**U.S. Department of Justice**
Federal Bureau of Investigation

# CJIS

# Crime Reporting in the Age of Technology

The National Incident-Based Reporting System

When Henry Ford turned out the original Model T Ford, it revolutionized travel. From our modern vantage point, that little vehicle certainly had its limitations, but it got the job done more efficiently than anything that came before it. However, place the Model T beside a new Ferrari, and it is clear how far technology has advanced. Similarly, the Summary system of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program has been very serviceable since its inception in 1929, but it pales next to the capabilities and potential of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

NIBRS (pronounced nī' • bers) is the replacement for the UCR Program's 70-year-old Summary system. Since its inception, the traditional UCR Program has collected statistics from local and state law enforcement agencies on seven (Part I) Index crimes. (An eighth offense, arson, was added in 1972.) The information to be reported is based on a hierarchy system; i.e., when a criminal incident occurs, police report the most serious offense identified within the incident according to the crime hierarchy established by the UCR Program—murder being the most serious, followed by rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. In multiple-offense incidents, e.g., a victim is robbed and then murdered, the lesser offense (robbery) is disregarded in the national crime count. (The exception is arson, which is always reported.) In the Summary system, the UCR Program collects crime details about the victim, the offender, and the circumstance only for homicide cases. The types of weapons used are gathered only for the crimes of murder, robbery, and aggravated assault. Weapons used in rape are not collected, and rapes are reported only for female victims. Twenty-one other (Part II) offenses are counted only if there is an arrest. The age, sex, and race of persons arrested are collected for all Part I and Part II offenses.

On the other hand, NIBRS takes advantage of the phenomenal capacity of modern police information and data processing systems to capture a myriad of details about crimes and criminals through incident-based reporting (IBR). IBR views a crime and all of its components as an *incident*. Investigating officers record pertinent facts about an incident following systematic procedures that organize the data into specific segments. The vehicle used to capture these facts is a *data element*. Data elements, given proper data values (much like answers to questions), provide information about crime and link this information to victims, offenders, property, arrestees, etc.

As agencies make the transition to NIBRS, they report data to the national UCR Program on each single incident and arrest within 22 offense categories made up of 46 specific

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crimes called Group A offenses. In addition, there are 11 Group B offenses for which only arrest data are collected. NIBRS captures specific details about the event, such as the time, date, location, and circumstance of the incident; the age, sex, and race of the victim and offender as well as information about their relationship; any involvement of weapons or drugs; details of property loss; and whether the crime was motivated by bias. Computer use in the perpetration of certain crimes is also captured.

The following scenario illustrates the difference in the degree of reporting through the Summary system and NIBRS.

*At approximately 8 p.m. on December 23, 1999, two young males approached a 28-year-old Asian female in a parking garage. The first man, who was black, held the woman at knifepoint, reached for her purse, and demanded her jewelry. The female, unwilling to cooperate with the robber, tried to hold on to her purse. A brief struggle ensued during which the second male, a white man, began laughing and pulled a gun. The white male then grabbed the woman, threw the purse at the black male, and said, "I'll have her!" After the second man raped the woman, both men fled the scene, leaving her in the parking garage.*

Under the Summary system, the national Program would count the above incident as one occurrence of rape. The value of the victim's lost property would be reported separately, although the robbery would not be recorded. No other information would be collected unless there were subsequent arrests. Under NIBRS, by contrast, both the robbery and the rape would be counted, and information would be collected about all of the critical elements of the event such as the age, sex, and race of the victim and any known information about the offenders' age, sex, and race as well as the fact that the attackers were strangers. Additionally, information about the location of the attack, the type and value of lost property, and the date and time the incident occurred would be entered into the System.

In developing NIBRS, UCR Program managers have provided law enforcement agencies with a standardized, electronic blueprint for storing the NIBRS data within their individual records management systems. The NIBRS data elements, which are a part of any good data collection system, form the basis for a monthly spin-off

report from the agency's central system that is forwarded to the FBI through the state's central crime data repository. The goals of NIBRS are to enhance the quantity, quality, and timeliness of crime data collection by law enforcement and to improve the methodology used in compiling, analyzing, auditing, and publishing the collected crime statistics. However, until the UCR Program receives the bulk of crime data via NIBRS, the FBI will continue to report crime statistics in the Summary format.

The purpose of this special edition of *CJIS* is to assist law enforcement personnel in understanding the problems likely to be encountered as well as the benefits to be realized from NIBRS implementation. The articles that follow have been written by law enforcement professionals who have participated in their agencies' transition from Summary to IBR, and they provide valuable insights into the various issues surrounding NIBRS. The national Program staff wishes to thank each of the contributing authors for their time and expertise, which they shared very generously with the *CJIS* editorial staff.

# Delaware's Long Road to Certification

BY SHARON DURHAM
DELAWARE STATE POLICE, STATE BUREAU OF IDENTIFICATION

I remember returning from Orange Beach, Alabama, following my first conference on the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in 1988 thinking that implementation of the new System wouldn't be too bad and that our Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) staff could handle modifications and additions required for NIBRS without any problems. After all, Delaware had been collecting automated, incident-based information since the 1970s. All police agencies in the state were already using a standardized incident report, and data entry was performed on a statewide mainframe system. Since, in essence, our agencies were already collecting more data than required for UCR, I assumed that only minor modifications would be necessary in order to become NIBRS compliant. Boy, was I wrong! Nine years after we undertook NIBRS implementation, we are finally on the verge of being certified and are looking forward to that moment.

Hindsight illuminates the magnitude of our underestimation of what needed to transpire in order to establish a NIBRS-compatible system. The first problem we encountered was a big one—funding. Initially our programming staff estimated conversion costs at $18,000; naturally, we submitted a grant request to the Bureau of Justice Statistics for that amount. Unfortunately, the original estimate was, to say the very least, off the mark, and a year later we found ourselves submitting yet another request for $80,000. However, once funding was acquired, we were on our way.

Because we only had to add about 15 additional data elements to our current data entry screens, that aspect of the conversion wasn't difficult. Programmers modified the input screens and added edit checks to the on-line input system to assure uniformity of data entry. State Program staff modified coding and report-writing manuals and provided training at the state's four input sites. During this process, we were still producing the Summary UCR data tape and paper data collection forms monthly. When the time came to produce the first NIBRS data tape, we encountered our second major problem—programmer error. In an attempt to develop the NIBRS tape capacity, the programmer somehow totally deleted the program that produced our Summary UCR tape. Needless to say, the programmer was removed from the project, and we had to start from scratch.

The next programmer, who stayed for approximately 3 years, reestablished our ability to produce the statistical printouts required for Summary reporting. We then decided that, in order to concentrate on producing the NIBRS tape, we would rely solely on paper reports for Summary submission and not redevelop tape capacity. We have continued to submit NIBRS test tapes to the FBI since 1991. Through these years of testing, we have had five different programmers, a circumstance which has made us aware of a third problem—the learning curve. We have discovered that a programmer's learning curve for NIBRS is at least 1 year.

During this period, we encountered yet another obstacle—the state's decision-makers decreed that an entirely new statewide Criminal Justice Information System would be implemented; this decision presented problems for our NIBRS data collection efforts. Further modification of data entry screens created a need for more hours of testing and training. The addition of new data elements, overall system changes, and personnel issues resulted in a tremendous input backlog throughout the state. Measures then had to be taken to eliminate the backlog. Among these were the development of mini input screens that allowed us to distribute data entry to resources other than the state's four input sites. Again, staff provided hours of testing and training,

## Sharon Durham

Sharon Durham has been with the Delaware State Police for 18 years. Ms. Durham has held numerous positions in the state UCR Program. Her current position is as Assistant Director of the State Bureau of Identification and UCR Program Manager.

and we expended funds for overtime and temporary personnel. Through these efforts, the backlog was eliminated, and still we managed to send NIBRS test tapes to the FBI.

In contrast to the above-mentioned setbacks, we received very positive support from the FBI. In May 1999, staff from the FBI's Education/Training Services Unit provided training that proved to be extremely beneficial. Participants included the state Program data entry and coding staff, programmers, and the UCR manager. During the meetings, we were able to resolve many issues relating to crime classification, and the participants came away with a better understanding of NIBRS. In September 1999, at our request, an FBI Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team reviewed all four input sites in the state. The review went well; all agencies appeared to classify crimes uniformly. In both instances, the FBI staff did an outstanding job and was great to work with. The experience and knowledge gained from the NIBRS training and the QAR review are invaluable. My advice to all states and agencies is to take full advantage of both of these programs.

