

## FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION EXTERNAL INTELLIGENCE NOTE



## (U//FOUO) Threat Actors Likely Engaging in Actions Comparable to Pre-Operational Activities at or over Louisiana Chemical Facilities, Creating Opportunities for Chemical Attacks



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(U) External Intelligence Note template approved for fiscal year 2021, as of 1 October 2020.

(U) This product expresses the judgments and perspective of this office and may not reflect the national perspective of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

(U//FOUO) FBI New Orleans Field Office and FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate assess threat actors<sup>a</sup> likely<sup>b</sup> are engaging in actions comparable to pre-operational activities<sup>c</sup> at or near Louisiana chemical facilities, creating opportunities for chemical attacks involving chemical releases. This assessment is made with medium confidence,<sup>d</sup> based on nine sources, including one law enforcement database search, one US Government (USG) liaison contact with direct access, one state law enforcement contact with direct access, two liaison contacts at chemical facilities with direct access, and open source reporting consisting of three news articles and one local government website posting from diverse areas impacted by incidents at chemical facilities.

(U//FOUO) The assessment made in this external intelligence note is based on the key assumption that threat actors are attempting to acquire knowledge of the facilities and their operations. We further assume threat actors will use information acquired about facilities and operations to explore the feasibility and impact of attacking those chemical facilities to inflict numerous injuries, fatalities, contamination of the surrounding areas, and disruption of essential services. We assess threat actors likely will maintain the same level or increase in pre-operational activities at or near Louisiana chemical facilities over the next 12 months, providing operational knowledge of facilities to execute a successful attack. Additional private sector, human, and technical reporting regarding perimeter surveillance, evidence of mechanical tampering, and suspicious behavior by employees or contractors, in conjunction with reporting indicative of specific targeting of chemical facilities, would raise our confidence in this assessment.

<sup>a</sup> (U//FOUO) *Analyst Note*: For the purposes of this external intelligence note the term ‘threat actors’ refers to criminal, cyber, and terrorist actors

<sup>b</sup> (U) See Appendix A: Expressions of Likelihood.

<sup>c</sup> (U//FOUO) *Analyst Note*: Pre-operational activities can include, but are not limited to, surveillance, theft, tampering, threats, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) fly overs, and suspicious inquiries.

<sup>d</sup> (U) See Appendix B: Confidence in Assessments and Judgments Based on a Body of Information.

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**(U) Source Summary Statement**

(U//FOUO) Reporting in this external intelligence note was derived from nine sources, including one law enforcement database search, one USG liaison contact with direct access, one state law enforcement contact with direct access, two liaison contacts at chemical facilities with direct access, and open source reporting consisting of three news articles and one local government website posting from diverse areas impacted by incidents at chemical facilities.

(U//FOUO) The law enforcement database search, and the USG, local and state law enforcement, and chemical industry information were deemed most critical to the key analytical judgement, overall assessment, and provided context and corroboration. The open source articles provided strategic perspective but did not influence the analysis. This collection occurred between 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2020. The open source articles were published between 26 June 2015 and 12 April 2019. The reporting was current as of 30 September 2020.

**(U//FOUO) Threat Actors Likely Engaging in Actions Comparable to Pre-Operational Activities at or over Louisiana Chemical Facilities, Creating Opportunities for Chemical Attacks**

(U//FOUO) We assess threat actors likely are engaging in actions comparable to pre-operational activities at or near Louisiana chemical facilities, creating opportunities for attacks involving chemical releases. This assessment is based on constant reporting of pre-operational activities at or near chemical facilities in Louisiana over the last two years, including numerous reports of site surveillance and multiple reports of attempted, unauthorized site access. Pre-operational activities give threat actors vital information regarding these chemical facilities and allow them to explore the feasibility and impact of conducting a successful attack. There has been no reporting of threat actors planning to attack Louisiana chemical facilities.

