

NYPD Warns of Chlorine Terror Risk

NEW YORK (AP) - Undercover police secretly set up a fake company to demonstrate how easily and anonymously a terrorist could purchase chlorine on the Internet for a deadly chemical strike against the city.

A videotape - presented Wednesday at a briefing of private security executives - discloses for the first time the results of "Operation Green Cloud" - a reference to the yellow-green color of chlorine gas. The purpose was "to assess the ease or difficulty with which a terrorist in the United States could acquire large quantities of chlorine without being detected by law enforcement or intelligence agencies," a narrator says on a copy of the video obtained by The Associated Press. The conclusion: "At the present time, few if any barriers stand in his way."

There has been no specific terror threat against the city involving chemicals, but New York City police recently put more emphasis on screening shipments of chlorine after learning that it has become a favored component of homemade bombs in Iraq. A 2007 United Nations report found that at least 10 attacks in Iraq involved explosives attached to chlorine canisters.

Chlorine typically is used as a disinfectant or purifier, and as an ingredient in plastics and other products. While routinely transported in liquid form, it can turn into a deadly toxic gas when exposed to air. Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said that while there were no places to obtain chlorine in New York, there are several locations in neighboring New Jersey. "It's something we have to be concerned about," he said of the potential of an attack using chlorine. "We think the whole area needs a lot of regulation." Kelly said the NYPD has been lobbying the Department of Homeland Security to draft stricter regulations requiring chlorine vendors to verify the legitimacy of their customers. The department sent federal officials a copy of the videotape and "asked them to include strict 'know-your-customer' rules," Kelly said.

Police stressed that the chlorine deal was within current regulations, which have no requirement that vendors verify identification of their customers or report transactions. In the video, an intelligence detective describes how in June 2007 the department fabricated a water purification company, complete with a mailing address, Web site and a phony contract with the city to clean up a polluted creek in Brooklyn. Investigators, after using the Internet to identify local vendors, used a credit card to place an order with one unnamed firm for three 100-pound cylinders of chlorine. No one ever asked for identification and the purchase required little human interaction, police said. The video includes surveillance footage of a truck delivering the canisters on a rain-slicked Brooklyn street lined with warehouses. At the time, hazardous material teams were on standby to respond to any accidents, police said.

Associated Press Writer Colleen Long contributed to this report. 02/13/08