The length of time that it has taken Delaware to reach this point in NIBRS certification clearly has not been only the result of the NIBRS certification process or requirements. As I have stated, there have been other unanticipated obstacles—personnel problems, system changes, backlogs, etc.—that have hindered the process. Since our error rate is now at an acceptable level, and we have been approved for all elements of certification except statistical reasonableness, the FBI would like to review one more tape before the final certification. At present, we are diligently working with our programmer to submit our final data tape. In spite of all our unforseen obstacles, we anticipate NIBRS certification early in the year 2000. Since Delaware requires all police agencies to submit NIBRS data to the state Program, once certified we will be submitting NIBRS data for the entire state. Very few states in the Nation can make that statement, and Delaware will take pride in joining the ranks of those that can. 🏃

# Officers Experience the NIBRS Conversion

**David Porteous**

The state of Connecticut supported the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) from its inception. In 1992, a Bureau of Justice Statistics grant enabled the state to purchase the necessary data collection software, and by the mid-1990s, several agencies were submitting NIBRS data. Our Department of Public Safety continues to support local agencies by providing the financial and technical assistance necessary for them to adopt NIBRS-compliant systems while upgrading their information technology.

The advantages of NIBRS over Summary reporting are extensive. Information about incidents is collected via *data elements,* which are data entry fields that investigating officers complete by entering a brief code or selecting an option from a list. Data elements provide for more expedient data entry, and they augment crime detail. Connecticut added two items, family violence and gang offenses, which now require separate forms. Officers can report family violence and gang offenses by entering a simple YES or NO response in NIBRS. We added two data elements that are not part of the federal NIBRS, Victim and Offender Share a Child in Common and Victim was an Ex-Live In/ Ex-Common Law Spouse. Also, we track crimes against police by listing POLICE as an option for the data element Victim Type.

Presently, over one-fourth of our reporting agencies are submitting NIBRS data. During the next year, three of our five largest cities plan to implement the program. As more of our agencies make the transition to NIBRS, the breadth and power of data sharing will increase, as will the uses of our information network for crime prevention and subject apprehension. As the information backbone of Connecticut agencies, NIBRS will act as a common denominator, easing collaboration among urban, suburban, and rural departments. A perpetrator's activities can be unmasked across jurisdictions through regional data-sharing systems.

The following brief commentaries have been contributed by police officers who understand the efforts, difficulties, and rewards of bringing a previously unknown system into their agencies.

Organizational change is rarely quick or easy. When the change affects many facets of a law enforcement agency such as dispatch, reporting, and patrol, as does implementation of NIBRS, the conversion is even more difficult. But when police officers experience the benefits of the new System, they too can, in the words of Sergeant DeCarlo of Branford Police Department (PD), become "believers."

*David Porteous is the NIBRS Coordinator and Trainer in the Crimes Analysis Unit of the Connecticut Department of Public Safety, Division of State Police. Prior to joining the Department in 1994, Mr. Porteous was managing training programs and databases at the University of Connecticut.*

In December of 1995, the Branford PD, which serves a city of 27,349 inhabitants, tasked me to implement a NIBRS-compatible records management system. And so began our evolution from the UCR of the 20th century to the UCR of the 21st century—NIBRS.

Under the UCR Summary system, most incident data appear in the report narrative and are not computer searchable. Categorizing data and placing them in tables, as occurs with NIBRS, allows the creation of relationships between NIBRS tables and other departmental information. This relational link transforms NIBRS from a strictly crime-reporting instrument to a valuable investigative tool. The following example illustrates how the system works.

**John DeCarlo**

One day another PD came to us with a surveillance camera photo of a burglar. The originating jurisdiction had visited other departments without success. Our officer entered the suspect's description and some Modus Operandi (M.O.) data into our computer. Within 2 minutes, we had a name to go with the face, which led to solving over a dozen burglaries in five cities. All in all, not bad for a couple of minutes' work.

How did we do it? Within our records management system, we have NIBRS tables that contain information on the LOCATION TYPE (the kinds of places a burglar usually enters) and the PROPERTY DESCRIPTION (the kinds of property a burglar usually steals). Another table houses specific data on M.O.s (a burglar's routine methods of operation), and yet another table contains the PHYSICAL DESCRIPTORS of known burglary suspects. When our officer entered the available information about the burglary suspect being sought, the computer searched all the tables for related data. The combined data produced the hit. The changes required to become NIBRS compatible were not easy to carry out, but having this increased capability to solve crimes has made believers out of us.

Our next project is a regional effort to share NIBRS data between state and municipal agencies through an information supersystem. As envisioned, the regional system will make local data available to a vast network of law enforcement agencies— integrating network access into the cruisers via laptop computers and directly to plainclothes personnel with handheld computers.

NIBRS is not just about submitting required data to state and federal agencies. NIBRS sets a foundation for data collection that can be built on and used well into the future, giving us powerful new management and investigative tools for solving crimes. Being part of a technological surge that is adding efficiency to almost every facet of our profession is sometimes overwhelming but always exciting. This is a good time to be a police officer.

*John DeCarlo, a Sergeant with 23 years' police experience, oversees the information technology effort at the Branford, Connecticut, PD. He confesses to being confused on a daily basis by all digital technology.*

**Dale Grenstiner**

When the Groton PD decided to implement NIBRS, our first step was to carefully consider what types of information we could collect that would help us improve our services to Groton City's 9,669 residents. We then looked at other agencies with NIBRS already in place to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of each—a task that aided us in selecting and purchasing a system that met both our immediate needs and our long-term goals. We learned that not only was it imperative to have computer-knowledgeable people, it was equally important to place high regard on their input.

Redesigning our 30-year-old reporting system was a challenge. The new reporting form had to be user-friendly as well as compatible with our computerized system. When finished, the new incident-report forms proved easy to complete and provided more comprehensive and accurate information than previous forms. The new forms can be completed by officers at the scene, in their cruisers, or at headquarters. The data from the forms are then entered into the in-house system by records personnel who ensure the data are complete, reliable, and in compliance with both department and NIBRS requirements.

The results of our early efforts to implement NIBRS were predictable. During the first month, as officers were learning the new forms, patrol mileage fell by two-thirds. By month's end, the mileage was back to normal, and officers were completing the new forms as quickly as they had the old ones. Records personnel experienced a similar learning curve. Detectives discovered that the new forms provided them with more specific details of crimes and better follow-up information.

The database is most widely used by detectives, followed by patrol officers. Data are accessible to anyone in the department through the in-house computer system via workstations throughout the station. Any information is accessible within department headquarters, and limited access is possible with Mobile Data Terminals from the cars. Types of inquiries are limited only by the kind of data collected and entered into the system, e.g., M.O. information, personal traits, physical markings, and similar data to help track suspects.

When our department first examined NIBRS, comments like "It cannot be done," "too time-consuming," "too much training," and "The guys will never do it" were common. It wasn't easy, but we have been NIBRS certified for 6 years now, and the entire department feels fortunate to have experienced the benefits.

*A 21-year veteran of the Groton City PD, Officer Dale Grenstiner is assigned as systems manager for all department computer systems: Computer Assisted Dispatching, the Records Management System, the Report System, and Mobile Data Terminals.*

When people are directed to relinquish a comfortable routine and learn new procedures, the response is rarely enthusiastic. Crime hasn't changed. Why do we have to report so much now?" was just one of the expressions of frustration I heard when officers learned that the Danbury Police Department intended to upgrade all of its information technology systems. As a member of the team charged with implementing the new systems, it was part of my job to overcome this kind of opposition. So I asked the officers, "When you are dispatched to an address, wouldn't you like to know how many times officers had been called to that location? And, if you knew that, wouldn't you like to know whether prior calls had involved a landlord-tenant dispute or a domestic violence incident? Wouldn't it be good to know if there were drugs involved, or a gun?" This information has always been in the department's records, but until NIBRS created the possibility, it could not be cross-referenced and linked to display a pattern. And it could not be made instantly available to every officer, who could use it to make the job safer and more efficient.

**Jose Agosto**

With the adoption of NIBRS, Danbury's officers on patrol will play an even more important role in protecting our 65,774 citizens because during daily patrols they will gather more detailed information that, when entered into the IBR system, may be immediately linked by the computer to earlier entries concerning the same individual, location, circumstance, etc. These relational links not only provide patrol officers and investigators with leads to help solve crimes but also can signal that a situation is potentially dangerous. The information they capture in the performance of their day-to-day duties may save the life of a brother or sister officer another day.

From the first weeks of using the new NIBRS, department managers saw eye-opening patterns of crime incidence and patrol coverage. The ability to separate crime incidents from calls for service and to analyze incident types (traffic stops, burglaries, etc.) that occur in each patrol area by day of the week and time of the day has made it possible to better gauge actual policing needs.

Law enforcement in the 20th century has often been reactive, i.e., responding to problems after they arise. Thanks to programs such as NIBRS, we have the opportunity to be much more proactive in the 21st century. We can concentrate law enforcement resources in those areas where our data tell us problems are developing.

Within the Danbury PD, I am hearing officers make remarks such as, "You can now see trends in criminal activity where they were hidden before." As our officers see the practical applications, their doubts about the value of NIBRS diminish.

