



### D42 Tractor Man: The Nation's Capitol Held Hostage

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This presentation is designed to highlight the many components of a dangerousness assessment done in support of a post 9/11 critical incident negotiation through the presentation of an unusual case. This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by highlighting the difficulties faced by law enforcement and professionals from related disciplines in dealing with dangerousness assessment, including determining future dangerousness, locating indicators of suicide, and preventing the hasty use of deadly force.

Critical incident dangerousness assessments are, by their very nature, complicated and emotionally intense because of pressure from the political establishment, media, community, and family members. Investigators and professionals from related disciplines face many challenges because of the lack of clear and convincing on-site evidence pertaining to the offender's true mind-set, motivation and capabilities. On March 17, 2003, Dwight Watson had a legal permit to distribute literature describing the plight of the nation's tobacco farmers. When approaching the Washington Monument, Watson veered his John Deere tractor into a shallow pond at Constitution Gardens near the monument and began a 47-hour standoff with law enforcement. He claimed to have weapons, including "organophosphate bombs" in the tractor with him. The incident began on the same day that the Department of Homeland Security elevated the terror threat level to Code Orange, a heightened state of alert that preceded the beginning of the American led assault on Iraq on March 20.

Four Federal law enforcement agencies responded including three SWAT teams, three bomb technician teams, two negotiations teams, the FBI's Evidence Response Team and HAZMAT team. The NCAVC responded in support of the negotiation component. Federal, state, and local authorities in a variety of violent crimes including threat assessments and dangerousness assessments, routinely consults the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC). Initial information indicated that Watson was violent, possibly suicidal, and hence very dangerous. There was conflicting preliminary investigative background information on the offender regarding violent acts and suicidal tendencies.

The NCAVC team initiated investigative leads to clarify Watson's background, life situation, and any factors that could contribute to a suicidal state of mind. The NCAVC analyzed the results of investigative leads and conducted on-site interviews of Watson's family members who had traveled to the scene. The NCAVC provided on scene commanders with a dangerousness assessment that stated Watson was not a risk for future violence and would surrender himself by his self-imposed deadline of March 19. A tactical assault was not warranted.

During the two day standoff there was an array of political media and public pressure to utilize a dynamic tactical response to assault Watson's position and end the standoff, thus eliminating the huge disruption to the nation's capitol. On March 19 Watson turned himself over to police custody. Watson had a dummy hand grenade and several cans of bug spray with him in the tractor. He did not have any weapons, ammunition, or other dangerous items or material in the tractor. A subsequent search of the tractor conducted by bomb technicians and the FBI HAZMAT team could find no materials posing credible threat.

The issues in this case highlight the difficulties faced by law enforcement and professionals from related disciplines in dealing with dangerousness assessment, including determining future dangerousness, locating indicators of suicide, and preventing the hasty use of deadly force.

#### **Suicide, Dangerousness Assessment, Suicide**