



Everything Jersey

New alert may extend to fall

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TRENTON - Gov. James E. McGreevey placed the state's financial sector on alert as the next likely target of a terrorist attack, leading to heightened security at large firms statewide.

The warning came moments after McGreevey and state anti-terror coordinators met with 92 executives about a Department of Homeland Security warning of possible bombings at financial institutions in New Jersey, New York and Washington.

McGreevey cited the unusually detailed federal warning and prior history of terror attacks "emanating" from New Jersey as grounds for the ramped up security. Both the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and the Sept. 11, 2001 hijackings were launched in part from New Jersey.

The heightened alert could extend through the fall, he added.

"Clearly, the intent was to hit the financial services industry and hit it hard," he told reporters. "What we need now is to more thoroughly and aggressively protect these facilities."

The federal warning cited possible attacks against the Prudential Financial building in Newark. Along with that site, Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Union and Passaic counties currently remain under Code Orange, or high alert.

But the rest of New Jersey appears safe for now, officials said.

The New Jersey Office of Counter-Terrorism said no specific targets exist in South Jersey but added that so-called critical infrastructure will see stepped up policing. Facilities on that list include refineries, the Salem nuclear plant and chemical factories.

Executives with Commerce Bank in Cherry Hill were among those briefed, administration officials said.

"There are no specific targets other than the Prudential building," said Roger Shatzkin, a

spokesman for the Office of Counter-Terrorism. "The financial sector in the Northern part of the state is on alert, but that's based on unspecified information."

In the case of Prudential, the company's Newark headquarters -- home to over 1,000 workers -- has been surrounded by concrete "Jersey barriers" and ringed with police.

Sid Casperson, director of the OCT, urged business leaders to monitor vehicles in parking lots and garages and step up identification checks at all companies. State Police and local law enforcement will also be deployed in greater numbers, although officials refused to release trooper totals.

The head of the state police said roadways around Newark are being buffered with increased manpower regulating traffic flows.

"It's seamless," said State Police Superintendent Rick Fuentes. "We're aggressively working with the FBI and the Office of Counterterrorism."

McGreevey's admonition to be vigilant was the latest, and most detailed, since the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

Lee Clarke, a Rutgers University researcher, said providing a higher level of information is the best way to prevent the public from growing unmoved by frequent, vague terror threats.

"I don't think there is any danger in releasing information about a potential strike like this unless they are not telling the truth. And I think we should give them the benefit of the doubt," said Clarke, an associate professor of sociology whose latest book, "Worst Case," deals with how people deal with crises such as natural disasters.

"It's a false assumption that people will panic."

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