Crisis Planning to Manage Risks Posed by Animal Rights Extremists

Matthew R. Bailey, Barbara A. Rich, and B. Taylor Bennett

Abstract

Among the multitude of crises that US research institutions may face are those caused by animal rights activists. While most activists opposed to animal research use peaceful and lawful means of expressing their opinions, some extremists resort to illegal methods. Arson, break-ins, and theft with significant property damage at US animal research facilities began in the 1980s. The most troubling trend to develop in the past decade is the targeting of individuals associated with animal research, whether directly or indirectly, and the use of violent scare tactics to intimidate researchers and their families. The National Association for Biomedical Research has a 30-year history of monitoring the animal rights movement and assisting member institutions with crisis situations. In this article we discuss attacks on researchers at their homes, cyber crimes, exploitation of new media formats, infiltration of research facilities, and the targeting of external research stakeholders and business partners. We describe the need for a well-conceived crisis management plan and strong leadership to mitigate crisis situations. Institutions with well-informed leaders and crisis management teams ready to take timely action are best equipped to protect staff, laboratory animals, and research programs. They act on early warnings, provide support for targeted staff, seek legal remedies, thoughtfully control access to research facilities, and identify and enlist new research supporters. We underscore the importance of up-to-date crisis planning so that institutions are not only aware of ongoing risks posed by animal rights extremists but also better prepared to take preemptive action and able to manage those risks successfully.

Key Words: animal research; animal rights; crisis management; crisis planning; extremists; infiltration; laboratory animals

Introduction

Imagine that

- An ABC TV national news producer is on the phone. She says that Nightline is devoting tomorrow night’s show to research animal “abuse.” Video taken at your facility during the past 9 months by an “undercover investigator” will be featured. The caller asks, “Do you have any comments?” Or…
- A break-in was discovered early this morning at the research facility where you work. Hundreds of mice and rats were stolen. Dozens of computers were smashed. Laboratory equipment and research files were destroyed. Hazardous chemicals were dumped in offices and hallways. “ALF” is spray-painted on the walls. The building is closed indefinitely and the fate of your research animals and data is unknown. Or…
- It’s 2:00 AM. You and your family are at home sleeping. A loud noise awakens you and you hear people running from the yard. Rushing downstairs, you see a fire on the front porch as smoke begins to fill the house. Animal rights protesters have been demonstrating in the neighborhood for several weeks, shouting through a bullhorn that you are an animal killer and must pay for what you do. Have they just acted on their threats?

These scenarios are based on real events that occurred in the recent past. Regrettably, however, the threats posed by animal rights (AR1) supporters have been a fact of life for so long (Rudacille 2000) that many in the biomedical research community have become complacent. If no serious incident has affected them or if they believe their nightmare is over, research institutions and staff may think that animal rights extremism can be ignored. And with other urgent challenges facing both academia and industry and with the economy so seriously strained, such a desire is understandable.

But failure to prepare for and respond promptly to AR extremist activities can have significant consequences: diversion of time and money away from research and animal care, long-term damage to reputations, political interference with the scientific process, loss of community support and...
financial resources, and forgone research benefits or delays in medical progress. Furthermore, given the increased use of violent tactics by some extremists, being ill-prepared for an AR crisis could jeopardize the personal safety of people involved with animal research and their families. Possible long-term impacts include erosion of staff morale, difficulties with personnel recruitment, and a decline in the number of young people choosing animal research–related careers.

Those who oppose animal research can use any number of lawful methods to express their opinion or to protest the work of scientists and research institutions. Peaceful demonstrations, requests for information via legal channels, letters, and the resulting media interest can be time-consuming and inconvenient for those who must respond but need not turn into a full-blown crisis. In fact, when handled well, such attention can be an opportunity to educate the public about the benefits of humane animal research. Even crises such as those described above can provide a platform for positive public education.

Rather than outlining the many methods for capitalizing on educational opportunities, in this article we describe AR activities that may become a crisis if not anticipated and handled appropriately. Our purpose is to underscore the importance of up-to-date crisis management planning based on a knowledgeable, realistic assessment of risks.

