also Attractive to Violent Extremists

(U//FOUO) While FTOs and HVEs have operationalized CSSAs overseas and have made recent calls for such attacks in the Homeland, we lack specific information indicating that HVEs or inspired lone offenders would be receptive to this tactic or would seek to incorporate CSSAs into attacks inside the United States; we assess, however, that many of the factors likely driving criminal use of CSSAs—such as the ability to harm individuals, cause infrastructure disruption, possibly evade capture following an attack, and/or perpetrate repeat attacks—likely would also make this tactic attractive to terrorists, especially violent extremists lacking training and the access or desire to use explosives or firearms.

» (U) On 14 July 2017, two now-detained criminal gang-affiliated actors conducted five acid attacks reported over a 70-minute timeframe in two London suburbs.[29] The individuals used a moped to strike victims and quickly disappear into traffic, making it difficult for witnesses to identify the attackers or provide details to law enforcement and first responders, according to open source media describing a timeline of events. [30]

» (U) German police, as of late 2016, were attempting to solve a series of CSSAs, but had not yet identified the perpetrator(s) or motives, according to German open source press reporting.[31] In at least two of the five incidents, an unknown assailant sprayed women with battery acid.[32] These unattributed and unsolved incidents demonstrate the ease with which multiple attacks to inflict serious injuries can be perpetrated by one or more individuals in a short timeframe, the difficulty in identifying and apprehending suspects to prevent future attacks, and the potential for copycats.

» (U) Factors that we assess could make the CSSA tactic attractive to violent extremists include the ease of obtaining suitable chemicals, the relative ubiquity of available substances, and the subsequent difficulty in identifying perpetrators after an attack. In London, for instance, more than 70 percent of the cases remain unprosecuted due to difficulties in identifying suspects and the unwillingness of victims to pursue charges, according to open source media citing police information and a senior lecturer of criminology at Middlesex University.[33]

(U//FOUO) FTOs and their supporters in the United States likely will prioritize using conventional tactics involving edged weapons, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-ramming, and small arms attacks, judging from a body of open source reporting highlighting tactics used by FTO-inspired actors in the West and violent extremist literature advocating such tactics. Nonetheless, we remain concerned that media attention about criminally motivated CSSAs and increased advocacy by FTOs will heighten awareness and potentially influence violent extremists considering attacks in the Homeland. We have medium confidence in this assessment because conventional tactics consistently cause more fatalities than CSSAs, and we found no mention of acid attacks or splash attacks among the tactics recommended in official violent extremist publications. Shifts in the threat environment and continuous evolution of tactics limit our confidence level to medium, as tactics such as vehicle-ramming—a tactic that just a few years ago was uncommon—have become increasingly used by HVEs and lone offenders in the West.

» (U//FOUO) London Metropolitan Police indicated that the number of reported acid attacks in London increased by 74 percent, from 261 in 2015 to 454 in 2016, with more than 1,800 attacks—employing various tactics—involving corrosive chemicals reported since 2010, according to open source media citing official police figures.[34] They attributed the "sharp rise" in acid attacks in London to the increased popularity of the tactic among criminal gangs in the city, according to official information reported in open source media.[35]

» (U//FOUO) Violent extremists in the West have historically opted for simple attacks involving edged weapons, guns, incendiary devices, IEDs, and vehicle-ramming, judging from a review of 28 FTO-inspired and directed HVE attacks and disrupted plots in the West since mid-2016.[36–43] FTO official publications and social media posts advocated these tactics in Western attacks and praised them when they were executed successfully.[44-48] While we lack insight into HVE or lone offender methodology as it relates to CSSAs, recent calls for acid attacks on an ISIS-linked social media account known for providing guidance for attacks probably increases the likelihood that at least some HVEs and lone offenders will consider this tactic.

