

## Take Notice of Suspicious Vehicles

**The recent attempted terrorist attack in New York reminds us once again that taking notice of suspicious vehicles—and reporting them—can be critical in preventing structural damage, injury and loss of life.**

On a balmy, busy Saturday night last month, a crude incendiary device was discovered in a smoking Nissan Pathfinder in Times Square. Police were called to the scene by an alert street vendor who noticed the smoke. Inside the vehicle, authorities found propane, gasoline, fireworks and two clocks with batteries. Police determined that the device was in the process of detonating when it was discovered, but that it had malfunctioned.

No doubt luck—that the device didn't go off because the man who assembled it wasn't very skilled—played a role in avoiding a potentially deadly event. But what ultimately foiled the attack was the vigilance of an “ordinary citizen” who noticed something unusual about the vehicle and immediately reported his suspicions to the authorities.

### Something is Just Not Right

So, what is it that makes a vehicle suspicious? Clearly, an S.U.V. with smoke coming out of it raised a red flag, but most clues that a vehicle might be suspicious are a bit more subtle.



Suspicious vehicles can come in all shapes, sizes and colors, but the one defining characteristic they all share is that they seem “out of place.” Some other indicators to watch for include a car, van or vehicle that:

- Emits an odd odor of chemicals, fuel, fertilizer or gunpowder
- Doesn't “fit” its surroundings—e.g., too pricey or too beat up, a panel truck in an area usually occupied by passenger cars
- Has missing license plates—or an older vehicle with new or temporary tags
- Is sagging on its springs which could indicate a load of explosives

- Is parked awkwardly or parked in an unauthorized place
- Moves slowly and repeatedly through an area
- Has tinted windows or otherwise blocked view inside
- Has been left in the same spot for an unusually long period of time
- Is left idling in an unusual spot or unusual way (e.g., door ajar or window open)
- Occupants are seen leaving in a hurried or strange manner

Most suspicious-looking vehicles turn out to be false alarms. In fact, in the days and weeks following the Times Square event, New York City police responded to several suspicious-vehicle calls—all of which turned out to be non-threatening. But it's safer not to assume there is no risk. If you observe a vehicle

with one or more of the above indicators, report it to the authorities immediately.

### Five Senses are Enough to Spot Potential Trouble

Some say law enforcement and security personnel have a “sixth sense” when it comes to spotting trouble before it happens. But there is nothing supernatural about it. What sets these professionals apart is training and experience—that and frequent, thorough patrols of their environment that give insight into what is usual, and what is not.

Alert security officers on patrol and at access control points may be the first to detect a suspicious vehicle near or at a client site. But, as the street vendor in Times Square proved, anyone with a keen understanding of his or her surroundings can learn to detect when something—or someone—seems out of place.

## Find the Suspicious Vehicle Indicators

Here are excerpts from a *New York Times* article that chronicles the Times Square incident. It includes several indicators of a suspicious vehicle. Can you find them all?

At 6:28 p.m., (Police Commissioner) Kelly said, a video surveillance camera recorded what was believed to be the dark green Nissan S.U.V., driving west on 45th street.

Moments later, a t-shirt vendor on the sidewalk saw smoke coming out of vents near the back seat of the S.U.V., which was now parked awkwardly at the curb with its engine running and its hazard lights on. The vendor called to a mounted police officer, the mayor said, who smelled gunpowder when he approached the S.U.V. and called for assistance.

Police officers from the emergency service unit and firefighters flooded the area and were troubled by the

hazard lights and running engine, and by the fact that the S.U.V. was oddly angled in the street. At this point, a firefighter from Ladder 4 reported hearing several “pops” from within the vehicle. The police also learned that the Pathfinder had the wrong license plates on it.

Officials said they had no reports of anyone seen running from the vehicle. Mr. Kelly said the police were scouring the area for any additional videotapes but noted that the S.U.V.'s windows were tinted, which could further hamper any efforts to identify those inside.

Answers: 1. smoke coming out of vents 2. parked awkwardly 3. engine running and hazard lights on 4. smell of gunpowder 5. “pops” from inside the vehicle 6. wrong license plates 7. tinted windows

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