Troubling Trends in Animal Rights Extremist Activities

For 30 years, the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR) has monitored the evolution and escalation of extremist tactics while assisting member institutions with crisis prevention and management. Anyone involved with animal research faces some degree of risk and can become a target of extremists. As shown in a US map of reported illegal incidents committed by animal and environmental extremists (Figure 1), most states have seen some type of such activity (e.g., arson, break-ins, theft, firebombing, property damage, and other forms of harassment).

For its work with a broad coalition of affected industries on passage of federal legislation to address increasing AR crimes (AEPA 1992; AETA 2006), NABR relied on a listing of all known illegal incidents committed by both animal and environmental extremists (Figure 1). To assist the biomedical research

2According to law enforcement agencies, incidents of this type tend to be underreported.
3Federal law enforcement experts believe that animal and environmental terrorists are related (Jarboe 2002).
Table 1 Major crimes\(^a\) committed by animal rights and ecoterrorists at US research facilities,\(^b\) 1998 to 2009\(^c\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Estimated damages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/1998</td>
<td>USDA research site, Seattle</td>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and Earth Liberation Front (ELF) set fires at two animal research buildings.</td>
<td>$400,000; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/1999</td>
<td>UCSF San Francisco</td>
<td>Break-in, theft, and property destruction</td>
<td>Unknown extremists broke into three research laboratories. Research animals were stolen, glass and equipment shattered, research destroyed. In addition, a group entered another facility and confronted a researcher during World Laboratory Animal Liberation Week (WLALW); three activists arrested.</td>
<td>Thousands of dollars estimated; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/1999</td>
<td>U. of Minnesota Minneapolis</td>
<td>Break-in, theft, and property destruction</td>
<td>Lyons Research Building broken into during WLALW; extensive damage to equipment, computers, video tape, and research data. Research animals involved in Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease studies were stolen.</td>
<td>Over $2 million; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1999</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Razor blade mailings</td>
<td>Group calling itself “The Justice Department” gives Internet warning that 80 packages booby-trapped with razor blades were mailed to researchers working with nonhuman primates. Seven such envelopes were received by research institutions.</td>
<td>No injuries reported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1999</td>
<td>Western Washington U. Bellingham</td>
<td>Break-in, theft, and vandalism</td>
<td>WWU laboratories were broken into by ALF, research animals are stolen, muriatic acid dumped in offices, and experiments destroyed.</td>
<td>Tens of thousands of dollars estimated; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1999</td>
<td>Michigan State U. East Lansing</td>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>ELF set fire at MSU Agriculture Hall on New Year’s Eve. Blaze destroyed significant property and years of research on genetically engineered crops.</td>
<td>Over $1 million; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2000</td>
<td>B&amp;K Universal Fremont, CA</td>
<td>Bombing</td>
<td>ALF took responsibility for placing four incendiary devices at warehouse of an animal research products supplier.</td>
<td>Several trucks damaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2001</td>
<td>University of Idaho Moscow</td>
<td>Property destruction</td>
<td>ELF spray-painted biotechnology building and destroyed property.</td>
<td>$21,000; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2001</td>
<td>U. of Washington Seattle</td>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>ELF set fire at Center for Urban Horticulture to protest plant research.</td>
<td>$5 million; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/2003</td>
<td>Chiron Corporation Emeryville, CA</td>
<td>Bombing</td>
<td>Two incendiary devices exploded at this Northern California facility in early morning hours. Company targeted due to alleged association with Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS). Daniel Andreas San Diego is placed on FBI’s Ten Most Wanted List in conjunction with Chiron investigation; $250,000 reward for info leading to his arrest. Also see next incident.</td>
<td>Damages not estimated, but at least $10,000;(^d) no injuries reported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/2003</td>
<td>Shaklee Corporation Pleasanton, CA</td>
<td>Bombing</td>
<td>An incendiary device exploded at a health and beauty product subsidiary of Yamanouchi Holdings Group, a Japanese conglomerate that allegedly had ties to HLS. Daniel Andreas San Diego is also wanted by FBI in connection with this investigation (see above incident).</td>
<td>Damages not estimated, but at least $10,000; no injuries reported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/2003</td>
<td>Louisiana State U. Baton Rouge</td>
<td>Break-in, theft, and property destruction</td>
<td>ALF claimed responsibility for breaking into LSU’s Inhalation Toxicology Laboratory, destroying computers and other research equipment used in study of smoke and other toxins’ relationship to cardiovascular and respiratory disease. FBI reward of $20,000 offered.</td>
<td>$250,000; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Estimated damages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/2004</td>
<td>Brigham Young U.</td>
<td>Break-in, theft,</td>
<td>&quot;ALF&quot; spray-painted on seven locations at BYU's agricultural center, near the site of a suspicious fire. Two other incidents attributed to ALF in a 6-week period, including barn break-in and theft of animals and equipment.</td>
<td>$30,000; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provo, UT</td>
<td>and property destruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2004</td>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>Break-in, theft,</td>
<td>ALF broke into two laboratories, stole 400 research animals, smashed computers, destroyed research data and equipment. Hazardous chemicals were dumped in offices and halls causing building to be closed for semester and classes relocated.</td>
<td>$400,000; no injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iowa City</td>
<td>and property destruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/2005</td>
<td>Louisiana State U.</td>
<td>Break-in, theft,</td>
<td>ALF took credit for another LSU break-in, &quot;freeing&quot; 21 research mice, smashing windows and aquariums, spray-painting equipment, paint-stripping walls, and gluing laboratory locks.</td>
<td>Damages not estimated, but at least $10,000; no injuries reported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
<td>and property destruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2005</td>
<td>Planned animal facility</td>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>Animal extremists set fire at a greenhouse owned by businessman who had recently applied for permit to build a holding facility for nonhuman primates intended for research use. Greenhouse and contents burned to ground; cars and property vandalized on same night as public hearing for permit application, which owner later withdrew.</td>
<td>Damages not estimated, but at least $10,000; no injuries reported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quakerstown, PA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table NABR defines “major crimes” as those resulting in an estimated $10,000 or more in damages. The designation excludes dozens of minor crimes committed each year, such as trespass during demonstrations and vandalism of property resulting in less than $10,000 in damages. Also excludes harassment of research staff via email and telephone threats, as well as bomb threats and other hoaxes.

