

## Countdown to the new Millennium

# Law enforcement agencies brace for Y2K-related terrorism

ASSOCIATED PRESS

While companies scramble to ensure their computer systems are Y2K-compliant, police departments across the country and the FBI are preparing for potential violence on the part of religious extremists and other groups hoping the world ends on Jan. 1, 2000.

Dominic Venturi, the supervisory agent in charge of the FBI field office in Boise, said a special command post will be staffed around the clock from Dec. 29 through Jan. 5 in Idaho as well as other states.

"We're prepared to respond whether an incident is urban or rural," Venturi said.

Opinions vary on how much of a threat fringe groups pose, but a 34-page report from the FBI's domestic-terrorism unit warns of militias and racist groups acquiring weapons and surveying targets.

"Several religiously motivated groups envision a quick, fiery ending in an apocalyptic battle," the report said. "Armed with the urgency of the millennium as a motivating factor, new clandestine groups may

conceivably form to engage in violence toward the U.S. Government or its citizens."

And while FBI officials view large cities as more likely to be terrorist targets, they are not ruling out other locations.

But Venturi, and officials with the Boise Police Department, are tightlipped when it comes to security specifics.

Lt. Larry Jones said officers have received additional training to deal with potential violence on New Year's Eve and there will be more of them on the streets.

The department also has worked to protect potential targets. "We are aware of certain areas that are of a high visibility and high value as targets, and we're working with the security personnel from those areas to coordinate security efforts," Jones said.

Meridian Police Chief Bill Gordon, prompted by concerns over rioting, asked for \$18,000 from the City Council to buy rifles, helmets, shields, ammunition, clubs and other equipment. He later withdrew the special request amid skepticism.

"Everybody wants to be ready for anything

that could take place," Gordon said. "Our main concern is the availability of the officer. We're not going to run more shifts, but everyone will be available like years past on New Year's Eve."

While academics who study extremist groups are doubtful there will be violence, they are well-aware the groups can be unpredictable. James Richardson, a professor of Sociology and Judicial Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, said irrational beliefs, coupled with an approaching millennium, can be a lethal combination.

"There may be some people who think not only is the world going to come to an end, but they are a chosen instrument that is supposed to help it along," Richardson said. "All it takes is somebody with a little plastic explosive in a backpack and they can do a lot of damage." And Richardson, who advises the FBI on dealing with extremists, said organized groups sometimes are not the culprits in terrorist acts.

"One noteworthy thing about this phenomenon is that it's often not groups but

loners who think they're doing the Lord's will or they're doing the right thing," Richardson said.

Some of the advice he gives to the FBI is to develop a thorough understanding of fringe groups.

"I've been working to convince them they really need to understand the mind set and worldview of these groups," Richardson said. "If you do that, you may figure out openings and ways to get some leverage on them. It doesn't do any good to denigrate those people."

The FBI said one of those groups, Concerned Christians, has tried to initiate violent confrontations in an effort to start Armageddon. Monte Kim Miller, the group's leader, claims to be one of the two witnesses or prophets described in the Book of Revelation who will die on the streets of Jerusalem prior to the second coming of Christ. Members of the group traveled to Israel in 1998 to prepare for next month. Fourteen have since been deported by the Israeli government.

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