



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
Homeland Security Advisory Council**

March 31, 2004

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Secretary Tom Ridge
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Consistent with your charge to us during our June 2003 meetings, and on behalf of the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) and the members of the Lexicon Working Group that was formed as an extension of that charge, thank you for the opportunity to research and provide recommendations on managing the Homeland Security Lexicon and its rapidly expanding set of words, phrases and acronyms. We believe that without a disciplined process to manage its use, the Homeland Security Lexicon has the potential to accomplish the opposite of its intent (i.e., to accurately inform all stakeholders and enable the Nation to meet its Homeland Security challenges).

After independent research, consultation with our Senior Advisory Committee colleagues, and after public deliberations at our October and December 2003 and March 2004 HSAC meetings, we are pleased to provide you the product of the Lexicon Working Group's efforts. The attached offers a review of the state of the Homeland Security Lexicon and our recommendations for ensuring that the lexicon is, to the greatest extent possible, effectively used and understood by all Homeland Security stakeholders.

Again, on behalf of the HSAC and Lexicon Working Group membership, our thanks for the opportunity to serve the Department and the Nation and to contribute to the security of the Homeland.

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HOMELAND SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL LEXICON WORKING GROUP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the inaugural meeting of the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) in June 2003, and consistent with the provisions of the Statewide Template Initiative, Secretary Ridge requested the HSAC research and provide recommendations to him to enable the Department to develop and effectively manage an authoritative "*Homeland Security Lexicon*."

The Council believes strongly that the English language forms the foundation of all coordinated effort within the scope of American Society. As such, we view it imperative that the portion of the language associated with Homeland Security awareness, prevention, protection, response, and recovery efforts be as descriptive, accurate, precise, and as widely understood as possible.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- As part of its research, the Working Group focused on a few previously identified key words. These words included first responder, critical infrastructure, risk, and vulnerability. The working group chose not to draft unique definitions as originally suggested in light of the following:
 - the diverse and dynamic spectrum of threats and vulnerabilities that must be addressed by the Department,
 - the growing need (and nascent initiatives) for education, training, and public communications programs to achieve the Department's objectives for *awareness, prevention, protection, response, and recovery*,
 - the proliferation of homeland security related documents coupled with the seemingly increasing penchant for document-specific definitions and multi-definition acronyms,
 - and the context-based nature of the English language.

The Working Group concluded that generation of additional definitions for homeland security related terms, in the absence of a disciplined lexicon management process, would only add to the ambiguity and confusion that already exists.

- As a departure from the above conditions, the Working Group found that Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 (HSPD-8) illustrates a disciplined use of document-specific terms that is consistent with building the processes required for effective Homeland Security Lexicon management.

Specifically, terms including “Federal departments and agencies,” “first responder,” “major disaster,” “emergency,” “state,” and “local government” are defined and identified with authoritative sources from the U.S. Code, to include the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 101). Despite the standard set by HSPD-8, the Working Group concluded that immediate efforts to instill discipline and arrest the “individual creativity” that will otherwise further exacerbate the lexicon situation are required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A vital first step is the assignment of ownership for the lexicon management process. Successful implementation will require clear delegation of authority as well as allocation of resources to support the effort. We suggest that the Executive Secretariat may be the appropriate organizational home; and accordingly, we recommend designation of a Homeland Security Lexicon Program Officer who is accountable for the lexicon management process.
- Consistent with the Department’s need to establish and maintain efficient and effective communications throughout the broad homeland security stakeholder community, the HSAC recommends:

**The Department of Homeland Security should
create, sustain, and promote the Homeland Security Lexicon
to enable achievement of national goals and objectives.**

Create the Homeland Security Lexicon

We recommend an initial project—to be initiated immediately and executed on a “fast-track” basis—to *create* a foundational Homeland Security Lexicon. The scope of this project should be constrained by selection of an essential subset from the universe of relevant documents, both to ensure timely completion and to facilitate the identification of lessons-learned that may influence the subsequent development of departmental policies and procedures. The Lexicon Program Officer should plan and manage the effort, but we suggest the engagement of one or more professional lexicographers to guide and/or support the project.

The recently published DHS Strategic Plan, “Securing Our Homeland,” should be used as the core foundation document for the Homeland Security Lexicon. Key terms should be identified, definitions derived, and wherever possible the HSPD-8 example of the use of authoritative sources to foster credibility, consistency, and a common understanding among readers should be emulated. Additional foundational documents should include:

- National Strategy for Homeland Security
- National Strategy for Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Key Assets
- National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace

- Homeland Security Presidential Directives
- Homeland Security Act and other relevant legislation
- National Response Plan
- National Incident Management System

We observe that this collection of documents will not provide unique definitions for many key terms. The Working Group's research found that in some cases terms are defined by example; in some cases terms are defined by functional description; and in some cases terms are used without definition, leaving the meaning to be derived from the context. We recommend that this initial project focus on characterizing the current state—with source references—rather than attempting to derive unique definitions.