Excludes major crimes against non-research-related industries (e.g., fur, meat, entertainment), including some of the costliest arsons, all the work of ELF: at a San Diego construction site ($50 million in damages to low- and middle-income housing units; 8/2003); at a ski resort in Vail, CO (losses of $12 million; 10/1998); and at a Boise Cascade Office in Monmouth, OR (destruction of $1 million building; 12/1999).

Data compiled by the Foundation for Biomedical Research based on media and law enforcement reports. Additional details at www.fbresearch.org.

In the absence of a reported estimate, the $10,000 minimum is based on a description of damages incurred.

Community with Risk Assessment, we present a list of the major crimes committed at research-related institutions since 1998 (Table 1; this table does not include activities at people’s homes or on off-campus property such as vehicles; see next section).

It appears that vigorous federal prosecutions in the past 5 years as well as heightened security at facilities have contributed to the decrease in events at institutions—the last report of a major arson, break-in, or property damage event at a research facility was in 2005. However, it is premature and ill-advised to believe that research institutions are no longer vulnerable to these types of crimes. Ongoing vigilance is in order.

Furthermore, a more troubling trend in actions has developed as AR extremists have shifted their attention to individuals associated either directly or indirectly with animal research. Pharmaceutical companies, contract research firms, and related industries also have become more frequent targets. The shift in focus from institutions to individuals and the addition of corporate and other targets is depicted in Figure 2. The use of increasingly violent tactics to harass and intimidate individuals creates serious new challenges for the biomedical research community.

**Intensified Tactics and Future Risks**

Activist groups, sometimes acting in concert, pursue campaigns for as long as they seem productive, generally using a combination of tactics or variety of strategies over time to generate maximum attention and pressure. In the following sections we describe the AR strategies or tactics of greatest concern.

**Attacks on Research Staff and Property**

The targeting of individuals involved in research, as well as their families, is the most disturbing strategy used by extremists. Opponents of animal research began personalizing their protests over a decade ago, and since then their methods have become more violent.