(U//FOUO) Anarchist Extremists and Other DTs Most Likely US-based Threat Actors to Use CSSAs

(U//FOUO) **We assess that anarchist extremists, other DTs, and criminal actors are the most likely US-based criminal actors to use CSSAs based on our analysis of past and present DTs use of this tactic and on open source reporting of unaffiliated criminal actors using acids, toxic industrial chemicals, and other chemical incapacitating agents in attacks in the Homeland.[c,d] They have used CSSA tactics against law enforcement, institutions, ideological opponents, protesters, and mass gatherings, especially those associated with political or social causes, judging from a body of open source reporting. These actors rarely used CSSAs to cause fatalities, but previous incidents have demonstrated that domestic CSSAs can cause significant bodily harm and disrupt law enforcement and first responder operations.**

» (U) On multiple occasions since 2012, state and local law enforcement officials have warned that violent anarchist groups planned to disrupt peaceful protests or political conventions using acid-filled eggs, holiday ornaments, and other objects filled with urine, including squirt guns, according to open source media reports, some citing law enforcement information.[49]

» (U) In early 2017, individuals, possibly including DT, pepper-sprayed Philadelphia police officers during a protest march against police brutality, "stop and frisk" policies, and corruption, according to open source media reports.[50]

» (U//FOUO) DT groups and actors who have sought to carry out CSSAs in the United States and Canada, including environmental extremists, sovereign citizen extremists, anarchist extremists, and white supremacist extremists, have used or brought a variety of harmful and irritating agents (e.g., pepper spray, bear repellent, butyric acid) to assault state and local law enforcement, protestors, and people attending mass gatherings. Some incidents resulted in disruption, panic, and minor injuries, according to open source and law enforcement reporting.[51–54, e,f,g]

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[c] (U//FOUO) DHS defines anarchist extremists as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence as a means of changing the government and society in support of the belief that all forms of capitalism and corporate globalization should be opposed and that governing institutions are unnecessary and harmful to society.

[d] (U//FOUO) DHS defines domestic terrorism as any act of unlawful violence that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources committed by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group. This act is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state or other subdivision of the United States and appears to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping. A domestic terrorist differs from a homegrown violent extremist in that the former is not inspired by and does not take direction from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power.

[e] (U//FOUO) DHS defines environmental rights extremists as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence against people, businesses, or government entities perceived to be destroying, degrading, or exploiting the natural environment.

[f] (U//FOUO) DHS defines sovereign citizen extremists as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence directed at public officials, financial institutions, and government facilities in support of their belief that the legitimacy of US citizenship should be rejected; almost all forms of established government, authority, and institutions are illegitimate; and that they are immune to federal, state, and local laws.

[g] (U//FOUO) DHS defines white supremacist extremists as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence directed at the federal government, ethnic minorities, or Jewish persons in support of their belief that Caucasians are intellectually and morally superior to other races and their perception that the government is controlled by Jewish persons.

(U//FOUO) Analysis of Alternatives: FTOs Conducting but Not Claiming Responsibility for CSSAs in the Homeland

(U//FOUO) While we have seen no evidence supporting that the premise FTOs and HVEs intend to conduct CSSAs in the Homeland, we considered the plausible alternative that they are already using this tactic in the West, in light of the capability for CSSAs to be used without warning and the multiple unclaimed, unattributed CSSAs recently noted in Europe. We assess that this alternative is less likely because FTOs and HVEs would almost certainly claim responsibility for such attacks based on assertions made following past terrorist attacks and at least one terrorist publication highlighting the importance of claiming responsibility on behalf of an inspiring or affiliated terrorist organization.[55] *Furthermore, if CSSAs had been adopted as a tactic by an FTO, we judge one or more terrorist organizations would feature that tactic in their publication in the hope of inspiring others to conduct similar attacks.*

(U//FOUO) Most Commercially Available Toxic or Irritating Chemicals Could Be Used for CSSAs

(U//FOUO) **Strong acids and caustic chemicals are frequently used in CSSAs, but we assess attackers are just as likely to choose other commercially available chemicals such as pepper spray, bleach, ammonia, solvents, and other irritating, foul smelling, toxic industrial chemicals, and other non-toxic materials, based on the variety of materials used for CSSAs domestically and abroad. First responders treating victims of CSSAs may face secondary dermal and inhalation hazards depending on the type of chemicals used.** For instance, since 2012, criminal actors in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom have used a variety of chemicals, including ammonia, bleach, cleaning products, solvents, bear spray, and pepper spray, in CSSAs against celebrities, religious figures, and transportation infrastructure operators.[56,57,58] Some CSSAs present secondary dermal and inhalation hazards to first responders, as shown by multiple instances in which first responders and law enforcement officers were injured while rendering aid to victims of chemical suicides and other chemical exposures.[59,60,61]

(U) Report Suspicious Activity

(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement. Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx.