*Officer Jose Agosto, Jr., has been responsible for coordinating a complete overhaul of the Danbury, Connecticut, PD's information systems. Prior to joining the department in 1996, he had 25 years' experience installing and managing management information systems for a Fortune 500 company. The Danbury PD Implementation Team consists of two other members, Officer Steve Bobel and Officer Sheila Brooks.*

# TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS . . .

## How Austin PD Became a NIBRS Agency

BY SUE BARTON
  AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT

The information that follows is as much about converting to a new information system as it is about converting to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) because in Austin, Texas, both occurred simultaneously. The Austin Police Department (APD) computerized its paper report system in the 1970s. By the mid-80s, changes in technology, departmental growth, and the desire for more refined information led to the design of a database information system. The new system, designed for laptop data entry, was operational in October 1994. However, APD had lost funding for laptops earlier in the year. Without the necessary equipment and with no time for training, officers were forced to revert to paper forms that incorporated the new NIBRS data requirements. Manual entry created a backlog of thousands of paper reports.

*The Situation Worsens:* At that time, APD was past the point of no return. The old information system was inoperable and the Summary-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program would not run against the new database. Employees searched boxes of reports awaiting data entry to complete UCR data collection for 1994. Even though the arrival of laptop computers in 1995 answered the paper-reporting problems, it presented new challenges. Officers found data entry difficult, time-consuming, and unreliable. Despite the technological advances, backlogs continued, patrol productive time dwindled, and ready access to information was virtually nonexistent.

*The Long Road Back:* Eventually, we were able to design new data entry screens that simplified the process. The new screens also provided immediate edits for mandatory fields of information. New upload programs provided for the transfer of information from laptops to the mainframe. In January 1995, APD began submitting electronic incident-based reports to the national UCR Program. It took more than a year to meet the FBI's standards for clean data. Since management reports had not yet been developed, the APD did not have access to official numbers relating to the state of crime for the entire year.

*Initial Shock:* Judgement Day came in February 1996 when the FBI returned APD's final crime statistics for 1995. Overall, Part I crime had increased only 5 percent, but violent crime was 25 percent higher than 1994 figures primarily due to an astounding 66 percent increase in aggravated assault. The fact that arrests had plummeted added to the misery.

APD immediately initiated a review to determine the accuracy of the returned FBI report using other internal crime reports (not based on Summary or NIBRS standards) for comparison. A cursory review narrowed the scope. Homicide, rape, robbery, and property crime categories appeared to be valid. A mystery remained as to why our database contained a lower number of aggravated assaults and a higher number of arrests than reported through NIBRS; therefore, the data required further analysis.

Two years earlier, APD had discovered discrepancies in reporting aggravated assaults. An audit had revealed that the way reports were coded and the way the UCR Summary software operated often resulted in counting offenses rather than counting each victim as a separate offense. APD had taken appropriate steps to correct the problem at that time, but now we suspected that the same error might be reoccurring. To test this theory, our programmers created software to count the number of victims associated with the aggravated assault offenses. The count validated the accuracy of the NIBRS report. APD then ran the same program against 1994 data and discovered that, indeed, APD had undercounted aggravated assaults in 1994. The problem was not a result of conversion to NIBRS, but rather incomplete reporting in 1994. After comparing the true count of victims for both years, the actual increase in aggravated assaults was 15 percent rather than 66 percent.

We then turned our attention to resolving the arrest issues. Again, we searched the database for raw clearance and arrest data. The exceptional clearances appeared to be accurately reported; however, the number of arrests was drastically undercounted. We discovered that the software logic was designed to extract the arrest data from the identification database rather than the offense database. Because of this design flaw, the system was failing to count persons arrested in other jurisdictions for APD offenses as well as persons who were arrested but not booked (bench warrants, etc.). Also, since field release citations resided in the offense system rather than in the identification database, they had been totally omitted. Other problems involved arrest codes that did not agree with offense titles and data entry errors or backlogs. APD developed software checks to identify and remedy most of these problems. A new report management system that will resolve the problems in a less work-intensive way is currently in the development stage. All in all, APD discovered a lethal combination of process, people, and programming errors that contributed to arrest data being clearly unreliable.

*Return to Normal:* The chaos of change has subsided. Police officers have embraced the use of laptops, and they are entering NIBRS data automatically. Even detectives are using laptops to take statements in the field. At least 90 percent of all

police reports are entered and reviewed within 24 hours; only reports that do not require follow-up investigation take more than a day. This means that detectives can begin investigations almost immediately rather than waiting 3 to 5 days as was common in the "old days" of manual entry of handwritten reports.

Perhaps the most notable improvement lies in the richness of information currently available. For example, Austin reports more hate crimes than does any other city in Texas, not because hate crime is more of a problem in Austin, but because that information is easily recorded in the field without having to fill out a paper form. Similarly, understanding the relationships between victims and offenders allows us to strategically channel resources to areas such as domestic violence where we can make the biggest impact on reducing violent crime.

*Looking Ahead:* APD has spent the last year planning the design of a new information management system to be implemented in the next few years. Although the change will undoubtedly bring some degree of confusion, we have great expectations for this system because we will be careful not to repeat the mistakes made during the development of our current system.

Converting to NIBRS was difficult. It was not painless; progress never is. Change is not easy, and often the rewards are not immediate. The true value and utility of NIBRS information cannot be fully realized until many more agencies, especially larger departments, come on board.

### Sue Barton

Sue Barton, Assistant Director, Austin Police Department, has 29 years of city government experience. Ms. Barton is also a consultant for the National Institute of Justice (U. S. Department of Justice).

# The Voice of Experience

If experience is the best teacher, the Austin Police Department (APD) is in a unique position to offer the following words of advice for agencies contemplating a change to incident-based reporting.

■ Begin the planning process by auditing your current information system and UCR Program to detect any possible reporting discrepancies. Any errors are likely to magnify differences in NIBRS data.

■ Work backward. Design the outputs. Consider the management and operational reports that are needed on a routine basis; then think about those special reports or requests for information that arise infrequently, and make sure all reasonable report needs are met. Once the local requirements are met, identify external reporting requirements from state and federal programs such as NIBRS. Chances are that few, if any, additional data elements will be needed.

■ Collect only the information that will be used. This may sound shortsighted, but if specifications are well thought-out, you will have all the data elements you really need. The danger in collecting huge amounts of data is that it complicates the system, making it less user-friendly. In actual practice, officers will zip past superfluous fields anyway—if a field contains information they will not use for the investigation, they will ignore the category. This tendency may bleed over to critical data elements that are needed for analysis or management purposes. Do not end up with a system loaded with capacity and potential for information, but devoid of data.

■ Do not leave the development solely in the hands of programming staff. Programmers know code and logic; they are not experts on departmental processes or procedures. The employees who use the system should play a strong role in designing the system. Before purchasing software, talk to the users to see how the data fit their needs.

■ Use laptop computers; easy, fast entry is essential. Let the computer do the work, such as replicating the offense number on each page. Design easy, pop-up help screens to give officers immediate access to descriptor codes.

■ Use on-line edits that prompt officers to correctly enter all data fields as they input the data; otherwise, you will have to continually clean your data.

■ Train prior to implementation. APD officers had to adjust to a new information system, new NIBRS requirements, and the transition to laptop entry in the field simultaneously.

■ Build your system to accommodate change.

■ Get all the help you can, wherever you can. APD built their information system without giving much, if any, thought to purchasing software for NIBRS. Neither did we network with cities that were already providing incident-based reports. Do not wait until problems arise; work with your state Program and the FBI during the planning and implementation phase.

# Wichita, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Chicago Test NIBRS

Three cities selected for Pilot Project

Only 4 of the Nation's 67 major cities (those with populations over 250,000) currently submit National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) crime statistics to the FBI. Since 80 percent of U.S. citizens reside in metropolitan areas, meaningful national crime statistics are impossible without data from these vital jurisdictions. In recent years, the FBI and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) have been partners in an effort to promote NIBRS participation by encouraging the adoption of automated, incident-based records management systems. One result of this partnership was the recent selection of three cities to receive federal grants to showcase state-of-the-art systems that are NIBRS-compatible. Wichita, Kansas; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; and Chicago, Illinois, were chosen to serve as pilot agencies in a project aimed at demonstrating to the law enforcement community that a NIBRS-compatible system is feasible and that an agency will accrue benefits once the System is in place.

Participation in the NIBRS project entails an agreement from each of the pilot agencies to allow continual monitoring of relevant activities, tracking and recording all milestones and pivotal events in the implementation process. To broaden the scope of the project, representatives of seven observer agencies have been invited to meet with the pilot departments to add their perspectives and experiences. The seven observer agencies are Austin Police Department (PD), Texas; Jefferson Parrish Sheriff's Office (SO), Louisiana; Seattle PD, Washington; New Castle County PD, Delaware; Los Angeles County PD, California; Washington Metropolitan PD, District of Columbia; and Honolulu PD, Hawaii.

The FBI and BJS intend to document and publicize experiences of the three diverse pilot agencies as they develop NIBRS-compatible systems.

## WICHITA

The Wichita, Kansas, Police Department, which serves a population of 335,000, employs 626 sworn officers and logs approximately 25,000 Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Part I offenses a year. In connection with its overall automation efforts, the department will modify its existing records management system to include NIBRS elements not currently available. The most significant elements lacking in the present system are relationship identifiers that link victim to suspect and victim to offense. The project will consist of making alterations to the Oracle database, revising the data entry screens, and training officers and support staff in the use of NIBRS reporting guidelines. Once the department is able to collect and store all required NIBRS data, the statistics will be verified using software provided by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation and then submitted electronically to the state's Crime Data Information Center.

## CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG

Approximately 53,000 UCR Part I offenses are reported each year to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Police Department, which employs 1,393 police officers. The jurisdiction has a population of about 611,000. In 1998, the police department began developing an integrated information system that includes a module for crime reporting to the state UCR Program. While the original data fields, tables, and links were in accordance with the incident-based reporting (IBR) standards that were in use at that time by the state UCR Program, they were not compatible with NIBRS. Under this project, the crime reporting module will be redesigned so that it will meet the NIBRS standards currently being adopted by the North Carolina State Bureau of Identification. The original data fields, tables, and links were developed with the goal of supporting an increased emphasis on local problem solving as well as providing better support for case investigation. The department hopes to incorporate the



**NIBRS STATUS**

NIBRS Certified | Developing NIBRS | Testing

As of December 1999 | No Formal Plans | ★ NIBRS Pilot Cities

NIBRS requirements within that framework rather than as an additional set of data fields and links.

The enhanced reporting system is more than just a matter of asking officers to file their incident reports on laptop computers. In fact, patrol officers will be conducting preliminary investigations. The technology will provide a way for them to record their findings so that the information can be used not only to help solve individual crimes but also to analyze problems in their districts. NIBRS will be an important part of this process.

## CHICAGO

Serving a city of nearly 3 million inhabitants, Chicago's police force consists of 13,466 sworn officers and another 2,060 administrative personnel. The department handles over 250,000 UCR Part I offense reports each year. It will implement a NIBRS-compatible, automated case-reporting system that will integrate with the department's existing Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (PCAD) and Criminal History Records Information System (CHRIS) applications. The automated case-reporting application, which will include screens that guide the officer through the preliminary investigation process, will also pull relevant data automatically from the PCAD for inclusion in the incident report.

All case reports will be housed in CHRIS, which will automatically update the case report as transactions occur. Development of the automated, integrated case-reporting application will be handled by a vendor under contract with the city of Chicago. CHRIS, however, was developed within the Chicago Police Department, and the department is quite amenable to sharing with other agencies any nonproprietary software that is currently available or may be developed as the project progresses.

Representatives from the three agencies will meet with BJS and FBI staff quarterly to share experiences regarding successes, problems, solutions, costs, and other relevant developments. The FBI's Programs Support Section will make available whatever training support may be needed, and the FBI and SEARCH, under a BJS grant, will offer technical assistance to all three participating agencies. NIBRS test data will be collected, reviewed, and analyzed regularly to confirm that they are complete and that they meet tests for statistical reasonableness. The goal of this ambitious project is to demonstrate best practices in developing and implementing systems that 1) meet internal management and administrative information needs; 2) increase capacity for crime analysis, community-based policing, and Comp-Stat-like applications; and 3) enable the submission of data to NIBRS. 🎖

# New York's Strategy Simplifies Switch to NIBRS

BY JAN WHITAKER
NEW YORK DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES

More than a decade ago, the New York State Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program identified the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) as an excellent way to enhance crime data and increase crime reporting accuracy. A Project Advisory Group, with broad representation from the state's law enforcement community, worked with state Program staff to develop our New York State Incident-Based Reporting (NYSIBR) system. We developed a conversion strategy that minimized both additional workload and training investment for local law enforcement. The key to our successful conversion to NYSIBR was the development of a standardized coding system built on the existing New York penal law codes that allowed cross classification of New York crimes to the traditional UCR offenses and to NIBRS.

Obviously, we wanted to make the transition as smooth as possible. Our advisory group quickly realized that adding another set of crime classifications covering the state's criminal laws would represent an additional workload for local law enforcement. However, officers were already required to be conversant in the content and structure of the state penal law, and they were familiar with it through its use in New York's fingerprint-based Criminal History

Record system. The advisory group recommended building on that existing knowledge base and having the state Program handle all classification conversions.

State Program IBR analysts began the process by conducting detailed analyses of the criminal laws of New York State (NYS), the Summary system of UCR, and NIBRS crime category definitions. In some cases, the Summary-NIBRS code assignment was fairly obvious and straightforward. However, in others, a careful examination of the actual statutory text was needed to permit appropriate assignment of Summary and NIBRS codes. Even so, in some cases, the full statutory text did not provide sufficient precision to complete the classification. For example, NYS larceny statutes do not adequately differentiate between pocket-picking and theft from a coin-operated machine. To overcome this, we added a variable to NYSIBR called Larceny Type, which is required for all larceny offenses. With this variable, coupled with the NYS penal law classification, we were able to derive the necessary NIBRS code.

In other cases, where NYS statutory language did not exactly match the Summary-NIBRS crime categories, the advisory group provided guidance and a rationale for applying a "best fit" to

Summary and NIBRS codes. Interestingly enough, in those cases where NIBRS definitions confound state statute language, we found that traditional Summary definitions and state statute language had also conflicted, since Summary and NIBRS use the same logic.

State Program analysts constructed cross classifications of all crimes in the NYS penal law to Summary and NIBRS, and they are contained in the state's official Coded Law File. NIBRS offense codes are assigned by the state Program as the data are processed for transmission to the FBI.

**Benefits of Standard Classification**

Having a single, uniform set of standard classifications for the entire state increases the accuracy and utility of the data. Classification errors due to ambiguous definitions or other causes are minimized. Each reporting agency can be assured that its data are consistent and comparable to those of all other agencies. And, the state and national Programs benefit from this uniformity as well. State policy makers applaud the ability to analyze state data using either NYS penal law definitions or, where cross-state comparisons may be useful, Summary-NIBRS definitions.

Significantly, too, under the new NYSIBR process, the entire task of classification is removed from the local agency. Staff no longer have to be trained in Summary or NIBRS codes and how they relate to the state penal law.

**Code Standardization and Managing the Summary/NIBRS Transition**

Another important benefit of the cross-classification system is that it enables the state Program to convert our data from incident-based back to Summary formats. This has proven to be a key tool in understanding the transition from the Summary system to NIBRS as well as allowing the state to compare its newer data to historic UCR patterns.

In fact, Summary-NIBRS comparison is a critical part of NYSIBR certification review. We compare historic UCR reporting patterns with NYSIBR source data applying

the traditional Summary counting rules. During this review, our staff have uncovered problems in the old classification process such as the use of nonstandard Summary UCR crime category definitions. These errors generate noticeable changes in counts in the transition between the Summary system and NYSIBR. We also discovered coding errors in some of the records management software used by local departments. In some cases, a specific penal law offense had always tallied to the wrong UCR category due to a simple typographical error. All significant changes in crime category counts are documented as part of our NYSIBR certification process so that not only is the degree of change due to the transition from the Summary system to NYSIBR noted by local, state, and federal analysts, but so are the reasons for the changes.

It has been a concern in New York and elsewhere that crime counts will increase as local law enforcement implements NYSIBR. We have not found that to be the case in NYS. Overall crime totals do not change substantially; however, counts within categories may change and, in some cases, may change significantly.

With the ability to crosswalk between the Summary system and NYSIBR within a reporting agency, we have been able to closely examine the transition and discover the reasons for any discontinuity. For the most part, incorrect or misapplication of UCR offense classifications, whether due to human assignment or software coding errors,

is the most frequently occurring reason for apparent changes in crime counts in the transition from Summary to incident-based reporting. The NYSIBR implementation and certification process helps departments better understand the reporting process and allays fears that crime counts will increase.

In the past year, as part of a Bureau of Justice Statistics' grant, state Program staff reviewed the Summary system and NYSIBR code decisions made 10 years ago. They identified the rationale for coding decisions and documented the entire process. Where Summary and NYSIBR codes don't map directly to one another, we are evaluating and documenting the rationale and, in some cases, reconsidering some coding assignments. As we built the documentation, we refined the questions for making code assignment decisions. This process and the documentation will be used in coming years as new laws are added by the legislature.

**Conclusion**

Standardized classifications across the state have been useful as departments switch from the Summary system to NIBRS, helping to identify and explain changes in historic reporting patterns. Local departments appreciate the simplified training resulting from this standardization, and they report increased confidence in local data. 🐚

**Jan Whitaker**

Jan Whitaker is the Manager of the New York State Incident-Based Reporting Program for the Office of Justice Systems Analysis, New York Division of Criminal Justice Services; she joined the project in the early 1990s as a programmer/systems analyst.

| Ten Largest NIBRS Agencies | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Agency** | | **Population** |
| Austin PD | *(Austin, TX)* | 559,758 |
| Colorado Springs PD | *(Colorado Springs, CO)* | 357,741 |
| Cincinnati PD | *(Cincinnati, OH)* | 344,828 |
| Aurora PD | *(Aurora, CO)* | 262,464 |
| Oakland Co. SO | *(Pontiac, MI)* | 256,562 |
| Greenville Co. SO | *(Greenville, SC)* | 255,854 |
| Henrico Co. PD | *(Richmond, VA)* | 245,905 |
| Chesterfield Co. PD | *(Chesterfield, VA)* | 245,044 |
| Akron PD | *(Akron, OH)* | 218,044 |
| Knox Co. SO | *(Knoxville, TN)* | 199,518 |

Working with the local media:

# When NIBRS is the News

By WILLIAM M. WATSON

RILEY COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT, MANHATTAN, KANSAS

Police shootings, use of force, high-speed pursuits, and profiling are just some of the tough issues I must address as chief of police. If it were not difficult enough to deal with such matters while striving to maintain high standards of police conduct, morale of employees, and support of the community, I must also deal with local media that often appear skeptical of police. All I need to top off a week when Officer Smith has written a traffic citation for the mayor's wife is a front page news story about the city's crime going up.