California is the epicenter of personal attacks on researchers in the United States, with 16 incidents reported in...
Researchers and administrators at the University of California–Los Angeles have been subjected to the most frequent and serious incidents, including improvised incendiary devices left to ignite on doorsteps, the flooding of a home with a garden hose (resulting in $20,000 to $30,000 in damages), other significant vandalism of private residences, and the complete destruction of personal vehicles and university commuter vans (UCLA 2009). Los Angeles is not the only area in which California extremists have been active: as reported in the Orange County Register, 38 incidents of harassment in the 3 years ending in August 2008 involved people from seven UC campuses around the state (Robbins 2009).

But these data do not tell the whole story, as there are no records of comparatively minor acts of harassment (e.g., deliveries of unordered goods and services) and non-life-threatening nuisance activities such as telephone, letter, and email contacts. And because the identity of individuals is usually protected, statistics also do not convey the fact that the same researchers are harassed repeatedly in different ways.

Adding to the atmosphere of fear are mistakes in targeting (extremists vandalized the wrong house in one researcher’s neighborhood) and hoaxes (empty bomb threats and claims that tainted mail has been sent). Although hoaxes do not result in immediate physical damage, they do necessitate spending time and resources to respond, and may instill fear of death or bodily injury.

### Cyber Crime

When two US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) risk analysis documents were leaked on the Internet in 2009, one dealing with right-wing and the other left-wing extremists’ threats, neither end of the political spectrum was pleased (Saunders 2009; Zimmerman 2009). Of the two, the DHS assessment *Leftwing Extremists Likely to Increase Use of Cyber Attacks over the Coming Decade* was generally viewed as factual as it was based on specific actions committed by named animal rights, environmental, and anarchist extremist groups that promote or have conducted criminal or terrorist activities (Roff 2009). Based on the public record and long observation of the AR movement, NABR concurs with the government that animal extremists are likely to become more active in cyberspace to “inflict economic damage on those who profit from the misery and exploitation of animals” (ALF 2009). Extremists possess the sophisticated computer skills needed or can easily identify hackers and malicious software for their purposes, and the Internet offers relative anonymity and is as convenient as the laptop in their living room or the cell phone in their pocket.

To date, the most common cyber attacks (Box 1) committed in the name of animal rights are deletion of user accounts on targeted networks with demands attached to their restoration, flooding of a company’s email server with messages to the point of network shutdown (called denial of service), and other types of email assaults intended to force businesses to exhaust resources. Without much additional creativity, those who are highly motivated to wreak economic havoc on animal research through electronic means will certainly discover new ways to do so.

### New Media: Welcome to the Blogosphere

In addition to being a weapon of intimidation for radicals, the Internet’s hand-held, speed-of-light communication ability has been a tremendous boon for AR leaders working to spread their message, build grassroots interest, motivate followers to take action, and solicit money. The AR movement no longer must depend on traditional media for publicity—propaganda and misinformation about animal research can be spread rapidly without interference from responsible, fact-checking journalists. On the web, AR organizations are free to create their own
spin and use their own “experts” to assert that animal research is cruel, “bad,” or “outdated” science and unnecessary because valid alternatives are available for every type of research. Major national groups have state-of-the-art websites and robust email databases for sending daily messages to supporters in a manner that feels very personal. Email listservs, blogs, and discussion boards devoted to AR topics have proliferated on the Internet. Activists’ purposes are also well served by social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, MeetUp, and Twitter, which lend themselves to sensational ideas and images.

Some AR groups are also using information easily accessible online to multiply their efforts. One blog generated by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has invited readers to vote for a “Vivisector of the Month” using information that has been gathered online and twisted to disparage nominees (PETA 2008). Stop Animal Exploitation NOW! (SAEN) director Michael Budkie has used the National Institutes of Health (NIH) database Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tool Expenditures and Reports (PORTER; formerly Computer Retrieval of Information on Scientific Projects, CRISP) to identify animal researchers and file Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to obtain their federal grant applications and progress reports. He then misinterprets or misconstrues this information on the SAEN website and in press releases claiming abuse of laboratory animals (SAEN 2009). US Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection reports and annual reports to the USDA from research facilities (posted on the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service website) are also used to “expose” alleged animal abuse and make accusations of noncompliance with the Animal Welfare Act.

