

Testimony

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“Building a Partnership Strategy: Improving Information Sharing with State & Local
Law Enforcement and the Private Sector

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share some of my views on information sharing between state and local law enforcement and the private sector.

Introduction

In 2004 Pacific Northwest National Laboratory was asked by the Department of Homeland Security, Science and Technology to lead the Regional Technology Integration Initiative (RTII) for the Seattle Urban Area. In leading this effort I have had the pleasure and honor of working with hundreds of professionals in the public and private sectors who are committed to public safety and the protection of their communities. The first phase of this program was to work with the public safety sector and private sector to identify the major technology gaps that if met, would significantly improve regional preparedness for major disasters whether natural or human induced. One of the key findings of this program was that the Seattle Urban Area Emergency Management Planners should direct more resources into prevention. Regional law enforcement used this platform to pursue the development of a Regional Fusion Intelligence Center that would focus on intelligence lead, community policing. This effort is being coordinated with the state intelligence fusion center.

Regional Intelligence Fusion Center

At its origin the Regional Intelligence Fusion Center was conceived as a partnership. Regional law enforcement recognized that their focus on jurisdictional priorities and boundaries was self limiting. They also recognized that resource limitations resulted in suboptimal intelligence capability. The fundamental question then was how do you improve your operations and get the desired results without a significant and sustained increase in resources? The answer is to partner.

The vision for this partnership is that it will be a multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary organization with representatives from state, local, federal and tribal partners, all working toward common objectives. At a minimum, it will include the regional intelligence groups in Pierce, Kitsap, King, and Snohomish Counties, the intelligence operation in the Seattle Police Department, and local industry. Federal law enforcement agencies and the Washington State Fusion Intelligence Center are also envisioned as partners as is the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, Public Health, Fire, Utilities, and the private sector.

Without leadership, an articulation of the challenges that need to be overcome, and a critical mass of supporters to articulate and improve the concept, this partnership would never have moved forward. Although there are, and will continue to be numerous challenges I would like to focus my remarks on information sharing with the public/private sector.

The Northwest Warning, Alert & Response Network (NWWARN)

The benefits of information sharing between the public and private sector are well recognized. The challenge for any Regional Intelligence Fusion Center is not how to build the partnership with the private sector but rather, who should that partnership be

with and what kind of information should be shared? The attributes of an ideal solution include:

- Trusted network of public/private sector representatives by infrastructure element
- Vetting of participating members so only qualifying individuals are allowed to participate
- Defined roles and responsibilities for private sector members
- Secure communication portal for information sharing

The Northwest Warning, Alert & Response Network (NWWARN) has all these attributes making it a very attractive solution to the challenge of information sharing between the public/private sector and law enforcement. The NWWARN was established as a pilot project of the Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Security Information Network – Critical Infrastructure. NWWARN, a collaborative effort between government and private sector partners within Washington State, has as its goal, to maximize real-time sharing of situational information and provide immediate distribution of intelligence to those in the field who need to act upon it. Information sharing occurs through a secure web portal and within each infrastructure element. Members are vetted by knowledgeable individuals within each infrastructure element, ensuring the formation of trusted network.

Although initially established to allow infrastructure elements to communicate with one another in an emergency, NWWARN became an effective information sharing vehicle for a range of issues. Establishing an information sharing partnership between NWWARN and the Regional Fusion Intelligence Center would not change the purpose or operation of NWWARN. Rather, it enables regional law enforcement to collect and analyze the information NWWARN members provide to each other on a daily basis. If law enforcement analysis reveals patterns or suggests heightened awareness, law enforcement can use the NWWARN network and secure portal to immediately share appropriate information with the potentially affected infrastructure elements.

Conclusion

As I mentioned at the beginning, it is a pleasure and an honor to be able to work with the law enforcement organizations in the region. The vision for a Regional Intelligence Fusion Center in the Seattle Urban Area is moving toward reality. The existence of the NWWARN offers an ideal conduit to enable information sharing between the public/private partners and regional law enforcement.