A police department may not want to have a relationship with the media, but it will have one, good or bad. Too many law enforcement personnel see the media as intrusive, unfair, critical, and biased. And many members of the media believe law enforcement officers are secretive, defensive, and violate an individual's rights—hiding behind a code of silence. Obviously, such stereotypes on both sides are not conducive to building positive relationships.

However, a law enforcement agency that fosters an adversarial relationship with the media by attempting to deny its members access to information serves neither the department nor the public.

When a department converts its crime reporting methodology from the Summary-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program to the incident-based National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), the news media will undoubtedly have questions regarding the department's decision to make this transition. Most reporters do not understand the traditional UCR Program, the new NIBRS, or the idiosyncrasies of crime data. Simply put, by taking the trouble to ensure that the media and, through them, the public understand both of these systems and the differences between them, a law enforcement agency will minimize the misinterpretation of the data as well as the hostility that will naturally follow erroneous news stories that "make the department look bad."

It is in the best interest of the department to thoughtfully disseminate to the media information that the public should understand. For example, the media can help the public comprehend that a rising crime rate in some categories is not necessarily bad. Reporters can explain that the numbers may indicate that officers are proactively detecting criminal activity. When a department expands its narcotics or drug intervention units, more drug arrests can be predicted, and drug crime may appear to increase. Conversely, disbanding drug interdiction units may make drug crimes appear statistically more favorable because fewer arrests may be recorded.

Invest some time and effort to preempt misunderstandings. Prior to the release of crime data collected via NIBRS, the department should arrange a press conference to discuss the new data collection system. The chief or a representative should explain that the additional data that NIBRS provides will assist the department in the preparation of strategies to combat criminal activity in the community. A knowledgeable member of the staff should explain the limitations of Summary reporting and the strengths of incident-based reporting. Great care should be taken to ensure the general public and the media understand that in NIBRS each single crime incident is collected to provide a comprehensive view of criminal activity, while in the Summary system only the most serious offense is scored by application of the Hierarchy Rule. The agency head or designee should prepare a detailed presentation that includes the impact of the conversion of the number on crimes reported, the type and extent of additional information not previously available, and the reasons the department has elected to participate in NIBRS. The media will most assuredly want to know why crime rates seem to rise or at least deviate from those previously reported. Any fluctuations in crime statistics should be explained to reporters.

## A Media Packet Checklist

√ Overview of NIBRS

√ Listing of Group "A" and Group "B" Offenses

√ Listing of NIBRS 53 data collection elements

√ Listing of NIBRS offense definitions and miscellaneous features

√ Outline of differences between NIBRS and the Summary system

√ General guidelines and specifications for NIBRS

√ Enhanced crime analysis reports and maps

√ Glossary of terms, including acronyms

√ Sources of more information

√ Designated contact name and telephone number

A media packet containing explanatory materials should also be provided. (See sidebar on page 11.) The electronic media generally must present short stories that focus on faces and sound bites. They should be supplied with short anecdotal examples of the manner in which data are provided in each system.

It may be that the media will not consider the UCR-NIBRS transition news, and the department's communication efforts may not result in any stories. Nevertheless, plan on repeating the process again when the data are released. Time spent enlightening reporters about the changes in crime numbers is well spent. If the conversion to NIBRS is construed by the media as being veiled in secrecy, or if little or no information is provided, or the police representative providing the information appears less than well-informed about the new system, stories written or aired may be erroneous and detrimental to the department. More time may be spent clearing up the confusion than would have been needed to educate the media beforehand.

Many jurisdictions that have already converted their crime reporting from Summary to NIBRS and have educated the media about the conversion have not experienced significant problems with the news reporting. Often, the chiefs have found that reporters had not understood UCR even though the media had been reporting crime data for years. The conversion to NIBRS provided the departments an opportunity to familiarize reporters with both systems. To mitigate problems, these agencies not only reported statistics in NIBRS format but then converted them back to UCR standards so that reporters could compare current to past crime statistics. Some agencies have found that certain aspects of their past UCR reporting were significantly in error, thus appearing to represent a drastic increase in crime following the transition to NIBRS. When such problems are discussed openly with the media, any adverse publicity is short-lived.

With the advancement of computer technology, law enforcement agencies throughout this country, whether large or small, have the opportunity, if not the responsibility, to gather data in respect to criminal activity and analyze that data in an effort to better understand crime and prepare effective, efficient strategies to combat it. Law enforcement's old nemesis, the media, will want to acquire the newly available data, analyze them, and share that information with the public. Agencies that have developed and nurtured reasonable relationships with the media should fare well. The media will present knowledgeable accounts of the available data. Agencies that have not had good relationships with the media and/or do not properly educate reporters may suffer from that lack of planning as they would in any operation. Proper planning and good communication should mitigate any negative media reports in regard to the transition to NIBRS.
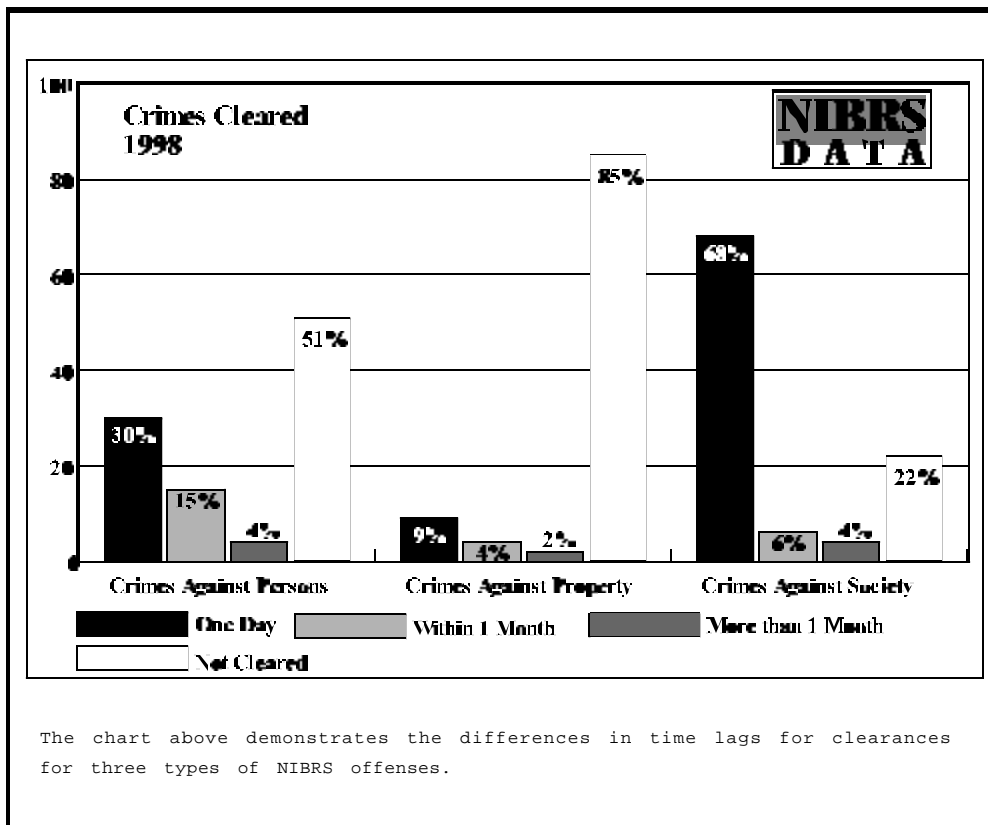
**MikeWatson**

William "Mike" Watson recently left his position as Chief of the Wichita Police Department to become Director of the Riley County Police Department in Manhattan, Kansas.

**Help Us Spread the "News"**

There is no restriction on reproduction of this newsletter for distribution within the receiving agency. In fact, the editors encourage recipients to do so. The newsletter is currently distributed to over 73,000 criminal justice agencies. In view of the size of the mailing list, we are unable to add individuals to it. However, since the information published in *CJIS* is intended to assist law enforcement personnel in the performance of their jobs, it is important that this newsletter be disseminated as widely as possible.



The chart above demonstrates the differences in time lags for clearances for three types of NIBRS offenses.

# NIBRS on the World Wide Web

Several Internet sites furnish law enforcement and criminal justice agencies with extensive information on a variety of National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)-related topics, including sites at the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA); the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS); the Association of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs (ASUCRP); and SEARCH, the National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics.

## JRSA
**http://www.jrsa.org/ibrrc**

The JRSA's Incident-Based Reporting Resource Center, established with BJS support, puts practical, analytical information and tools into the hands of analysts who want to work with incident-based data and provides a forum where they can exchange information and ideas. Click on the **Extracting Data from IBRS and NIBRS** link for technical information.