The latest entry to this scene is PrimateLabs.com, launched in 2009. The site combines publicly available information about individual NIH grants with researchers’ photos and office contact details obtained from university websites. A new database of primate “vivisectors,” searchable by state, has been created to facilitate targeting. Site visitors are instructed how to obtain additional information using state and federal open records laws, invited to update the database, and asked to “take action” by starting “a campaign against a lab or researcher in your community.”

### Box 1 Definition of cyber attacks

Cyber attacks are malicious acts that degrade the availability, integrity, or security of data. Following are examples of such attacks, but techniques are constantly evolving:

- Unauthorized intrusions into computer networks and systems
- Denial of service, typically by overwhelming the resources of the system
- Information theft, computer network exploitation, and extortion
- Introduction of viruses or malicious software into a computer network
- Website defacement or subtle changes to web pages in order to disseminate false information

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*aUnclassified portion of DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis Assessment: Leftwing Likely to Increase Use of Cyber Attacks over the Coming Decade, January 26, 2009.*

### Infiltration of Animal Facilities

Infiltration is a calculated and carefully orchestrated approach to carrying out the AR agenda. The potential impacts of an AR activist’s employment at a research facility under false pretenses can be significant and costly. Infiltration of a laboratory in Silver Spring, Maryland, by PETA co-founder Alex Pacheco in 1981 began one of the earliest AR campaigns in the United States. The 13-year saga of the Silver Spring monkeys had extensive repercussions, including:

- the first state conviction of a researcher for animal cruelty (although the conviction was later reversed, the researcher continued to be unjustly vilified in the media);
- abandonment of productive animal research by the laboratory;
- major additional animal research regulations under the 1985 Amendments to the Animal Welfare Act (highly publicized stolen videos from another facility also contributed significantly to this result);
- numerous AR lawsuits at state and federal levels seeking custody of the animals with three unsuccessful appeals to the US Supreme Court, one trying to block the necessary euthanasia of several animals; and
- the launching of PETA as a global presence, able to raise tens of millions of dollars annually for the purpose of abolishing essential animal research (Morrison 2009).

Based on its initial success, PETA has repeatedly used its own plants or disgruntled former employees and “whistle-blowers” to infiltrate research facilities, document and report perceived animal abuse, misconstrue research images, and fuel protests against specific projects and institutions. PETA imitators have also adopted this tactic with infiltrations in Oregon, Nebraska, and elsewhere (Conn and Parker 2008). One organization (SHAC, described in the next section) began with infiltrations on both sides of the Atlantic.

In efforts to advance their legislative agenda, AR activists have successfully infiltrated both commercial and research...
facilities. In 2008, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) employed an “investigator” to go undercover at a California meat processing plant (HSUS 2008); the operative’s unauthorized video prompted the largest meat recall in American history, eight Congressional hearings, the shutdown of the plant, and new state and federal laws. HSUS’s most recent infiltrator spent 9 months at a primate research facility in pursuit of information that was used to support the introduction of the Great Ape Protection Act, which would end all but observational research studies of chimpanzees (HSUS 2009).

The demonstrated value of infiltration for achieving AR goals ensures that it will continue to be a high-priority strategy for AR groups in the future. To that end, PETA provides a step-by-step guide for obtaining employment at an animal research facility as part of its online Action Center Guide to Becoming an Activist (PETA 2009).

Targeting of External Stakeholders and Business Partners

The animal extremist strategy of attacking not only employees but also their families and company shareholders (“secondary targeting”) as well as customers and business partners (e.g., banks, stock brokers, insurers, and suppliers of goods and services; “tertiary targeting”) was initiated in 2000 by Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC). This international campaign vowed to close down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), one of the world’s largest contract research companies.

SHAC’s global website claims that more than 250 business partners have ended their relationship with Huntingdon (SHAC 2009). These external targets were generally unaware of AR extremists’ tactics, not highly motivated to support essential animal research, and in a position to drop a single customer such as HLS. SHAC supporters’ tactics against these business partners ranged from lawful protests to intimidation and harassment of families at their homes (names and addresses were posted on the Internet); firebombing of cars, boats, and residences; and threats of violence. In addition, the CEO of Huntingdon was physically beaten and acid was thrown in the face of the company’s marketing director in the United Kingdom. Thus there was good reason for threats of violence to be taken seriously by individuals and companies doing non-research-related business with HLS.

