

BATS Reporting by U.S. Bomb Squads

by ATF Special Agent Donald G. Robinson,
Chief, U.S. Bomb Data Center

Many of The Detonator's readers have probably been following the recent back and forth on the topic of explosives incident reporting in the Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS). At times, it has seemed that the issue would never get settled. But with some very recent events, it would appear that any perceived obstacles to incident reporting should now be removed.

To briefly summarize, during their June 2008 meeting, the National Bomb Squad Commanders Advisory Board (NBSCAB) voted to require incident reporting as a condition of a bomb squad's accreditation. However, in their October meeting at the Bomb Squad Commanders Conference in Anniston, AL, the Board was convinced to rescind their previous vote based on some concerns about the ability to mandate reporting. When speaking with a few Board members in Anniston days after this second vote, I heard a familiar theme: "We don't want to get involved in issues between the federal agencies, you guys need to work things out." Although we may have disagreed on whether incident reporting should be considered an issue between "the feds" their concerns were taken to heart.

Beginning in November, discussions were held on ways to come together on the issue of incident reporting, and not based solely on the fact that a centralized incident database was established by statute and mandated by the Attorney General. It needed to be resolved because the entire law enforcement community must have reliable and accurate information available to it concerning bombings and other explosives-related incidents. NBSCAB has recognized the need for a user-friendly searchable database containing explosives/IED incident data. This data can be used for a variety of purposes, to include justification of additional resources, uniform tracking of response and training activities, sharing unique render-safe methods, and linking crime scenes and suspects to each other. During this time, ATF and FBI have discussed how best to accomplish the wishes of NBSCAB. As mentioned in every BATS presentation given, until we all get our act together on incident reporting, none of us can say with any certainty how many incidents actually occur annually in this country.

In early December, ATF and the FBI took steps to do just that. ATF Assistant Director William Hoover and FBI Executive Assistant Director Steven Tidwell met and agreed that both agencies would fully support NBSCAB efforts to encourage incident reporting by the Nation's bomb squads. A letter addressed to NBSCAB was prepared and signed by EAD Tidwell and AD Hoover. In addition to expressing their agencies' support for NBSCAB efforts on incident reporting, Hoover and Tidwell also stated that both ATF and FBI recognized and endorsed BATS as the sole explosives incident database, and both agencies endorsed its use to document and re-

port explosives-related incidents in this country.

Accurate explosives incident reporting is important to ALL of us. The timely documentation of explosives-related incidents in a comprehensive database, accessible by bomb technicians and investigators on a national level, is first and foremost, a matter of officer safety. Intelligence on devices and incidents is just as crucial to Bomb Technician safety as any other safety requirements. That intelligence comes from comprehensive incident reporting. We can take our lead in this area from the military EOD community, which has always based their reporting mandates on Force Protection. When a bomb technician encounters a device, manufactured, transported and/or delivered by an unknown assailant(s), he/she typically feels compelled to share the necessary information with other bomb technicians who could possibly face a similar device involving the same assailant(s). The most efficient method of accomplishing this information sharing activity on a large scale is by entering the data into a single system to which we all have access.

A centralized database, accessible to all agencies with a need to have access to the information, is critical to all of our jobs. BATS is the link to the wealth of incident information maintained by the U.S. Bomb Data Center, and all of us have access to it. Let's all make use of this resource to make our collective work more productive. For information on obtaining access to BATS, please contact the USBDC at (800) 461-8841 or send an email to USBDC@atf.gov.



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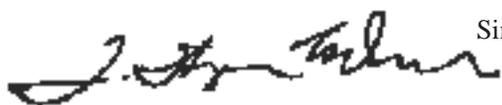
Jeffrey Fuller, Chair
James Hansen, Deputy Chair
National Bomb Squad Commanders Advisory Board

Dear Messrs. Fuller and Hansen,

On behalf of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), we join together to send this letter of support for your recent efforts on the issue of explosive incident reporting by bomb technicians and bomb squads across the country. In our current positions, we serve as the Executive Assistant Director of the FBI and the Assistant Director of Field Operations for ATF, and we have been designated by our respective Directors as agency representatives in our recent discussions on Homeland Security Presidential Directive 19 (HSPD-19), and the July 2008 Memorandum of Understanding on ATF/FBI Protocols for Response to Explosives-related Incidents.

As such, we are authorized to speak for our Directors on matters related to these two areas, and we speak for our agencies in jointly endorsing the use of the Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS) to document and report explosives-related incidents in this country. BATS is the sole explosives incident database recognized by the Department of Justice, and is recognized and endorsed as such by FBI and ATF. The official position of our respective agencies will also be to support all efforts by your Board regarding the reporting of explosives-related incidents in BATS by the bomb squads and bomb technicians that you represent.

Please accept this letter as our agencies' joint support for NBSCAB efforts in this area. We trust that this will clear up any confusion caused by previous statements or information to the contrary.



Sincerely,

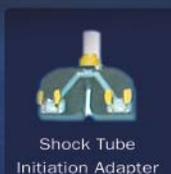
Steven Tidwell
Executive Assistant Director, FBI



William Hoover
Assistant Director, Field Operations, ATF

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