(U) Tracked by: HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.4, HSED-8.5, HSEC-8.8

(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) This Assessment *is based primarily on open source reporting predominantly from 2010 to present, much of which is corroborated or supported by victim accounts, pictures, law enforcement reports, and hospital studies. We have* ***high confidence*** *in our assessment that HVEs and lone offenders probably would find CSSAs an attractive tactic and could easily operationalize it in the Homeland because there is little evidence of criminal actors, FTOs, or violent extremist groups currently using this tactic facing any logistical or expertise barriers. However, we have* ***medium confidence*** *in our assessment that media reporting and increased FTO advocacy likely would influence HVE decisions to adopt CSSAs in the Homeland because we lack insight into HVE and lone offender methodology in adopting new tactics and the potential resonance of media reporting or terrorist messaging.*

(U//FOUO) We have ***high confidence*** *in our assessment that the majority of CSSAs will continue to be perpetrated by criminals, based on the frequency of these types of actors already using this tactic and the frequency of CSSA use in personal grievances.*

(U//FOUO) We also have ***medium confidence*** *that CSSA use could accomplish some of the same goals—such as causing fear, financial harm, or "gruesome" injuries—as described in FTO official publications and many of the features that have made CSSAs a desirable tactic for criminals. We remain concerned that increased criminal use of and media attention about this tactic will cause violent extremists to identify and adopt this tactic in future operations.*

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Homeland Security

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

Customer Feedback Form

Product Title: (U//FOUO) Chemical Splash and Spray Attack: Rare but Potential Tactic for Violent Extremists in Homelan

All survey responses are completely anonymous. No personally identifiable information is captured unless you voluntarily offer personal or contact information in any of the comment fields. Additionally, your responses are combined with those of many others and summarized in a report to further protect your anonymity.

1. Please select partner type: Select One **and function:** Select One

2. What is the highest level of intelligence information that you receive? Select One

3. Please complete the following sentence: "I focus most of my time on:" Select One

4. Please rate your satisfaction with each of the following:

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N/A
Product's overall usefulness	○	○	○	○	○	○
Product's relevance to your mission	○	○	○	○	○	○
Product's timeliness	○	○	○	○	○	○
Product's responsiveness to your intelligence needs	○	○	○	○	○	○

5. How do you plan to use this product in support of your mission? *(Check all that apply.)*

- ☐ Drive planning and preparedness efforts, training, and/or emergency response operations
- ☐ Observe, identify, and/or disrupt threats
- ☐ Share with partners
- ☐ Allocate resources (e.g. equipment and personnel)
- ☐ Reprioritize organizational focus
- ☐ Author or adjust policies and guidelines
- ☐ Initiate a law enforcement investigation
- ☐ Intiate your own regional-specific analysis
- ☐ Intiate your own topic-specific analysis
- ☐ Develop long-term homeland security strategies
- ☐ Do not plan to use
- ☐ Other:

6. To further understand your response to question #5, please provide specific details about situations in which you might use this product.

7. What did this product *not* address that you anticipated it would?

8. To what extent do you agree with the following two statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disgree	N/A
This product will enable me to make better decisions regarding this topic.	○	○	○	○	○	○
This product provided me with intelligence information I did not find elsewhere.	○	○	○	○	○	○

9. How did you obtain this product? Select One

10. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up conversation about your feedback? Yes

To help us understand more about your organization so we can better tailor future products, please provide:

Name:		*Position:*	
Organization:		*State:*	
Contact Number:		*Email:*	

Submit Feedback

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