

Securing the Cities by Fortifying the Suburbs

by Stuart Cameron

Modern law enforcement is a complex business. The many requirements associated with traditional public safety including training, staffing, budgeting, and liability leave little room for additional responsibilities. How then can police agencies undertake the recently added responsibility of homeland security and counter-terrorism? Essentially they must proceed one step at a time by addressing threats, starting with the most likely and continuing from there. No agency can ever be fully prepared, but every agency can be better prepared. By effectively securing their hometowns local agencies can help to secure the homeland.

The Suffolk County Police Department is the eighteenth largest police department in the United States with approximately 2,700 sworn members. It serves the nearly 1.5 million citizens of Suffolk County. Suffolk County is located on Long Island in New York State and is approximately 20 miles east of Queens County, New York City.

The Suffolk County Police Department has a small dedicated full time homeland security staff led by a deputy chief. Many of the department's homeland security programs are a global responsibility shared by all members of the department. This is accomplished by involving all department members and providing widespread awareness training to most, operations training to many and specialized technician training to a select few.

After September 11th, the department focused on the most likely threats facing the region, namely a terrorist attack utilizing energetic materials. Explosives are the most common means of attack used by terrorists worldwide and they have been used repeatedly within the United States and abroad with devastating results. Efforts were undertaken to enhance both the preventive and response strategies for dealing with explosives by training personnel and improv-

ing the capabilities of the department's bomb squad, which is the second largest in New York State. A concerted effort was undertaken to provide awareness training to the department's patrol force. Department members who were certified to deliver two courses from New Mexico Tech; Prevention & Response to Suicide Bombing Incidents, and Incident Response to Terrorist Bombings led the training.



In January 2005 the Suffolk County Police Department began a preventive radiological - nuclear detection program. The timing of this effort was not random or capricious, but logical, deliberate and progressive. Threats were addressed from most to least likely. The philosophy guiding all of the department's homeland security strategies also took into account a regional approach. It was recognized that Suffolk County may not be a primary target for a terrorist attack, but a more likely scenario

involved potential terrorists planning or launching an attack from Suffolk County, due to its proximity to New York City. In fact the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center in 1993 conducted some of their preoperational training within Suffolk and the September 11th attackers also spent some time in the county just prior to attacking New York City. Many of the recent terrorist attacks worldwide, including the July 2005 attack on the London subway system, had been plotted from the suburbs outside of major urban areas.

A comprehensive homeland security program cannot overlook any threat. It has been widely reported that Al Qaeda's intent to attack the United States utilizing a Weapon of Mass Destruction has not diminished with the passing of time. In fact, a recently released bipartisan report stated that it was likely that the United States would suffer an attack employing a biological or nuclear weapon within the next five years.

While less likely than an attack utilizing explosives, an at-



tack utilizing radiological or nuclear materials would be devastating. Continued and unrelenting efforts to obtain this type of weapon by our adversaries might eventually allow them to attempt this type of attack. As a result, the threat of a radiological dispersal device, commonly known as a dirty bomb, or an improvised nuclear device had to be addressed.

The Suffolk County Police Department's Emergency Service Section serves as the department's SWAT team, bomb squad, and Hazardous Materials response unit, among numerous other responsibilities. Members of the Emergency Service Section had been trained to respond to incidents involving radiation for some time, but there was little training or equipment to detect, interdict and potentially prevent an attack utilizing radioactive materials. Additionally, there was minimal knowledge and very little understanding about the effects of radiation within the department outside the Emergency Service Section. Although many urban departments had established preventive radiological programs, these programs were lacking in most suburban departments. A comprehensive proactive strategy to prevent the illicit use of radiological materials within Suffolk County had to be built from the ground up.

Patrol officers from departments across the county were invited to participate in this effort to thoroughly blanket the county with radiation detectors and leave no safe haven for terrorist to build weapons with radiological components. Establishing this strategy was a lengthy and technical effort, with few existing programs to provide guidance or best practices.

