

# Local

Daily Press

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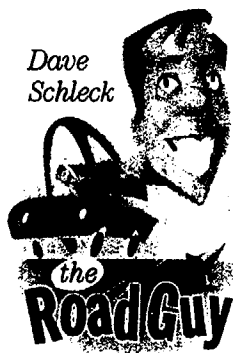
## Area lacks terrorism evacuation plan

**T**he scenes from last week haunt the Road Guy: Ash-covered professionals escaping Manhattan by walking across the Brooklyn Bridge. Traffic jams on the George Washington Bridge. Airports closed. Train service suspended.

Road Guy can't help but ask: What if it happened here? Would we be able to get out of town if a terrorist attack hit the Hampton Roads area? Should we even try to leave?

Road Guy called every emergency-management official he could get hold of. Some of them made him feel better about how prepared we are to handle a terrorist attack. Some of them made him feel worse.

The good news is that Hampton Roads has a highly sophisticated system for dealing with disasters, coordinating emergency response among localities, putting out the fires and cleaning up hazardous waste. The details are found in documents such as Virginia's Terrorism Consequence Management



Dave Schleck

*the*  
**RoadGuy**

Plan, which local officials will be updating next month.

But there are no designated terrorism evacuation routes.

There's no document like our hurricane evacuation plan, which tells residents to leave on specific routes in different phases, with those at highest risk leaving first. Our military bases and Newport News Shipbuilding have plans to get people out of their properties, but they don't necessarily tell people where to go once they leave the gates.

The only exception is Surry Nuclear Power Station, which has a detailed regional evacuation plan.

But can such a plan address terrorism threats for the whole region?

In a hurricane, we know what areas are prone to flooding. But there are hundreds of possible terrorist targets scattered throughout the area — mil-



Joe Fudge/Daily Press



Dave Bowman/Daily Press

Newport News Shipbuilding (top) has plans to get its people out in case of terrorist attacks, and the Surry Nuclear Power Station (bottom) has a detailed regional evacuation plan. But there are no designated terrorism evacuation routes for the Hampton Roads region.

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## Roads

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itary bases, shipyards, bridge-tunnels, schools. Who knows which ones would be destroyed and which ones would be spared?

"I don't think we can prepare ahead of time," said Stephany Hanshaw, who oversees emergency operations for VDOT in Hampton Roads. "We wouldn't know what the nature of the attack would be until it happened."

Maybe the Road Guy is worrying about nothing.

People disagree on whether a terrorist attack would lead to an evacuation. Don Druitt doesn't think so. He's deputy coordinator for emergency management in Newport News.

"I don't remember any case in this country, other than civil war, when Americans were running away from anything out of fear," Druitt said.

Although Druitt assured the Road Guy that city officials were prepared to manage traffic around any disaster, sometimes the safest thing to do is to stay put.

If a chemical attack produces a toxic cloud, emergency officials might very well tell people downwind to close their windows, shut off their air conditioners and stay inside — instead of sending them out into a dangerous situation. But an imminent chemical-weapons attack might very well mandate evacuation, said Bert Geddy, chairman of the Hampton Roads Emergency Management Committee.

## Contact Road Guy

Got a highway headache or question for the Road Guy? Here are several ways to tell him about it:

■ Get up-to-the-minute traffic information or leave a message via the 1-line. Dial 928-1111 and enter category 6464.



■ Get to the Road Guy directly by calling 247-2828 or e-mailing him at [dschleck@dailypress.com](mailto:dschleck@dailypress.com)

■ If your question is answered in a Road Guy column, you'll receive a free T-shirt.

In that case, Geddy says, hurricane evacuation routes could be used, including the reversal of the eastbound lanes on Interstate 64 on the Peninsula.

But what if a bomb destroys your primary evacuation route? Do people know what alternate routes they should take?

Geddy concedes that emergency officials need to talk more about terrorism in light of what happened last week in New York and near Washington.

"This is a wakeup call on a lot of issues," Geddy says.

Metro Traffic tells the Road Guy that the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Virginia State Police did an

excellent job distributing information about traffic and security restrictions after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

VDOT and state police inspected commercial trucks entering the Monitor-Merrimac Memorial and Hampton Roads bridge-tunnels for about five hours Tuesday.

It started about 10 a.m., when state police told VDOT to tighten the security at the bridge-tunnels. Both agencies spent about 30 minutes deciding exactly what those security measures would be, said Tony Key, assistant to the maintenance-operations engineer for the Hampton Roads District of VDOT.

Road Guy is worried about our bridge-tunnels. They truly are lifelines for our area, especially when air and rail travel has been disrupted.

Unlike military bases — which have a range of security levels that mandate specific precautions, such as gate closings and visitor restrictions — VDOT makes decisions about bridge-tunnel security case by case.

If one of the bridge-tunnels is bombed, should the others immediately block all non-emergency traffic? Or maybe one lane should be reserved for emergency travel? Or should VDOT start inspecting all vehicles that enter?

There should be a plan that anticipates these questions. But Road Guy can't seem to find one.

Road Guy couldn't imagine asking any of these questions two weeks ago.

But now, we know all too well that the unimaginable can become real.

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