Press Release
For Immediate Release

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Anthrax /Bio-Chem Attacks Rare, Records Show

College Park, MD - The 2001 anthrax attacks in the United States are among the few on record, says the director of the world's most comprehensive unclassified terror database, which is headquartered at the University of Maryland.

"Bio-chemical terrorist attacks are very rare," says Gary LaFree, director of the Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland, part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security-funded National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).

"The U.S. anthrax attacks stand nearly alone in our database and anthrax has been used as a terror weapon very infrequently since 1970," LaFree adds. "In 1993, the Japanese group Aum Shinri Kyo attempted to disperse anthrax in Tokyo and in the area around Japan's Parliament. Both attacks failed. In fact, there have only been a handful of bio-chemical attacks of any type on record and perhaps the most prominent ones go back to Aum Shinri Kyo's sarin attacks in Tokyo in the 1990s."

Chemical weapons provide greater hurdles to terrorists, he adds. "Relative to explosives, you need a lot of bio-chemical materials to inflict mass casualties and the materials must be handled very carefully," LaFree says. "That doesn't mean bio-chemical weapons don't pose a serious potential hazard. But so far, at least, they have not been the weapon of choice."

The Global Terrorism Database is unclassified and available online to researchers. It contains more than 85,000 terror incidents since 1970. Hundreds of details associated with each incident are included to make the tool useful to social scientists.

http://www.start.umd.edu/data/gtd/

START, based at the University of Maryland is a Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence conducting behavior research to unravel the causes and dynamics of terror and the motivations and techniques of terrorists and terror groups.
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