Federal prosecutions in the United States (USDOJ 2006) and United Kingdom (NETCU 2009) led to the imprisonment of 13 de facto SHAC leaders. Six US extremists, along with the SHAC USA organization by name, were convicted on all counts, including interstate stalking via the Internet and conspiracy to commit terrorism. The defendants were ordered to make restitution and given prison sentences of 3 to 6 years. Despite the deterrence of prosecution, SHAC sympathizers in this country and in continental Europe and the United Kingdom continue to target HLS as well as its customers and business partners, largely in the pharmaceutical industry and financial sector (Whalen 2009). The surviving activity is dramatically reduced, but nonetheless very disturbing. NABR continues to monitor the situation closely and hopes that secondary and tertiary targeting does not proliferate again in the United States and that other AR campaigns do not take up these tactics.

Trouble persists, however. SHAC has turned its attention to breeders of research animals: a headline banner on the SHAC global website announced “Operation Liberation,” a project to “close down” one named research animal breeder and stage a “global week of action” (in late September 2009) against all such breeders. According to the website, “without vivisection breeders, the vivisection industry would struggle to exist.” Activists were called to attend a national protest in the United Kingdom or to protest at local breeder sites around the world; the site included the names and addresses for research animal breeders by country and, for the United States, a link to the Buyers’ Guide listings for suppliers of laboratory products and services at LabAnimal.com.

Best Crisis Management Strategies

Crisis Planning

Preparedness is the key to successful management of any crisis. The appropriate time for crisis management planning is not during or after an attack—any delay in response time at the start of an emergency or a negative information campaign can actually exacerbate a crisis and have far-reaching consequences for an organization’s reputation, finances, and even viability.

In many cases, thorough planning and careful execution of a crisis management program can even prevent an emergency. Development of an effective program involves identifying risks, introducing measures to correct inadequacies, and preparing the institution for any situation. Among the numerous benefits of such planning, external and internal communications among departments or divisions are strengthened, employees acquire a better understanding of the purpose and scope of ongoing research, and management has an opportunity to assess operational effectiveness.

NABR has developed a Crisis Management Guide for its member institutions and companies (NABR 2009). The manual provides a roadmap for key components of a crisis management plan and a basic formula for managing a systematic response to AR attacks. The first and most important step is an assessment of the institution’s ability to prevent crises and its readiness to handle those that cannot be averted. Such risk assessment is a significant and useful exercise with many benefits. A thorough evaluation of the organization’s operations and vulnerabilities requires a coordinated team effort. The next steps are to address any weaknesses and to develop a plan to increase preparedness. The third phase is implementation of the plan. If and when that is ever necessary, it is important to evaluate the plan’s effectiveness and make necessary changes. Once a plan is in place it should be regularly
reviewed and updated to reflect changes in the institution’s program and personnel as well as changes in the tactics of the activists (for further discussion of emergency planning and evaluation, Swearengen et al. 2010 and Goodwin and Donaho 2010, both in this issue).

**Leadership**

“Lose the crisis plan; find a leader,” says Eric Dezenhall (2009), one of the country’s most recognized experts in crisis response. “An effective crisis management team must be a benevolent dictatorship governed by good judgment, not a democracy governed by protocols.... [T]here is a positive correlation between strong leadership and a successful resolution. There is no such correlation between a thick manual and a positive outcome.”

Of course, in addition to his advice about leadership and good judgment, Dezenhall advocates preplanning to assess vulnerabilities. He also recognizes that input from key players in legal, public relations, and security areas is needed before, during, and after a crisis. The basics for crisis preparedness must be in place (Box 2). A number of disaster planning and prevention resources are available online (Table 2).

Building on a solid foundation of realistic planning and efficient teamwork, NABR agrees that strong leadership is necessary to mitigate crisis situations and avert an animal rights disaster. Experience shows that institutions with well-informed leaders ready to take timely action have best protected their staff, laboratory animals, and research programs. Following are the hallmark actions of successful institutional leaders.

