

New crime-fighting tools aim to deter and nab terrorists

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Fingerprints, ballistics, DNA analysis and other mainstays of the forensic science toolkit may get a powerful new crime-solving companion as scientists strive to develop technology for "fingerprinting" and tracing the origins of chemical substances that could be used in terrorist attacks and other criminal acts. That's the topic of the cover story in the current issue of *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN), the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society, the world's largest scientific society.

Bethany Halford, C&EN senior editor, focuses on an emerging field known as chemical forensics, where the goal is to use the technology of chemistry to trace weaponized toxic substances and related materials back to their source. A chemical forensic analysis could, for instance, show that ingredients in a terrorist's weapon were produced in a specific factory. Criminal investigators then could check sales records to determine exactly who purchased those ingredients.

The article explains that the research in the field has expanded substantially during the last few years due mainly to funding from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Chemical Forensics Program. With this research, DHS and chemical forensic scientists are sending messages to the public and to would-be terrorists, the article notes. DHS wants the public to know that the agency is preparing for future attacks, and terrorists to be aware that science is preparing to nab them if they do attack.

More information: Tracing A Threat -
cen.acs.org/articles/90/i6/Tracing-Threat.html

Provided by American Chemical Society

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