

# REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

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## Real estate industry puts priority on building safety

By Liana Grey



Edward Fallon, BOMA

On Sunday, May 1st, just hours before President Obama announced that Osama Bin Laden had been killed in Pakistan, security personnel held a training exercise at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Portions of the north and south wing were closed, and traffic outside the commuter hub was diverted, as officers responded to a bombing scenario staged with simulated smoke.

At the time, it was little more than a routine drill: since 9/11, the Port Authority has invested over \$5 billion in securing its bridges, tunnels, ports, and terminals, and has avoided, at least to public knowledge, any major security breaches over the last nine and a half years. Now that the founder of Al Qaeda is dead, and the threat of retaliatory attacks looms, the Port Authority Police, along with counterterrorism agencies and building managers across the New York area, are on a heightened state of alert.

“In light of the events that are unfolding, the Port Authority has directed its police to increase its presence at all Port Authority facilities, including the World Trade Center site,” director Chris Ward said in a statement shortly after news broke of Bin Laden’s death.

The Building Owners and Managers Association of New York, which has a seat in the command center of the city’s Office of Emergency Management, is monitoring the situation closely. BOMA has conducted training with the Fire Department, and receives regular alerts from the New York Police Department and the Department of Homeland Security.

“New York City commercial buildings adhere to the strictest security standards of any US city,” said BOMA NY president Edward Fallon. “Our buildings are well prepared for emergencies.”

In addition to collaborating with citywide agencies, BOMA’s preparedness committee conducts its own training sessions, following a multi-layered approach advocated by Sofia Dermisi, a real estate professor and terrorism expert who has studied the relocation patterns of former World Trade Center tenants.

In 2005, Dermisi presented a paper at a safety and security conference in Rome, Italy, where she called for “the development of a citywide Property Anti-Terrorism Taskforce, which will increase the

cross-collaboration between real estate and law enforcement and emergency management agencies, while strategically preparing owners and property managers,” according to the paper’s abstract.

Of course, as with other property management goals – like reducing energy waste – it’s the small, simple measures that are most effective in thwarting terrorist attacks.

Planned Companies, a New Jersey based real estate services firm, warned its security staff to be on the lookout for strange behavior. “What we’re telling our people, or talking about again, is just be aware of odd occurrences,” said Dino Iuliano, the company’s executive vice president. “People who are suspicious, challenge them, but don’t be afraid to challenge them in a nice way.”

When faced with visitors that seem out of place, personnel at Planned Companies, which provides security for high profile office buildings like 393 and 401 Fifth Avenue, are trained to ask questions such as “how can I help you today?” It’s important, Iuliano added, to keep track of where everybody is.

To reduce hiding spots for bombs, some major transit hubs did away with traditional garbage cans after 9/11. At the Port Authority Bus Terminal, commuters dispose of their trash in wire baskets fitted with clear plastic bags. And at Grand Central Terminal, where 750,000 visitors stream in and out each day, bins are absent entirely from the landmarked main concourse, where security personnel occasionally patrol with bomb-sniffing dogs.

Not long after the twin towers fell, vehicle barriers cropped up around potential targets ranging from trophy office buildings to the New York Stock Exchange. Black and cylindrical, or thinly disguised as concrete flower planters, most are as nondescript and utilitarian as street signs or fire hydrants.

But in the Financial District, which perhaps has more security bollards than any other neighborhood, the devices have become an outlet for architectural creativity.

Rock 12 Security Architecture, a subsidiary of Rogers Marvel, a TriBeCa-based firm, designed turntable vehicle barriers, or TBVs, that were installed along Broad Street.

“The TVB is a shallow foundation, nonhydraulic, operable device designed to be easily installed and incorporated into an architectural streetscape,” according to the firm. “The surface of the TVB can accept custom paving to match the surrounding roadway and its impact pins can be fitted with architectural sleeves of various shapes and sizes.”

When tested in 2007, the devices successfully deflected a 15,000 lb vehicle moving at 50 miles per hour. Rock 12 also fashioned NOGOs – gold, sculpture-like barriers – for the Financial District, as well as landscaped or pavement-covered ditches called Tiger Traps for Battery Park City.

The MTA, too, caught on that security measures don’t have to be bland. Five years ago, the barriers surrounding Grand Central underwent a makeover. “These bollards will have a bronze-like cap over a high-strength structural steel base,” Metro North officials told *amNewYork*. “They will be architecturally in concert with the historical era of the building.”