The Suffolk County preventive radiological - nuclear detection program made comprehensive radiological training mandatory right from the start. No officer would be provided with equipment that they hadn't been thoroughly trained to operate. Additionally efforts were made to minimize the inconvenience and disruption that the program might cause to the citizens of Suffolk County because there were many legitimate uses of radiological materials. Agencies that had deployed detection equipment quickly found that the most

common radiological detection they encountered was from people who were briefly radioactive due to nuclear medicine treatments. The department's research had discovered that some departments had issued radiological detection equipment to their personnel with little or no training and at times this led to less than desirable results. In one case a man who had undergone a nuclear medicine treatment had been strip searched due to a lack of training and understanding about sources of radioactive materials. Ultimately Suffolk County successfully trained personnel and deployed hundreds of pager sized personal radiation detectors across the entire county. The search for illicit radiological materials could now be undertaken twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week.

As Suffolk County worked to develop their program many similar efforts were underway. The New York City Police Department continued to develop their extensive counterterrorism strategies throughout the city, including a well developed program to detect and interdict radiological materials within the city. New York and New Jersey were also working on state-wide programs to protect their states from the illicit use of radiological materials, by training and equipping members of their state police and other agencies. To a large extent, these programs developed independently of each other, with only cursory collaboration.

In April of 2005, National Security



Presidential Directive 43 / Homeland Security Presidential Directive 14 established a new national office staffed by personnel from several federal, state and local agencies. The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, DNDO, was given the responsibility to develop the global nuclear detection architecture and support a domestic detection system capable of preventing a radiological or nuclear attack from occurring within the United States. DNDO recognized, however, that any single strategy could not be one hundred percent effective, so multiple initiatives would have to be developed.

DNDO worked to secure potentially hostile source materials overseas, to increase the detection and interdiction capabilities at our border crossings & cargo ports and, as a final line of defense, increase the capabilities to detect & interdict radiological materials within the United States by working with state and local agencies.

In an effort to engage local law enforcement in the Preventive Radiological Nuclear Detection (PRND) mission, DNDO worked to develop a curriculum to educate and prepare state and local personnel for this relatively new mission. These new courses would supplement the existing curriculum taught by the Counter-Terrorism Operational Support (CTOS) staff. CTOS has been educating first

responders to safely respond to incidents involving radioactive materials for many years. The Personal Radiation Detector (PRD) course was the first new PRND course to be developed. Its objective is to train officers to properly operate their chosen model of PRD and how to successfully resolve detection events. The PRD course was developed with support from the Suffolk County Police Department and approved for a national roll out in 2006. During this process, CTOS staff was also a critical element in the development of Suffolk County's radiation interdiction program and CTOS staff members willingly lent their expertise to support and develop this effort.

The next PRND course to be developed and approved was the Detector Equipped Law Enforcement (DELE) course. This course was designed to train law enforcement personnel to utilize Radio-Isotope Identification Devices (RIID) to identify radioactive isotopes. Swift and accurate identification of radioactive isotopes is a critical aspect of the strategy, so threats posed by unidentified radioactive materials can be properly evaluated and resolved. The final and most advanced PRND course under development by DNDO is the Advanced PRND Operations Course, APOC. This course will train law enforcement personnel to operate equipment that was previously uti-

lized primarily by Federal or Regional response assets. This training will prepare those who attend it to plan and execute increasingly sophisticated operations, specifically for special event screening.

DNDO recognized the need to enhance the capability to detect potentially hostile radioactive materials within the borders of the United States. The Southeast Transportation Corridor Pilot program and Securing the Cities are two pilot programs to address this concern.

Securing the Cities or STC is a pilot initiative to increase radiation detection and response capabilities around the Nation's highest risk urban areas. The pilot area chosen for STC was the region surrounding New York City. The main idea behind STC is to build radiation detection and interdiction capabilities in law enforcement agencies around high threat major cities.

Pushing this detection capacity outward also potentially pushes back the timeline, as many recent attacks on major cities have been planned from the suburbs. It is theorized that a detection event in the suburbs could likely occur at an early stage in the planning process, perhaps even before the radiological materials are combined with other components to form a weapon. This is especially important considering the philosophy of suicide terrorism. Terrorists bent upon attacking with a radiological device would be likely to trigger

the device when compromised by law enforcement, even if it hadn't been delivered to the primary target location and would result in their deaths. It is highly unlikely that they would peacefully surrender. Detection of a radiological dispersal device when it is already within a targeted city does not leave many successful tactical options open to law enforcement.