The **IBR Data in Action: Reports Using IBR Data** link offers projects underway at state Statistical Analysis Centers that use state-level incident-based data.

The JRSA site links to several other NIBRS-related sites, including the main site for ASUCRP, BJS, and the NIBRS Project at the SEARCH site. (See below.)

## BJS
**http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/nibrs.htm**

The BJS site details the history of NIBRS and compares this incident-based reporting system to the traditional Summary reporting system. The site also supplies an abstract of various BJS publications about NIBRS and provides a link to these documents. Titles include "State Use of Incident-Based Crime Statistics" and "Implementing the National Incident-Based Reporting System: A Project Status Report."

To assist in the development and presentation of incident-based crime data, BJS staff created a series of standardized incident-based tables which can be accessed through **BJS Guidance**. Twenty-one table shells such as "Victim/Offender Relationship for Domestic Violence Related Arrests" and "Violent Incidents by Victim/Offender Relationship, Type of Crime, and by Premise" were identified as measures that could provide policy-relevant criminal information. Local agencies may download the shell tables onto a disk and adapt them for their own use. The software applications WinZip or PKUnzip are needed to download the tables.

## ASUCRP
**http://www.asucrp.org/news/index.html**

The ASUCRP site provides a detailed view of NIBRS data as they relate to the UCR Summary system. Highlights of the usefulness of NIBRS are presented along with suggestions for data analysis and links to other helpful Web sites.

## SEARCH
**http://www.nibrs.search.org**

A variety of information is available at the SEARCH site including details of the NIBRS Project, a collaborative effort of various law enforcement agencies. The FBI, the BJS, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriffs' Association, the Major Cities Chiefs' Association, and the ASUCRP are working together to increase agency participation in incident-based reporting.

A click on the **NIBRS Federal Standards** link to the **FBI NIBRS Publications** area connects viewers to Volume 1: *Data Collection Guidelines,* Volume 2: *Data Submission Specifications,* Volume 4: *Error Message Manual*, and an addendum to the volumes. Information on obtaining a complimentary copy of a NIBRS video and a copy of the NIBRS edition of the *UCR Handbook* is also offered.



This sample bar chart illustrates one type of policy-relevant data available with NIBRS.
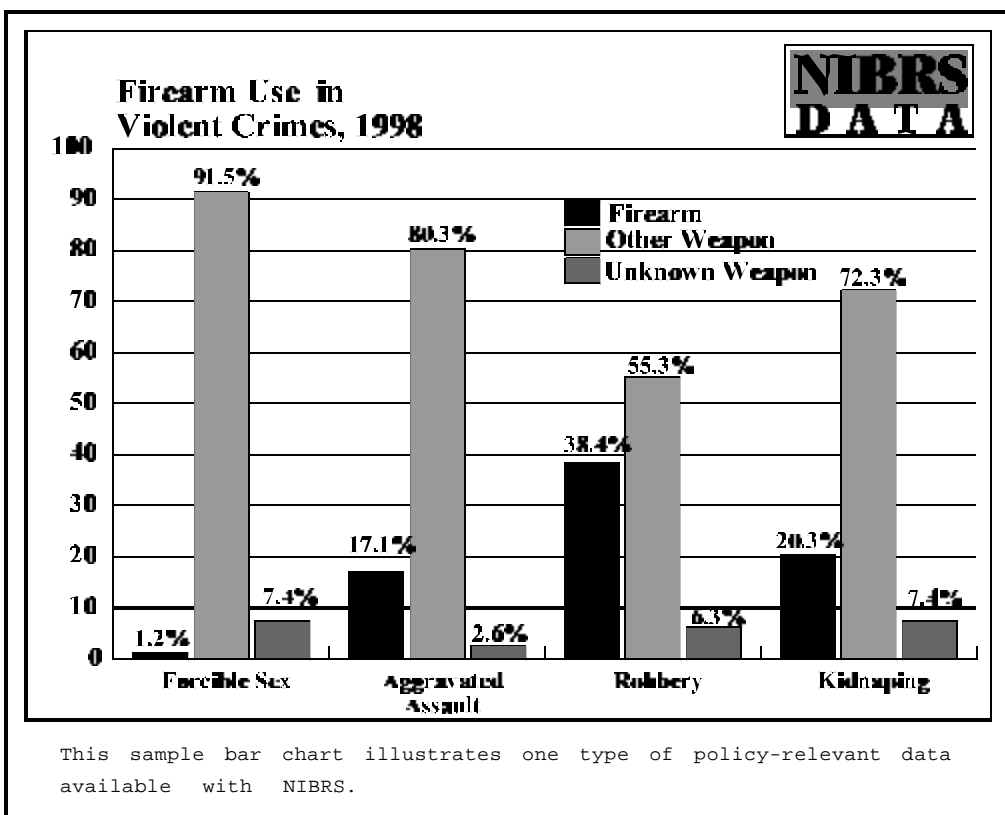
The **Law Enforcement Planning** link features various resources for law enforcement agencies in the process of planning for or implementing conversion of their crime reporting systems from Summary to incident-based reporting. The link contains information on technology, funding, strategic planning, and proposal writing. Sample incident reports that collect required NIBRS data are available, and there is a selection that accesses an automated marketplace for law enforcement products.

The **No-cost Assistance** link presents important information about the technical assistance SEARCH provides to law enforcement agencies, state Summary/NIBRS programs, and software vendors involved in developing NIBRS. It also details the in-house and on-site assistance SEARCH offers and explains how to apply for technical assistance.

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**N O T E :**

Information concerning Web sites and connecting links was accurate as of press time. However, Internet sites are continually being updated and improved. Readers are encouraged to browse these sites frequently for the most up-to-date NIBRS information.

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# Where's the Money?

Effective crime-fighting efforts require cooperation among the components of the criminal justice system: law enforcement, courts, prosecutors, public defenders, corrections officers, and probation and parole officers. One way to foster cooperation is to enable these components to share criminal justice information across local, state, and federal information systems. Attorney General Janet Reno is strongly supportive of criminal justice agencies obtaining federal grant money to purchase automated criminal justice information systems, and she encourages agencies that receive federal funds to implement systems that are compatible with the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).
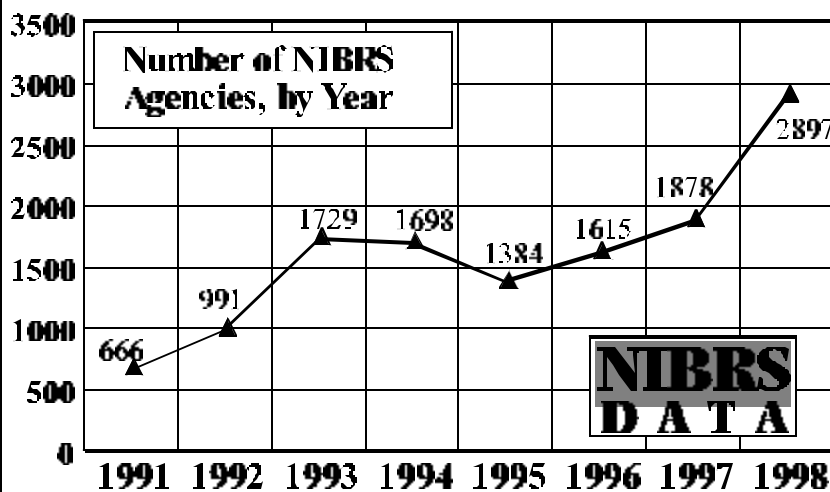
One source of funding for records management systems is the Local Law Enforcement Block Grants (LLEBG) Program administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). In fiscal year 1999, Congress appropriated $523 million for the Program. To be eligible for an LLEBG application, a jurisdiction must report Part I data to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program.

The LLEBG Program is a formula program based on a jurisdiction's number of UCR Part I violent crimes reported to the FBI. The formula is computed in two stages. In the first stage, state allocations are proportionate to each state's average annual number of UCR Part I violent crimes compared with that for all other states for the three most recent available calendar years. In the second stage, local awards are proportionate to each local jurisdiction's average number of UCR Part I violent crimes compared with the number reported by all other jurisdictions in the state for the three most recent available calendar years. **Note: BJA will base its awards for the fiscal year 2000 on the UCR Part I violent crime averages using 1995, 1996, and 1997 data**. More information about the LLEBG Program is available at the BJA Internet site at **http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA**.

Many major grant programs administered through the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) authorize equipment purchases, generally including hardware and software. Such programs include the Byrne Formula Grant Program, the Byrne Discretionary Grant Program, the National Criminal History Improvement Program, and the State Identification Systems Grant Program. The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Technology Program also provides funding for the implementation of information and records management systems.

**Note:** $10 million for NIBRS grants has been designated from this fiscal year's Crime Identification Technology Act. The funding will be competitively awarded to 1) states that do not have a state UCR Program that want to establish a statewide Program that is NIBRS compatible and 2) state UCR Programs that apply on behalf of local law enforcement agencies that will implement NIBRS. The grants require a ten percent match of state/local funding.