*Act on Early Warnings*

There are often signals that can tip off an institution that it is next in line for an AR-motivated act. Although all in the animal research community face some degree of risk, the question for the alert institution is when to take steps beyond those of routine operations. For example, the use of nonhuman primates and companion animal species has long been a target of AR activists, but receipt of special activist surveys, new FOIA requests, or other “public” inquiries can mark the start of an organized campaign. Other early warning signs may be a dispute with a disgruntled employee or an unusual media interest. The prepared institution not only monitors such signs and gathers intelligence about activist plans at the local level but also networks with national organizations such as NABR to learn about activists’ latest initiatives and what is happening at similar institutions.

*Provide Support for Targeted Staff*

Scientists who were singled out by animal extremists for prolonged protest campaigns in the 1980s and early 1990s suffered many injustices alone. Their home institutions lacked experience in dealing with AR extremists and often were hesitant to provide a public response to negative media reports. With a few outstanding exceptions, scientific organizations and colleagues tended to remain silent, unsure whether or how to speak out.

The climate today is quite different thanks to changes in the biomedical research community and the investment of significant additional time, effort, and funding. Laboratory animal care programs have been strengthened and research facilities improved as a result of the research community’s commitment to excellence in animal care and use, institutional animal research oversight processes, and emphasis on staff training at all levels. With so much to reinforce the reality of their concern for laboratory animals, proactive research facilities are able to highlight the quality of their programs in numerous communication vehicles for internal and external audiences.

With all these developments, positive role models now exist for effective communication about animal activist complaints to federal agencies, media, and other stakeholders. Research institutions also provide security protection, safety counseling, and legal advice to individuals experiencing harassment from AR activists. In addition, scientific organizations are better informed about AR extremists and many have made strong, clear statements of support for their members and stand ready to assist if needed (FASEB 2009; SfN 2009).

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**Box 2 The basics of being prepared**

Crises may come in many forms: disease outbreaks in animal colonies, critical equipment failures, natural disasters, laboratory break-ins, threats and intimidation aimed at researchers or institutions, etc. Each of these unexpected events is unique, but the basic components of “being prepared” for crises are the same for each.

1. An animal program of impeccable integrity.
2. A security program based on risk assessment.
3. An integrated communication plan with descriptions of research projects in lay terminology, spokespersons, and a telephone tree.
4. An internal and external community outreach program.

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*NIH Office of External Research. 2009. Medical Research with Animals website for Researchers and Institutions (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/air/preparedness.htm).*
Table 2 Animal rights disaster planning and prevention resources online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Resource(s)</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)</td>
<td>Website and resources for dealing with animal rights extremism</td>
<td><a href="http://www.animalrightsextremism.org">www.animalrightsextremism.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation for Biomedical Research (FBR)</td>
<td>Information resources about benefits of animal research, public education, media relations, and animal rights movement activities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fbresearch.org">www.fbresearch.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR)</td>
<td>Crisis Management Guide (available to institutional members)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nabr.org">www.nabr.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIH Office of External Research (OER)</td>
<td>Medical Research with Animals for Researchers and Institutions</td>
<td><a href="http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/air/researchers_institutions.htm">http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/air/researchers_institutions.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Links to 14 state or regional SUBR member websites</td>
<td><a href="http://www.statesforbiomed.org">www.statesforbiomed.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Seek Legal Remedies*

While freedom of speech is a protected right of everyone, it does not confer the right to compromise the personal safety of targeted individuals. Vandalism, firebombs, and threats are not free speech. Deterrent legal actions, such as temporary restraining orders and injunctions, are important tools for combating animal rights extremism at work and at home. Depending on the situation, civil action, criminal prosecution, or a combination of the two may also be appropriate; for example, violators of legal restrictions can be held in contempt of court and/or jailed. Courts tend to support restrictions on the time, place, and manner of demonstrations as a compromise that respects the rights of all. Temporary restraining orders and injunctions can require 72-hour notice to local police, giving advance warning to employees and encouraging police presence at events. Restrictions on protests have often stopped them completely. Universities and companies have used these measures to protect the private residences and property of their employees as well as employees of business partners.

Regardless of the legal remedy sought, it is necessary to work closely with law enforcement agencies and to have some knowledge of the extremists and their associations and patterns. We suggest the following steps:

- Seek expert legal advice to determine the available legal options in specific situations.
- In cooperation with local and/or federal law enforcement, collect and catalogue information to document extremists’ behavior for a possible legal case.
- Take photos of damages and, if it is possible to do so safely, videotape threatening disruptions.
- Monitor activists’ websites, Internet postings, and other published documents because statements from extremists themselves are usually necessary as evidence that their speech constitutes threats or harassment rather than a mere expression of opinion.

