

## **Homeland Security Advisory System FAQs**

### **1. What is the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS)?**

The Homeland Security Advisory System will provide a comprehensive and effective means to disseminate information regarding the risk of terrorist attacks to Federal, State, and local authorities and to the American people.

### **2. What is a Threat Condition and how is it determined?**

The 5 graduated Threat Conditions established by the HSAS are designed to provide a consistent frame of reference for information concerning terrorist threats. A higher Threat Condition means that there is a greater risk of terrorist attack, with risk including both probability and gravity. Heightened Threat Conditions can be declared for the entire nation. However, a heightened condition can also be declared for a limited geographic area or sector. The duration of a Threat Condition depends on the individual circumstances of each threat, and will be reviewed at regular intervals to determine whether adjustments are necessary.

### **3. What is the role of the Office of Homeland Security?**

Governor Ridge will continue to evaluate the integrated threat assessments and reports from law enforcement and the intelligence community. The Attorney General will consult with him and review these reports with Cabinet Secretaries and Advisors to the President. Heads of Federal departments and agencies will submit their annual reports to the President on Protective Measures through Governor Ridge.

### **4. What Threat Condition are we in now?**

The nation is now at an Elevated or Yellow Condition. This reflects the Homeland Security Council's assessment that there is a significant risk of terrorist attack. It takes into account the Martyrs pictures released publicly by the Attorney General and the list of terrorists released by the FBI on February 12.

### **5. What does this system mean for Federal agencies?**

There are many federal alert systems in our country - each tailored and unique to different sectors of our society: transportation, defense, agriculture and weather, for example. Each fills a vital need. The new national Homeland Security System provides context for these systems. During the next 135 days, federal agencies will develop plans to conform their Protective Measures to the national Homeland Security System.

### **6. Why is there an exemption for the State Department and military?**

This system only focuses on terrorist threats to the Homeland. The Secretary of State retains the authority to establish threat levels for foreign embassies and posts,

while the Secretary of Defense sets threat levels for defense forces. Military facilities in the United States are excluded from conforming to this system because they must operate under one unified threat system that applies to forces at home and abroad.

**6. Will this system give local police agencies a better idea of what to do in response to an alert?**

Yes. This advisory system provides context and common vocabulary for disseminating information concerning the risk of terrorist attacks. It assures greater coherence and consistency across regions and sectors in the assignment of Threat Conditions. This system will greatly improve the quality and quantity of information provided to State and local officials and law enforcement. To the extent possible, the Attorney General will provide timely and relevant information regarding the threat and other useful information.

**7. What does this new system mean for States and cities?**

State and local governments were among the first to urge us to develop a national framework for threat alerts. We cannot mandate that Governors and Mayors adopt the Homeland Security Advisory System, but we are confident that they share our desire for a common language that will allow us to do a better job of protecting the American people.

**8. How would this system have applied to September 11 and/or the previous three general alerts? What tier of alert were they?**

Any assignment of a threat level done retrospectively would be based largely on speculation. We did not have the new system in place at that time. Certainly on September 11, there were conditions present that would indicate the nation was at red. During the period of the three general alerts, elements of the threat analysis would have probably pointed us toward an elevated Threat Condition.

**9. Who determines the need to adjust the Threat Condition level?**

Decision-making has to be centralized in one individual. The Attorney General assigns Threat Conditions after consultation with Governor Ridge. If time allows, Cabinet Members, government officials at the State and local levels, the private sector, and the Homeland Security Council will have input in these decisions when appropriate.

**10. Will all alerts or changes in alert status be made public?**

National Threat Conditions generally will be publicly announced. Public announcements can have the effect of not only informing Americans, but of deterring terrorists. The absence of a terrorist attack could mean that an attack was deterred or averted.

**11. When would you not announce an alert or change in alert state?**

The safety of the American people is the most important consideration we have in this system. For example, if the Attorney General determines that notifying law enforcement agencies will help us catch a terrorist, and we don't want to let the terrorist know we are coming, then we may hold off on letting the public know. However, the most important consideration will always be public safety.

**12. Are you afraid the public will tune out these alerts if there are too many?**

The Advisory System will ensure that the public remains informed, and they are empowered to make the decisions they feel are appropriate for their safety. By creating a common vocabulary and a graduated series of Threat Conditions, we seek to strengthen decision-making at all levels, not only for the government and industry, but for every citizen.

**13. How does this system relate to bioterrorism?**

One of the strengths of this system is its flexibility. If information is obtained that a particular sector is threatened or public health is at risk, we will be able to apply an appropriate Threat Condition to that segment of industry or geographic region. In the case of a bioterrorist attack, medical professionals at the local level may be the first to pass information up the ladder to the State and Federal government. The strengthened communications systems and processes developed under this system should speed information both ways through the system.

**14. Where should comments and views of the HSAS be forwarded during the forty-five day review period?**

Comments may be submitted electronically to: [HSAScomments@fbi.gov](mailto:HSAScomments@fbi.gov). Written comments may be sent to: Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security Advisory System, Room 7222, 935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington D.C. 20535.