- (U//FOUO) According to a law enforcement database search, between 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2020, 235 pre-operational incidents were reported at or near domestic chemical facilities in Louisiana.<sup>1</sup>
- (U//FOUO) According to a law enforcement database search, from 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2020, the majority of pre-operational incidents that occurred at chemical facilities in Louisiana included 73 incidents involving photography or videography of facilities, 90 incidents of security breaches, and 53 incidents involving UAS flyovers.<sup>2</sup>
- (U//FOUO) According to a USG liaison contact with direct access, in April 2020, an individual drove to a chemical facility in Lake Charles, Louisiana, indicating the individual was working for the electric utility company and needed to read meters on the utility poles inside the facility. The individual did not possess a Transportation

Worker Identification Credential (TWIC).<sup>e</sup> The chemical facility contacted the utility company and found out the individual was not employed by the company.<sup>3</sup>

- (U//FOUO) According to state law enforcement and 2 liaison contacts at chemical facilities with direct access, between 11 and 19 May 2019, 2 neighboring chemical facilities in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, experienced continuous sightings at their facilities of UASs flying at night at low altitudes. There were 15 sightings within the 8 days and the operator(s) were not located.<sup>4</sup>

## (U) Perspective

(U//FOUO) While terrorists have not succeeded in exploiting US chemical facilities for a major domestic chemical attack, industrial accidents illustrate the catastrophic outcomes of chemical releases. According to an USBUS Fox 26 Houston article, based on reporting primarily from company officials with direct access, on 17 March 2019, USBUS Intercontinental Terminal Company in Deer Park, Texas, reported tanks at the facility caught fire. The fire started in 1 tank and spread to other tanks, resulting in severe damage to 11 storage tanks; the fire burned until 20 March 2019. The tanks contained various hazardous chemicals, including pygas, xylene, naphtha, a gas blend, and base oil.<sup>f, 5</sup> Additionally, the fire resulted in spillage into the Houston Ship Channel and a massive plume was visible across much of southeast Texas.<sup>6</sup> The Houston Ship Channel was closed for three days due to the chemical spill and cleanup efforts, resulting in an estimated \$1 billion loss for the Houston petrochemical industry.<sup>7</sup>

(U//FOUO) According to a 26 June 2015 Reuters report primarily citing French officials with indirect access, an identified man working for a delivery company murdered the business owner, decapitated him, and then drove to an American gas facility in southeast France. The vehicle was allowed through the gates because it was authorized to make deliveries. Closed-circuit television footage showed the man accelerating toward a warehouse housing gas canisters. Emergency services arrived after the man drove into the warehouse and ignited gas canisters, setting off a loud explosion. The man was overpowered as he attempted to open bottles of liquid acetone. It is unclear what degree of catastrophe could have been created if the man managed to spill and ignite the industrial quantities of liquid acetone.<sup>g, 8</sup> Although this partially successful terrorist attack occurred outside the United States, it demonstrates how industrial chemicals stored on a property present a danger when not kept secure. In this case, an insider threat actor radicalized by Islamist associates attempted to exploit his position, using his employment at a delivery business to gain access to explosive chemical materials and carry out a terrorist attack.

(U//FOUO) The assessment in this external intelligence note focuses on threat actors engaging in pre-operational activities at or near chemical facilities in Louisiana, creating opportunities for attacks; it serves as the baseline for this threat issue. This external intelligence note is the first FBI

<sup>e</sup> (U) The TWIC is required by the Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) for workers who need access to secure areas of the nation's maritime facilities and vessels.

<sup>f</sup> (U) These are used in gasoline and fuel production.

<sup>g</sup> (U) According to the National Institutes of Health's open chemical database, PubChem, acetone is a clear, colorless, volatile liquid with a flashpoint of 0 degrees Fahrenheit. Acetone can be easily ignited by heat, sparks, or flames when air mixtures are between 2.5 and 12.8 percent of Acetone by volume, causing an explosion or flash fire.

finished intelligence product devoted to examining threat actors engaging in pre-operational activity at or near domestic chemical facilities in Louisiana.