For information about the NIBRS grants or other funding through OJP or one of its five bureaus, visit the OJP Internet site at **http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov** (click on "Publications" and then "Guidelines, Solicitations, and Application Kits"). The BJA Clearinghouse provides additional information regarding funding opportunities on the Internet at **http://www.ncjrs.org** (click on "Law Enforcement," "Topics," then "Justice Grants"). To learn more about funding through COPS, visit the Internet site at **http://www.usdoj.gov/cops** (click on "Grants, Programs & Activities").

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**Number of NIBRS Agencies, by Year**

| Year | Agencies |
|------|----------|
| 1991 | 666 |
| 1992 | 991 |
| 1993 | 1729 |
| 1994 | 1698 |
| 1995 | 1384 |
| 1996 | 1615 |
| 1997 | 1878 |
| 1998 | 2897 |

NIBRS DATA

The number of NIBRS agencies has slowly risen since 1991. The downward movement during the 1993-1995 period was the result of Alabama and Illinois conversion problems at the state levels. Neither of these states is currently NIBRS certified.

**NIBRS Overview** - Introduces Program history - goals and objectives of an enhanced system
- Includes information promoting the benefits of NIBRS
- Compares advantages of NIBRS vs Summary reporting
- Introduces reports, data elements, and data values
- Emphasizes status and progression of NIBRS throughout the country
- Introduces NIBRS certification

Recommended for local, state, and federal UCR Program personnel (i.e., administrators, training instructors, report analysts, programmers, etc.) who are responsible for the collection of statistics for the UCR Program.

**NIBRS Introduction** - Emphasis on Classification
- Defines fundamental NIBRS terminology
  Definitions of Offenses
    Crimes Against Property
    Crimes Against Persons
    Crimes Against Society
- Exercises include:
    Classifying scenarios
    Identifying multiple-offense/"lesser included offenses" situations
    Recognizing an incident and acting in concert situations
    Distinguishing separation of time and place

Recommended for local, state, and federal UCR Program personnel (i.e., administrators, training instructors, report analysts, coders, data entry clerks, police officers, etc.) who are responsible for collecting and recording NIBRS crime data for submission to the FBI.

**1999 NIBRS Training**
783 participants representing 406 agencies

**NIBRS Property Segment** - Emphasis on Property Type and Value
- Examines:
    Type Property Loss/Etc. (Data Element 14)
    Property Description (Data Element 15)
    Value of Property (Data Element 16)
    Date of Recovery (Data Element 17)
    Number of Stolen Motor Vehicles (Data Element 18)
    Number of Recovered Motor Vehicles (Data Element 19)
    Suspected Drug Type (Data Element 20)
    Estimated Drug Quantity (Data Element 21)
    Type Drug Measurement (Data Element 22)
- Applications reenforced utilizing scenarios
- References associated with error messages

Recommended for local, state, and federal UCR Program personnel (i.e., administrators, training instructors, report analysts, coders, data entry clerks, police officers, etc.) who are responsible for collecting and recording NIBRS crime data for submission to the FBI.

**NIBRS Train-the-Trainer** - Emphasis on adult education techniques applicable to NIBRS
- Sharing training information
- Discussing practical ideas to enhance existing training
- Assisting with customized techniques for teaching adults

Recommended for local, state, and federal UCR Program personnel (i.e., records management system administrators, training instructors, state Program managers, etc.) who are responsible for training for the collection and recording of NIBRS crime data.

The Education/Training Services Unit (ETSU) will assist your state training instructors in the implementation of NIBRS training. Any training provided by ETSU is free of charge. For more information contact: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division, ATTN: Education/Training Services Unit, Module E-3, 1000 Custer Hollow Road, Clarksburg, WV 26306; (304) 625-2821 or 1-888-UCR-NIBR. Hours of business: 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. ET, Monday - Friday.

# The Evolution of a State Program

BY JACKIE VANDERCOOK
TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

The third annual Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS) Conference held in Gatlinburg drew 435 law enforcement personnel in April 1999. The magnitude of that accomplishment can only be appreciated by those who realize that the state of Tennessee had no centralized state Program for the collection and dissemination of crime statistics as recently as 1995. Despite action by the state legislature in 1980 establishing the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) as the state's central crime statistics collection agency, lack of funding rendered the legislation moot. For several years, the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program mailed paper data collection forms each month to the state's 420 local agencies and typically received completed reports from about 100 of them.

Tennessee's collection practices have progressed so rapidly over the past few years that TBI was able to meet the FBI's stringent requirements for UCR state Program status in 1999. Moreover, the state is now in compliance with the 1980 legislation for the first time in nearly 20 years.

Change began in 1992 with the arrival of Mr. Larry Wallace as the new director of the TBI. Following an assessment of the crime reporting situation, Director Wallace concluded that crime in Tennessee was not being reported accurately, if it was reported at all. One result of this deficiency was the loss of many federal dollars that could have helped to support state and local law enforcement agencies.

The new director's first task was to convince the Tennessee General Assembly and the state's administration of the critical need for accurate state-wide crime statistics and the necessity of funding the collection program. Once he had gained the support of Governor Don Sundquist and the state's legislators, Director Wallace worked with TBI to determine the best collection procedures. TBI decided that the state should go immediately to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). TBI hired additional employees to form an implementation staff and the state Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) was expanded to include the UCR Project. From a TBI canvass for

volunteers, a group of local law enforcement representatives was formed to discuss additional fields to be included beyond the mandated NIBRS elements, thus creating the basis for TIBRS. The group decided to incorporate additional data elements needed by the state within the NIBRS software in order to streamline the collection process for local agencies.

Once a course of action had been set, the most significant remaining obstacle was procurement of funding. That hurdle was cleared in July 1995 when TBI was awarded an Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program grant under the Criminal Justice Records Improvement Program to begin the implementation of NIBRS. Including the state's 25-percent matching funds, $645,000 was allotted in 1995. The grant funding provided for the initial program development and the purchase of computers for local law enforcement agencies based upon identified need. An additional $396,000, including the state's 25-percent matching funds, was awarded for each of the next 3 years.

The next task facing TBI was training employees at the individual agencies in proper data collection practices and use of the software that had been developed in-house by TBI programmers. TBI began an extensive training program in 1996, and by July of that year, approximately 100 law enforcement agencies were reporting monthly. Employees of the SAC produced operating manuals for staff in reporting agencies, and the FBI and state staff produced a guide to convert Tennessee state statute offenses to NIBRS codes.

Participation in the Program has continued to increase since the first TIBRS Conference in 1997 when approximately 220 persons attended. At the conference, a user group was formed to act as a support group and to establish a forum in which agency staff could meet to discuss common problems and successes and to exchange information. Topics of discussion at TIBRS conferences include Internet security, common audit findings, implementation by local agencies, and grant application writing. Staff from the FBI have partici-

pated in all three of the TIBRS conferences.

In 1998, TBI initiated a State Audit Program, in which TBI's Crime Statistics Unit reviews an agency's data collection practices biennially. In addition, TBI staff periodically check the reported data for reasonableness. The FBI certified the TIBRS program as NIBRS compliant in July 1998. In March 1999, TBI implemented a formal certification guideline policy establishing a training requirement of 16 hours for at least one person at an agency annually. Currently, 389 law enforcement agencies are submitting statistics monthly, and 342 of those have met certification requirements.

As the Program continues to develop, TBI will provide more support for local agencies, such as the current development of a "Train the Trainer" concept for larger agencies. The TBI Web page will eventually enable each agency with Internet access to download its own reports. In the future, agencies will have access to crime totals, precalculated statistical crime rates by city or local area, reports by offense type, arrest information, and drug incident data.

The federal grant funding for TIBRS concluded in June 1999; however, the state legislature has provided the funding for the Program's continued growth and development. TIBRS emergence as the solid foundation of a strong central state Program in a state with a tradition of piecemeal statistical collection proves the power of commitment. The partnership between Tennessee's local law enforcement agencies, their state offices, and the federal government has strengthened the criminal justice system at every level.

**Jackie Vandercook**

Jackie Vandercook started her criminal justice career 14 years ago and came to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation 8 years ago.

In Louisiana . . .

# Personal Networking Advances NIBRS

By Rachel Christ
Louisiana Uniform Crime Reporting

When I began working for the new Louisiana Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program in 1990, I had no inkling of the enormous challenge that lay before me. Due to a loss of funding, Louisiana had been without a formal state UCR Program since 1980. In 1988, law enforcement officials from the state had attended the Orange Beach, Alabama, Conference on the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), and they had returned home with a determination to rebuild the state's crime reporting program from the ground up. The state submitted a grant to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), and by the end of 1990, funding was in place. The following year, the Louisiana Sheriffs' Association and the Commission on Law Enforcement entered into a joint project to rebuild the UCR state Program. My task was to reinstate centralized reporting for not one but two programs—a Summary UCR Program and a Louisiana Incident-Based Reporting System (LIBRS).

