

What a Riot.



BY PAUL JAEB

Pragmatic Paranoia: How to prepare for civil unrest.

Each generation has images of civil unrest seared in their memories. For my father it was the Detroit and Los Angeles riots of the 1960's. I recall in stark detail the shock I felt witnessing the looting and violence after the Rodney King verdict. Will today's generation remember the incidents happening now in Minneapolis as their moment? Perhaps. Especially as similar episodes become familiar.

Civil unrest makes for great television. All the major networks have branded these events much the way they do for natural disasters. Predictably, the images we see include business owners arming themselves and defending their property. But is that the proper response?

At its core civil unrest is chaotic and extraordinarily difficult to foresee. Often, a single action by a citizen or law enforcement officer can ignite a riot. Commentary in recent years, including Bill Buford's classic book, *Among the Thugs*, reinforces how difficult civil unrest is to predict. Buford believes that when participants feel egged on by crowds, they "bracket" off their customary ethical norms to dive into aggressive and bizarre behavior they would never indulge in on their own.

This confusion can lead business owners to take highly reactionary actions. While business owners have certain rights to protect their property, they carry substantial liability when using force to deter looters.

So, what should a business owner do to protect their assets from a civil unrest incident? Treat it like any other disaster. For instance, the pragmatism used during an impending weather event is a good place to start. If an event that mirrors something that caused damage or unrest in the past is leading the evening news, then you should spring into action.

At the core of any prevention is planning. Having a Disaster Plan is critical to any business and should include all potential incidents (weather, chemical spills, civil unrest, electrical grid failures, pandemics, etc.). Many sources are available to business owners, including the use of Certified Protection Professionals and security consultants.

Depending on the complexity of your business a Disaster Plan can be an onerous task. At its core, a good plan should require the following basic tasks:

- Connect with local authorities to determine what their plans might be and work together to prepare your mitigation strategy. These may include FEMA, local police and fire, and city officials.
- Contact your insurance professional to determine your coverage for these events. Many disasters are excluded.
- Conduct a thorough physical security audit to determine weak points in overall security. Hire a Certified Protection Professional or security consultant if necessary.
- Determine the series of events that will trigger your action plan.
- Create a disaster package that includes contact information for all employees, third party security providers, legal counsel, law enforcement contacts, and your insurance professional. Keep this document off site.
- Gather intelligence during an event to learn about emerging risks – this includes having local sources and monitoring regional news and social media.
- Develop systems to temporarily move the operation if possible.
- Demand total adherence to the plan from all employees and stakeholders and hold periodic training sessions to test your response.

A good plan can not be created on the spot. The recent unrest in Minneapolis began less than 24 hours after the inciting incident. Start your planning. Now.

Excellent planning resources are available at www.ready.gov/business.

“As a security professional, I tell my clients to pull up their pragmatic side in times of crises. Resist the reptilian impulses. Focus on protecting your family and assets.” -Paul Jaeb, Managing Partner