## (U) Analysis of Alternatives

(U//FOUO) We considered the alternative hypothesis that threat actors likely conduct pre-operational activities at Louisiana chemical facilities to steal hazardous chemicals rather than to exploit the chemicals on-site, enabling means for chemical attacks away from the facility. Chemical facilities—notably large industrial facilities referenced herein—have chemicals in larger amounts and at higher concentrations than are generally commercially available and exfiltration of—for example—cylinders of chlorine or anhydrous ammonia would give threat actors the means to conduct a chemical attack against the general population, away from the facility. We discounted this hypothesis partially due to a lack of reporting indicating a desire for threat actors to steal hazardous chemicals but primarily because the effort required to steal chemicals is much greater than it is to exploit them on-site. Threat actors must breach security to enter the perimeter and then bypass security again with a large item or items. There are also generally more chemicals to exploit on-site than what is generally transported on a truck, such as vats and tankers that are not easily stolen. Indicators, if detected, that would increase the likelihood of this alternative include an increase in communications regarding theft of chemicals from chemical facilities for use in attacks against soft targets and an increase in communications on chemical agent dissemination techniques.

## (U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) We assess threat actors likely will maintain the same level or increase pre-operational activities at or over Louisiana chemical facilities over the next 12 months, providing them with operational knowledge of facilities to execute a successful attack. Such an attack could result in numerous fatalities and injuries. Beyond the next 12 months, threat actors likely will attempt to find new ways to accomplish their goals, including retaliating against individuals, companies, or groups by exploiting chemical facilities, causing psychological fear and physical damage to targets of opportunity or those that have significance to the USG and US economy. Some methods they pursue include questioning security personnel and operators and photographing or videotaping facility layouts. Observable indicators that would highlight suspicious activity and warrant further law enforcement scrutiny include, but are not limited to:

- (U//FOUO) Surveillance of facilities, including suspicious vehicles parked or checking plants' storage tanks and critical equipment;
- (U//FOUO) Frequent, multiple perimeter surveillance “false” alarms;
- (U//FOUO) Persons out of place, inside or outside the facility, testing security;
- (U//FOUO) Sabotage or holes in fences or security barriers;
- (U//FOUO) Vandalism or perimeter security equipment;
- (U//FOUO) Broken seals, locked or chained transfer valves cut, or unexplained open valves;
- (U//FOUO) Tampering (for example, product, equipment, and infrastructure);

- (U//FOUO) Persons seeking employment who do not have proper identification documents;
- (U//FOUO) Negligent professional behavior or abnormal individual personal behavior; and
- (U//FOUO) Employees or contractors engaging in suspicious activities.

(U//FOUO) An increase in human sources and liaison contacts within the chemical industry and state, local, and federal law enforcement will provide FBI New Orleans Field Office an opportunity to mitigate threats to chemical facilities.<sup>h</sup>

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(U) FBI New Orleans Field Office and FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate prepared this external intelligence note. Please direct comments and queries to the FBI New Orleans Field Intelligence Group at 1-504-816-3000.

(U) If you would like to provide qualitative feedback on this product, please send an email to the appropriate address with the product title as the subject line: [DI\\_Customer\\_Feedback@fbi.gov](mailto:DI_Customer_Feedback@fbi.gov); [DI\\_Customer\\_Feedback@fbi.sgov.gov](mailto:DI_Customer_Feedback@fbi.sgov.gov); or [DI\\_Customer\\_Feedback@fbi.ic.gov](mailto:DI_Customer_Feedback@fbi.ic.gov).

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<sup>h</sup> (U) See Appendix C: Map of Chemical Facilities within Louisiana

(U) Appendix A: Expressions of Likelihood

(U) Phrases such as “the FBI judges” and “the FBI assesses,” and terms such as “likely” and “probably” convey analytical judgments and assessments. The chart below approximates how expressions of likelihood and probability correlate with percentages of chance. Only terms of likelihood should appear in FBI products; the chart includes terms of probability strictly for comparison, as they sometimes appear in reporting of other government agencies. Furthermore, the FBI does not arrive at judgments through statistical analysis and will not use terms of probability to convey uncertainty in FBI external intelligence products.

