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Index	Last	Change
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Nasdaq	1282.47	-19.26
S&P 500	829.69	-8.46

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Orange terror alert brings extra police presence

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Sunday, February 9, 2003

 By **BRIAN KLADKO**
 Staff Writer

Despite Friday's announcement by federal officials that the risk of terrorism is higher than it was just a few weeks ago, many seem to be shrugging off the latest warning.

At Riverside Square mall in Hackensack, shoppers carried on with their weekend routine despite the heightened national alert.

"It makes you think, but it doesn't make you stop," said Steve Woodard, a Rockland County resident and a native of Midland Park. "You have to live your life."

The orange alert, the second-highest level of alert on the five-color scale, was issued because intelligence agencies said they had intercepted more al-Qaeda communications than at any time since just before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Much of the information contained in those messages was corroborated by secret agents and hinted at New York City as a possible target, Bush administration officials said.

This time, Attorney General John Ashcroft explicitly warned about the possibility of an attack on "soft or lightly secured targets," including apartment buildings and hotels. The last time the government issued an orange alert was in September, around the anniversary of the attacks.

The alert prompted the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to add surveillance at the Hudson River crossings. At the New Jersey entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel, a heavy presence of state troopers was evident - some standing at the toll plaza, others inside a pair of vans parked with their lights flashing. Trucks headed into the city were



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stopped and inspected, just as they were in the weeks immediately following the Sept. 11 attacks.

In Paramus, police increased their presence at the borough's malls to holiday shopping levels. Police in Englewood said they did the same at religious buildings, and Ringwood police said they were paying extra attention to the Wanaque Reservoir.

"Everybody's vigilance has gone up an extra level," Ringwood Chief Bernard Lombardo said.

But for people who aren't entrusted with public safety, the message is far less clear.

"It seems to me you need to be specific what we're supposed to be vigilant about," said Barry Glassner, a sociologist at the University of Southern California and author of "The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things." "I can't imagine what I could be doing that I'm not already doing that could possibly be beneficial to the country."

Jeff L. Greenberg, an Arizona State University social psychology professor who co-authored "In the Wake of 9-11: The Psychology of Terror," thinks the alert may be doing more harm than good, because it heightens our fear without telling us what to do about it.

"They usually give out the alert and say, 'Don't panic, don't do anything different,'" he said.

But Lee B. Clarke, a sociologist at Rutgers University who has studied disasters, mass panic, and evacuation plans, thinks the warnings probably serve different purposes for different audiences.

For police agencies and security firms, the alert should actually change their behavior, prompting them to enhance their usual efforts. For the general public, it's a different message.

"It serves a symbolic purpose in trying to tell us that indeed officials are on top of things, and they're trying to do something about the potential risk," Clarke said.

Although some believe the "cry wolf" syndrome will render the terror alert system increasingly ineffectual, Clarke disagrees.



"We know from research during the old civil defense days that that's not true," he said. "If people deem that the messenger is credible, they'll pay attention every time."

Still, with little advice coming from the top levels of government, people saw no point in altering their plans. Michael Hart, resting on a sofa at the Riverside Square mall, was almost fatalistic.

"If someone wants to do something bad, they'll find a way to do it," said Hart, of New Milford. "If you buy all these theft prevention gadgets for your car, but someone really wants to steal your car, they'll end up stealing your car."

Staff Writers John Chadwick, Richard Cowen, and Raghuram Vadarevu contributed to this article, which also contains material from The Associated Press. Brian Kladko's e-mail address is kladko@northjersey.com

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