*Thoughtfully Control Access to Research Facilities*

The question of open versus closed laboratory door policies does not have a uniform answer. NABR reports indicate that responsible institutions take a pragmatic approach to providing access to animal facilities. Case-by-case decisions are
Based on who should be given access; what projects, procedures, or areas of the facility are appropriate for visits; and when or how entry is allowed. Visits from external stakeholders such as elected officials, media, employees not involved in animal research, and the local community are desirable and encouraged (Swarengen et al. 2010 also discuss the benefits of such access). These guests may be invited to take a scheduled guided tour of interesting areas, although not all areas may be appropriate. Impromptu visits are rarely, if ever, possible or desirable because of potential disruption to research or animal routines. Tour invitations are generally not extended to anyone with a well-known history of total opposition to animal research. If the background of potential visitors is unknown, the first educational step can be a "virtual" tour composed of institution-generated printed information, photographs, and/or video (often called b-roll by media), with an opportunity for further discussion.

In making the decision to conduct tours of the animal facility, it is important to obtain the support and assistance of internal stakeholders such as representatives from public affairs, government relations, security, and other administrative units that interact with external stakeholders. It is also important to make both the research and animal care staff aware of the fact that tours will take place and of the ground rules for those tours.

An open door policy offers the institution the opportunity to build relationships with stakeholders beyond what is possible through brochures, presentations, and meetings. Observing how an animal care facility operates and showing people that caring for animals is more than just a job can have a very positive impact. Visitors learn that the people who interact with laboratory animals are carefully selected, receive extensive training, and have ongoing opportunities for professional development. Employee education programs cover information about applicable laws and regulations for animal care and use; institutional oversight policies; standard operating and safety procedures, including the reporting of non-compliance or concerns about unusual activity; and the most effective ways to discuss their work and its purposes and benefits. To encourage pride in animal care programs, some institutions have adopted an employee code of ethics that must be formally endorsed and followed (Covance 2009).

Putting a human face on the care and use of laboratory animals is one of the greatest benefits of an open door policy and goes a long way toward gaining the support of external stakeholders and the public.

Identify and Enlist New Research Supporters

Experienced institutions understand that the best time to seek supporters of responsible animal research is not when an AR controversy has erupted. They create outreach programs and take other opportunities to educate internal and external audiences about their research programs, including the commitment to excellent laboratory animal care. For example, a recent article explaining progress in medical research through the use of genetically engineered mice (Anft 2008) appeared in *Johns Hopkins Magazine*, where it reached a wide array of readers (and won the Michael E. DeBakey Journalism Award). Most research institutions have similar communication vehicles or press announcements to highlight the role of laboratory animals and benefits of research.

Like AR organizations, forward-looking institutions have made good use of the Internet to attract interest and support by, for example, giving visibility on their homepage to the benefits of responsible animal research and their commitment to humane laboratory animal care, and by establishing a positive presence on social networking websites. Individual scientists and communication staff are contributing to Internet blogs and discussion boards that reach particular audiences of potential new supporters, such as patient groups, students, and science teachers. The possibilities are limited only by the imagination of the animal research community and the time available to invest in such community outreach.

Conclusions

The animal rights movement seeks an end to all research that depends on the use of laboratory animals and some extremists resort to violent, threatening, or highly destructive means to achieve this goal. Research institutions should be prepared. Effective institutional crisis prevention and management plans require regular reassessment of potential risks related to animal rights. The objective is to create a functional roadmap for readiness rather than a thick manual of low practical value.

Based on the preceding analysis, NABR recommends that animal research institutions undertake the following:

- Review crisis management plans and assess vulnerabilities to old and new risks.
- Redefine responsibilities of crisis management team members and other key personnel, if necessary, and update procedures to meet current and future needs.
- Reinforce or refresh staff security and crisis management training, if necessary.
- (Re)enlist the support of upper management, since decisive leadership is key to preventing animal rights disasters and dealing with those that cannot be avoided.

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References
