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ATF'S BOMB ARSON TRACKING SYSTEM TAKES INFORMATION SHARING TO A NEW LEVEL

by Drew Wade

The creation of the recently launched second version of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' (ATF) Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS 2.0) is the first web-based intelligence database that will allow federal, state and local law enforcement and bomb scene commanders to share crucial information about arson and explosives incidents around the nation over the Internet.

BATS is an arson and explosives incident database for the entire U.S. Department of Justice. It was developed to achieve an unprecedented degree of information sharing among law enforcement agencies and fire service organizations at every level of government.

Investigators who take digital photographs and write reports at active crime scenes can download those files and enter them into BATS in an instant. Those files can be searched and viewed by other law enforcement investigators who can access the database. Similarities in crimes can be linked in hours instead of days with the new system.

"ATF brings unique resources and expertise to arson and explosives investigations," said Director Carl J. Truscott. "BATS is a real-time investigative tool that will help law enforcement and fire investigators keep America safer."

ATF expects to see an increase in the links between arson and explosives incidents as a result of the new system. Jurisdictional boundaries created by legislation and state and/or local borders will be minimized. Participating investigative agencies can immediately share key information about arson and explosives incidents with counterparts in other states or regions. BATS will allow those agencies to share crucial intelligence and information as incidents occur.

The BATS database also will improve coordination and cooperation in the fight against terrorism. It will allow images of arsons, improvised explosives devices, and crime scenes to be shared online with law enforcement partners anywhere in the United States. Investigators will be able to track trends and compare incidents for similarities in motives, leads and potential suspects.

On August 11, 2004, the Attorney General directed the Department of Justice's chief information officer to consolidate all DOJ arson and explosives incident databases into a single database. The final determination was that all such databases within DOJ would be maintained by ATF, specifically based on the BATS model.

Following the recent DOJ information systems consolidation assessment, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) recommended that the FBI Automated Incident Reporting System (AIRS) data be integrated into BATS.

Jesse Chester, Chief, Arson and Explosives National Repository Branch (AENRB), where the data is housed, said the following progress has been made in the consolidation effort:

- AENRB has processed approximately 5,000 explosives incident and activity reports from the FBI for manual data entry into BATS. Sixty percent of the CY 2004 records have been entered into BATS.
- AENRB has electronically processed approximately 26,000 digital AIRS explosives incident records. (These records are currently being quality checked to meet AENRB standards).
- On Dec. 15, 2004, BATS 2.0 was released with enhanced functions in the areas of Bomb Render Safe Procedure information; five, one-megabyte attachment per record capability for pictures and document files; and multi-agency record sharing capabilities.
- 430 law enforcement agencies profiles have been successfully migrated from AIRS to BATS. 431 information packets were sent to previous AIRS users.

ATF's Arson and Explosives National Repository, which Congress has entrusted with maintaining all national information on explosives incidents and arson, developed BATS to serve as a library that state, local and other federal law enforcement agencies could use to manage and exchange information. "BATS provides state, local and federal law enforcement agencies that have fire, arson, post-blast and explosives ordnance disposal responsibilities the ability to put in and share information concerning arson and explosives crimes," said Virginia O'Brien, Deputy Assistant Director, Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information.

ATF has established more than 500 accounts for federal, state, local and tribal agencies to access BATS, which is currently populated by more than 3,100 records. ATF is adding new users daily and plans to have 10,000 users by 2010. Also, international investigators will be able to access similar information through the DFuze system, another database developed and used by ATF.

In 2004, BATS received the E-Gov Institute's Pioneer Award and the FOSE Showcase of Excellence Award. The Pioneer Award given to BATS was one of 15 that the E-Gov Institute bestowed in 2004 to federal, state and local agencies.

ATF is the primary federal law enforcement agency for investigating arson and explosives incidents. Its special agents investigated more than 400 incidents involving bomb and improvised explosives devices in 2004. The ATF National Response Team has responded to more than 550 arson incidents since 1989. ♦*