There were no guidelines or procedures in place to provide direction for establishing a state UCR Program, and my overriding question at that time was, "Where do I begin?" Since the language in the BJS grant specifically provided support for a four-person field staff, my first step was to interview candidates to fill those positions. Very quickly, the newly hired field staff and I learned the importance of weekly planning meetings to discuss issues and set goals and objectives. One of our first decisions was to collect Summary UCR data on the traditional forms and to focus our automation efforts on LIBRS development.

These first steps got us, literally, "on the road" to LIBRS implementation. We felt it was important to have field staff visit our sheriffs' offices and police departments to explain LIBRS and convince their personnel of its importance. This wasn't always an easy task. Some days, our field staff would come in from visits exhausted

and discouraged. Personnel in the agencies were often quite skeptical about NIBRS, and it seemed unlikely that the agencies we visited would embrace incident-based reporting (IBR). But as we gained experience, we learned that personal contacts were invaluable. The questions and comments that were generated in the field helped us to do our jobs better when we visited other agencies. We began to anticipate questions and were better prepared to answer them.

Questions regarding the conversion from Summary UCR to IBR were, and still are, those most frequently asked of our field staff. To agency concerns that conversion to IBR would make crime rates look higher, we responded that the state Program would design a system that would produce both Summary and NIBRS data—converting NIBRS data to Summary data. Furthermore, system checks would assure both the agency and the state Program of proper conversion; i.e., the numbers generated would be valid and reliable whether produced as Summary or NIBRS statistics.

## State Designed Software

By late 1994, the state-designed software was available to any local agency wanting to automate its records but lacking the staff or funds to do so. Over 75 agencies are currently using the software, which not only allows automated management of the department's functions, but also provides the capability of becoming LIBRS compliant. Agencies that are LIBRS compliant are also NIBRS compliant. We built the necessary structure at the state level to convert LIBRS data to NIBRS data for our state submission to the FBI.

The state Program also created tools for our field staff, enabling them to provide agencies with sound advice regarding system enhancements. One tool is a checklist for quick and easy assessment of local systems, which also contains a recap of additions or changes necessary for

LIBRS compliance. Another is a list of sample goals and objectives intended to furnish agencies with an organized, methodical approach to LIBRS implementation, one that can be followed even in the event of personnel turnover. The state Program suggests that each agency have a LIBRS coordinator or liaison and a backup, so that if turnover occurs, there are no setbacks to the agency's compliance efforts.

Even before formal NIBRS training was available from the FBI, our state Program staff used NIBRS documentation as a reference and bravely ventured into designing our own training program. In addition to holding seminars in key areas of the state several times a year, our field representatives travel across the state for individual technical assistance sessions. When an agency indicates readiness to begin implementation, we initiate a visit to review their system to make sure that all necessary LIBRS data elements and codes are in place— an effort which saves time by resulting in a more accurate test tape. The field staff are also available for follow-up assistance.

## Statewide Training Program

Very early in our rebuilding efforts, the new state Program recruited a 30-member LIBRS working group comprised of sheriffs, chiefs, technical staff, dispatchers, officers, records personnel, and supervisors through which we began to create an environment conducive to effective collaboration. Brainstorming flowed, networking materialized, goals evolved, target dates emerged, and things began to happen. Still in existence, this group serves as a steering committee that advises the state Program primarily on issues regarding technology.

Initially, we were fortunate because several leading agencies were in the early stages of automating or upgrading their existing systems, so fitting LIBRS into their projects required only the addition of a few

data elements or codes. Their sheriffs and chiefs had already made internal decisions regarding the importance of an automated system, so convincing these agencies to become LIBRS test agencies was not difficult. Since then, Louisiana has made much progress in the process of testing NIBRS with the FBI. The last few NIBRS submission tapes tested 96-percent error free. Our target is to be certified within the next few months.

LIBRS implementation started with a small network of people. The network grew stronger as time went on. Slowly, we began to develop a base of knowledge and share it. Through constant networking, cooperation between local agencies and the state Program gradually developed. Now, we receive requests daily from local agencies wanting to know more about implementing an IBR system. In our journey toward NIBRS certification, we, together with the agencies, have discovered the importance of being open-minded and flexible and sharing lessons learned along the way. We anticipate a great future for IBR in Louisiana.

**Rachel Christ**

Ms. Christ has been working with the Louisiana Uniform Crime Reporting Program for over 9 years. She was a training manager and a computer system liaison in private industry before joining the Program.

# Photo Finish

Digital technology revolutionizes fingerprint identification.

FBI Identification Division personnel searching rows of fingerprint records files at the National Armory during WWII.

FBI employees once covered many miles "on foot" searching files for fingerprint records. Today, the information is available with the click of a computer mouse.

The records shown in the National Armory (above) have been condensed to the few cabinets pictured here.

# A Final Word

## 1999—A Banner Year for the CJIS Division

In September 1999, over 150 Identification Division retirees joined an equal number of current and former employees at the CJIS Division complex to celebrate the Division's 75th Anniversary. Many of the guests were surprised at the size and scope of the various operations of the FBI's Division I, now renamed the Criminal Justice Information Services Division. The modern facilities are, as one visitor remarked, a far cry from the old days at the Washington, D.C., Armory, which housed the Bureau's Fingerprint Files during WWII. Impressive as they found the complex, the retired fingerprint examiners, without exception, found the new Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS) to be nothing less than amazing. (See photos at left.)

When IAFIS came on-line on July 28, 1999, it spelled the end of an era in the FBI's fingerprint identification process. While many automated fingerprint identification techniques had been implemented during the past two decades, the fingerprint identification process was still a labor intensive paper-based system requiring fingerprint examiners to individually classify each fingerprint card and to retrieve master prints from hundreds of cabinets standing adjacent in long rows. Generally, under this system criminal prints could be processed within 3-4 weeks. With IAFIS, the fingerprint identification process is completely electronic. For example, a Boston police officer recently arrested a man for drinking alcoholic beverages on a public street. The man presented phony identification to the officer, but the Boston police sent the man's fingerprints electronically to IAFIS. Thirty-four minutes later the System responded with the subject's real name, his lengthy criminal history, and the fact that he was wanted in Alabama on an attempted murder charge. The suspect was then extradited to Alabama to face the charge. This incident not only demonstrates the value of speedy fingerprint identification through the national System, but also the potential of IAFIS to support cooperative law enforcement efforts between states and, ultimately perhaps, between nations.

It may be that the successful implementation of IAFIS was the crowning achievement of the Division's 75th anniversary year, but perhaps not. There is another contender for that nomination. The FBI also completed a massive overhaul of the National Crime Information Center (NCIC)—the Nation's computerized index of criminal justice information that has been a mainstay of law enforcement for over 30 years. The NCIC upgrade also came on-line in July 1999. NCIC 2000 provides law enforcement with numerous improvements in the System's capabilities including the ability to link information, process images, and access new databases.

In June of 1998, the CJIS Division established an Office of International Development to coordinate international initiatives. This office manages the NCIC International Vehicle File Project, which had successfully established access to NCIC for 27 countries by the end of 1999. Participating countries access the NCIC Vehicle, Boat, and License Plate Files through the INTERPOL telecommunications network.

Data generated by this project will be analyzed to distinguish vehicle theft routes and patterns and generate investigative leads to assist in the identification of organized criminal groups engaged in international vehicle theft. More importantly, the International Vehicle File Project may be the first step in the development of a global network for the exchange of crime information.

Also during that blue-ribbon year, the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program completed the design phase of a 3-4 year project to automate the Nation's crime data. The project will improve services to the Program's law enforcement data contributors by automating many data processing functions and developing the capability for in-depth crime analysis especially with National Incident-Based Reporting System data. The public will also benefit since UCR data will be released earlier, and UCR data sets and predefined tables will be made available via the Internet.

The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which went into operation on November 30, 1998, completed over 10 million background checks through December 31, 1999, to determine consumers' eligibility to purchase firearms. Approximately 1.8 percent of all inquiries through the federal system resulted in denials. A somewhat unexpected benefit of the background checks has been the identification of approximately 2,500 individuals attempting to purchase a firearm who were identified through the System as fugitives from justice. In such cases, not only is the firearm purchase denied, but the FBI immediately reports the address of the firearms dealer where the fugitive attempted the purchase to appropriate law enforcement authorities. In many cases, this information has resulted in the apprehension of a wanted person.

So many technological advances have produced additional risks requiring more stringent security precautions. Moreover, as law enforcement agencies use more efficient communication mechanisms such as the Internet to transport criminal justice information, there is an increasing need for maximizing computer security. During 1999, the CJIS Division appointed an Information Security Officer (ISO) and staff to coordinate information security efforts at all the CJIS interface agencies. The CJIS ISO will administer the CJIS Security Policy and provide support for the interface agencies.

In its 75-year history, the FBI's Division I can certainly point to many red-letter days and singular events. Nonetheless, 1999 must rank in our history as a year of extraordinary achievement. I want to thank everyone, including the many fine contract employees who worked as part of the team, for their dedication and hard work. These new information systems will serve all of us well, and I am confident that their shared use and management will continue to strengthen the partnership between local, state, federal, and international law enforcement.

David R. Loesch

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Topics for articles you would like to see in future issues of ***CJIS:***

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