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Terms of Likelihood	Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain(ly)
Terms of Probability	Remote	Highly Improbable	Improbable (Improbably)	Roughly Even Odds	Probable (Probably)	Highly Probable	Nearly Certain
Percentages of Chance	1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

(U) Table showing terms of likelihood aligned with terms of probability and percentages of chance.

## (U) Appendix B: Confidence in Assessments and Judgments Based on a Body of Information

(U) Confidence levels reflect the quality and quantity of the source information supporting a judgment. Consequently, the FBI ascribes high, medium, or low levels of confidence to assessments, as follows:

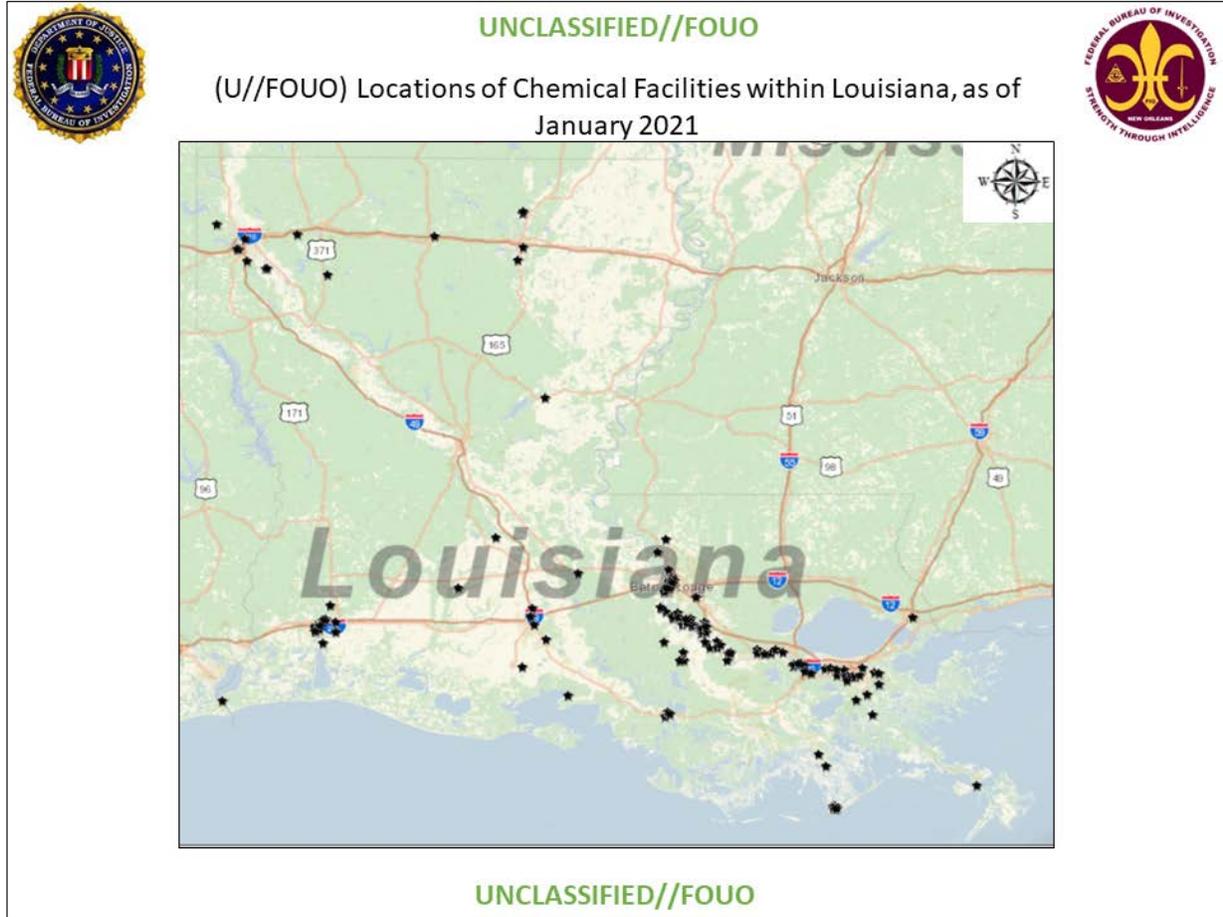
(U) **High confidence** generally indicates the FBI's judgments are based on high quality information from multiple sources. High confidence in a judgment does not imply the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong. While additional reporting and information sources may change analytical judgments, such changes are most likely to be refinements and not substantial in nature.