The lexicon creation process should also include compilation of a list of acronyms together with their expansions and definitions; source references should be identified as appropriate, particularly when multiple expansions exist for the same acronym.

Upon completion of the “*create*” project, we recommend an ongoing two-prong effort—managed by the Lexicon Program Officer. The “*sustain*” process maintains currency of the Homeland Security Lexicon; the “*promote*” process ensures that the lexicon is available to—and used by—the stakeholder communities. The HSAC believes that over time, this two-pronged effort will foster convergence toward common usage and enhance communications throughout the stakeholder communities.

Sustain the Homeland Security Lexicon

Given the dynamic nature of the mission environment and the diverse sources of related communications (external as well as internal to DHS), the Homeland Security Lexicon will inevitably change over time. An ongoing scanning process is needed to identify and incorporate terms and acronyms from newly released documents and communiqués.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that the set of documents used to create the foundation lexicon will necessarily be incomplete with respect to the lengthy list of relevant documents. The “*sustain*” process should also include a scan of other important documents—to include legacy documents that continue to guide the actions of DHS component organizations as well as reference documents used by other homeland security community stakeholders (e.g. state, local, and tribal governments; private industry owners of critical infrastructures; international collaborators). The designated Lexicon Program Officer should work with stakeholder organizations to identify the most important legacy and reference documents for inclusion in this phase. While not every homeland security related communication should impact the Homeland Security Lexicon, we believe an ongoing scanning process is vital to the long-term success of the effort.

Promote the Homeland Security Lexicon

Given that the objective is to establish and maintain efficient and effective communications throughout the diverse homeland security stakeholder community, the Homeland Security Lexicon must be readily accessible—and used—by the members of that community. There are a number of distinct target audiences over which the Department has varying degrees of leverage in terms of enforcing the use of a standard lexicon. We believe that parallel strategies are therefore required to *promote* use of the Homeland Security Lexicon, but an essential first step is ensuring accessibility by all stakeholders. We recommend that the lexicon be maintained online (Merriam-Webster Online provides a useful model); this approach effectively supports the ongoing updates stemming from the scanning process described above and can easily be configured with audience-specific portals to facilitate use.

An “enforcement” mechanism is required to ensure that official departmental documents, communiqués, and education/training programs are compliant with the Homeland Security Lexicon. Departmental policy and review procedures must be established; we recommend that the Lexicon Program Officer be assigned responsibility for these tasks. We suggest that the Executive Secretariat assume responsibility for review of official departmental documents/communications and that distributed review mechanisms be established to *promote* consistent use throughout the department.

Other key audiences for the Homeland Security Lexicon include:

- White House Homeland Security Council
- Congressional Staffers
- Media
- Providers of homeland security related education and training
- Homeland security research community (academia, non-governmental organizations, private sector)
- American public

We recommend that the Department develop an outreach strategy for each audience to make them aware of the Homeland Security Lexicon and to *promote* consistent use. While the Lexicon Program Officer should lead the effort, we suggest that the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Legislative Liaison work collaboratively to implement the strategies. We observe that the Homeland Security Lexicon must be “sold” as a value-adding resource to these audiences.

The HSAC believes that implementation of aggressive strategies to *create, sustain,* and *promote* the Homeland Security Lexicon will significantly improve communications both within and between the diverse homeland security stakeholder communities.

The members of the Lexicon Working Group remain available to review draft policies and plans and to otherwise assist your efforts in establishing an effective and efficient lexicon management process.

As the Nation aggressively confronts the grave challenges to the safety, freedoms, and future of its citizens, on behalf of the Homeland Security Advisory Council, we again offer our thanks for affording us the opportunity to assist the Department. We believe the Homeland Security Lexicon is vital to the Department's success—and to our Nation's future. We share your commitment and stand ready to support you and the Department in this important endeavor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Homeland Security Advisory Council wishes to recognize the time and commitment made by the members of the **Homeland Security Lexicon Working Group**:

Dr. Ruth David	Homeland Security Advisory Council & Vice Chair, Academe and Policy Research Senior Advisory Committee (Lexicon Working Group Chair)
Mr. Richard Andrews	Homeland Security Advisory Council & Chair, Emergency Response Senior Advisory Committee
Ms. Donna Finn	State and Local Officials Senior Advisory Committee
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Mr. Jack Skolds	Private Sector Senior Advisory Committee
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