



Fact Sheet



Public Affairs Division - Washington DC

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National and International Response Team

In February 1978, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) formed the arson and explosives National Response Team (NRT). Federal, state, and local investigators can request the activation of the NRT to investigate significant fire and explosion incidents.

The International Response Team (IRT) is part of the NRT program and can be deployed worldwide to investigate fires and explosions at the request of the U.S. Department of State.

ATF became actively involved in the investigation of explosives-related incidents with the enactment of the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970. In 1982, Congress amended the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970 to cover offenses involving fire, as well as explosives, thereby increasing federal jurisdiction in arson crimes.

The primary mission of the NRT is to concentrate ATF explosives and fire investigative resources and expertise on large scale incidents, or on more complex investigations due to the size, scope, or number of victims as a result of the incident. The NRT provides an immediate and sustained nationwide response capability, typically deploying within 24 hours of notification, with state-of-the-art equipment and the most qualified ATF personnel available.

The NRT works in conjunction with other investigators to reconstruct the scene, identify the seat of the blast or origin of the fire, and determine the cause. In the case of bombings and arsons, NRT members gather evidence to support criminal prosecutions. A deployed team is generally broken down into two components: a group that processes the scene and an investigative-lead element. In the course of the overall investigation, both components coordinate daily to ensure investigative continuity.

The NRT is composed of veteran special agents, including certified explosives specialists, certified fire investigators, forensic mapping specialists, accelerant and explosives detection canine teams, explosives enforcement officers, fire protection engineers, electrical engineers and forensic chemists.

The NRT's resources include a fleet of fully equipped response vehicles strategically located throughout the United States that allow the NRT to be self-contained for the forensic examination of explosives and fire scenes.

Past NRT activations include such incidents as the explosion in West, Texas, that killed 14 people in 2013, the spree of 10 arsons at churches in Texas in 2010; a commercial fire in Charleston, S.C., that killed 9 firefighters in 2007; and national level incidents such as the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon, the Atlanta, Ga., olympics bombing, the Oklahoma City, Ok., bombing, and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Significant IRT activations include a fire at a prison in Honduras that killed more than 350 inmates; an ammunition depot explosion in Albania that killed 26 people and wounded approximately 400 others; a fire at a supermarket in Paraguay that killed 348 people; and a nightclub bombing in Bogota, Colombia, that killed 32 people.

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