(U) **Medium confidence** generally means the information is credibly sourced and plausible but not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. Additional reporting or information sources have the potential to increase the FBI's confidence levels or substantively change analytical judgments.

(U) **Low confidence** generally means the information's credibility or plausibility is uncertain, the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make solid analytic inferences, or the reliability of the sources is questionable. Absent additional reporting or information sources, analytical judgments should be considered preliminary in nature.

(U) Appendix C: Map of Chemical Facilities within Louisiana

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(U) Locations of Chemical Facilities in Louisiana, as of January 2021

(U//FOUO) The information was collected from the DHS's Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards (CFATS) program and the US Coast Guard's MTSA program. The CFATS program is the nation's regulatory program focused specifically on security at high risk chemical facilities to mitigate terrorism threats. The MTSA program is designed to protect the US maritime industry from terrorism-related threats, which includes chemical facilities that are connected to US waterways. According to CFATS and MTSA, Louisiana has 148 chemical facilities located within the state boundary.

(U) Sources

(U//FOUO) DHS | Database search | 12 January 2021 | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | Search criteria: CFATS Chemical Facilities.

(U//FOUO) US Coast Guard | Database search | 12 January 2021 | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | Search criteria: MTSA Regulated Chemical Facilities.

## (U) Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI | Case Investigation | 3 October 2020 | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.

<sup>2</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI | Case Investigation | 3 October 2020 | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.

<sup>3</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI | Case Information | 2 June 2020 | 5 April 2020 | “(U//FOUO) March, April, May USCG NRC Reports” | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.

<sup>4</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI | SIR | SIR 0032711703 | 28 May 2019 | 19 May 2019 | “(U//FOUO) Unmanned Aerial System Activity over Chemical Facilities in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, as of 19 May 2019” | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.

<sup>5</sup> (U) News article | Fox26 Houston | “All tank fires extinguished at ITC Deer Park” | 20 March 2019 | [www.fox26houston.com/news/all-tanks-fire-extinguished-at-itc-deer-park](http://www.fox26houston.com/news/all-tanks-fire-extinguished-at-itc-deer-park) | accessed on 3 October 2020.

<sup>6</sup> (U) Website | Deer Park Emergency Services | “ITC Fire Updates” | 12 April 2019 | [www.deerparktx.gov/1778/ITC-Fire](http://www.deerparktx.gov/1778/ITC-Fire) | accessed on 3 October 2020.

<sup>7</sup> (U) News article | *Houston Chronicle* | “Houston Ship Channel closure could cost energy industry \$1 billion” | 25 March 2019 | [www.houstonchronicle.com/business/energy/article/Houston-Ship-Channel-closure-could-cost-energy-13716058.php](http://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/energy/article/Houston-Ship-Channel-closure-could-cost-energy-13716058.php) | accessed on 3 October 2020.

<sup>8</sup> (U) News article | Reuters.com | “Delivery Man Beheads Boss in Suspected Islamist Attack on French Gas Site” | 26 June 2015 | <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-blast/delivery-man-beheads-boss-in-suspected-islamist-attack-on-french-gas-site-idUSKBN0P60XR20150626> | accessed on 28 July 2020.