

UNEXPLODED BOMBS ARE A 'LOTTERY WIN' FOR POLICE

BY DAVID LEWINS
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Capturing the unexploded bombs from Thursday's failed terrorist attacks on London is a "lottery win" for forensics teams, a Bath expert has said. Bombs from the three tube stations and the bus targeted by terrorists could lead police directly to the bombers and the people supplying them.

It could also answer questions as to whether Thursday's attackers are copycats, or belong to the same terrorist cell as the suicide bombers who struck the capital on July 7, killing more than 50 people.

"It could well be a blessing in disguise," said James Clery, who runs Defence Forensics in the city, and has worked across the globe, including in New York after the 9/11 attacks.

"Because they believed the bombs were going to explode, the makers might have been more careless about leaving things like fingerprints."

Dr Clery said clues such as fingerprints, hairs or DNA on the rucksacks or bombs could lead police directly to the people trying to plant the devices, as well as those who made them.

National fingerprint and DNA databases could provide the bombers' names.

But even if they are not on the database, perhaps because they have no previous convictions, Dr Clery said the clues could still be vital.

"If they arrest someone in connection with the incident, a DNA match would provide a strong link," he said.

"There might also be fibres from a carpet, or a hair from a pet which could later provide a strong link.

"Even a roll of Sellotape kept in a drawer could be matched to that used to wrap up the bomb."

The make-up of the bombs and the ingredients will also give police a strong indication as to whether this is the same terrorist group responsible for the attack or a copycat, said Dr Clery.

His views were echoed by Stefan Wolff, professor of political science in the Department of European Studies at the University of Bath.

He said: "There is a lot of forensics evidence to be gathered from the bombs being intact.

"It is like a lottery win from the forensics point of view."

He said the lesson to be learned from Thursday's mirror-image of the attacks of two weeks ago was the terrorists would target transport systems to create the most carnage and disruption.

Although no one was seriously injured in Thursday's attacks, the terrorists still succeeded in causing disruption.

"For reasons we do not yet know, the bombs did not go off," he said.

"But if they had, there would have been devastation and casualties.

"Even with the increased security alert, the public transport system in London still remains a soft target. Even with airport-style security, there is still no way for it to be 100 per cent secure.

"It seems to suggest the terrorists are going for this type of target, both to get massive casualties and massive disruption.

"Although the devices did not go off, tube lines were still closed, and it caused disruption.

"On the other hand, it was clear the emergency services handled the situation very efficiently, and can cope on the current scale."

Prof Wolff said a basic error, rather than extreme good luck, was the reason the four bombs did not detonate.

"An ingredient could have been missing, or there could have been a problem with the trigger," he said.

He also said what was especially worrying was that there were now four potential suicide bombers who had failed in one attempt, and were on the loose.

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PICTURE: Richard Lee