Having detection capabilities in communities surrounding major high threat cities provides early warning while the threat is still a distance away and there's still time to safely interdict it and prevent an attack, rather than mitigating it and suffering the consequences. STC provides the regional partner agencies with a way to both protect their communities, and to discover those who might exploit their communities as the launching ground for another attack against New York City. STC allows New York City to leverage the surrounding law enforcement agencies as a force multiplier in their counter-terrorism efforts, much like they've done to collect intelligence in the United States and abroad.

In 2006 the Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, approached New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg about participating in the first pilot of the STC initiative. The



NYPD felt that participating in this program would enhance the city's capability to prevent a radiological or nuclear attack from occurring within the city, and in fact the department committed over three million dollars of existing grant money to fund the equipment that was purchased for STC in 2007. The New York City Police Department also volunteered to facilitate and expedite the roll out of the program by purchasing the STC equipment and distributing it to the regional partner agencies. The vast size of the NYPD and its robust purchasing capability allowed it to facilitate this acquisition and distribution process. Much of the equipment that was received by NYPD was distributed to the regional partners and in many cases field deployed within just a matter of weeks. This was by no means an easy task and it highlights the NYPD's strong commitment to this program and homeland security in general.

The first equipment purchased through STC was configured into eighteen identical caches. This worked well and provided a basis for each area in the region to build upon, while rapidly creating interoperable sets of equipment for the regional partners. Combined the eighteen caches contained hundreds of personal radiation detectors and dosimeters; numerous mobile detection systems and kits containing Radio-Isotope Identification Devices & radiation survey meters with Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Neutron probes. These caches would build the foundation for STC and strengthen the region's capabilities quickly and substantially. Prior to STC there was substantial variation of preventative detection capability throughout the region, some agencies had existing programs and others did not.



Several sub-committees were established to provide guidance and to develop the regional concept of operations, ConOps, for the STC program. In keeping with the DNDO's desire for this to be a regional program that was facilitated, but not dictated by the NYPD, several of the committee chairs were selected from among the regional partner agencies. Initially three sub-committees were established including, Con Ops, Training & Exercises, and Equipment. As work progressed the number of

sub-committees and working groups grew, as did the level of participation from the regional partner agencies.

Some thought that the STC initiative may fail because the necessary regional cooperation could not be built among the myriad of state, county and local agencies required to support this program. As it turned out nothing could be further from the truth. The first pilot of STC in the New York City region re-



quired the cooperation and unity of law enforcement agencies across three states including hundreds of departments. The initiative included some of the nation's largest departments along with some containing only a handful of personnel. As STC began to roll out through the region, cooperation and unity followed. A diverse group of law enforcement agencies came together in support of the program. Many of those involved in STC believe this almost spontaneous support and cooperation to be the best aspect of the program. The prevailing attitude was, what can we do to support this program? rather than, what will I gain from the program? This cooperation has transcended the STC program and led to other positive benefits, including greater regional planning and cooperative training.

Two letters were sent to Washington DC requesting that the 2008 fiscal year funding appropriations to support the STC initiative be approved. These two letters were both signed by nineteen agency heads from agencies spanning the three host states. Both letters were successful in preventing looming funding cuts and STC has been funded for 2008.

STC has not only provided the region with a common purpose, it has established standardized and uniform operational and reporting procedures, alarm settings, documentation requirements, equipment caches, training requirements, intelligence sharing, units of measure and a coordinated deployment strategy. This was done in an unprecedented multi-state effort. It is hoped that this level of coordination and cooperation will result in a web of radiological detection that is virtually impenetrable. Without a doubt it will result in a significant threat reduction in the participating region.

On August 10, 2007 an intelligence threat that Al Qaeda was planning to attack NYC with a radiological truck bomb resulted in an immediate, coordinated region-wide deployment of radiological detection equipment. This increased level of deployment continued until the threat could undergo further analysis and a determination could be made that it lacked credibility, however it demonstrated that STC works and that the regional partner agencies are fully committed to this initiative.

The Securing the Cities initiative has allowed agencies that didn't have a preventive radiological detection program to get up to speed much more rapidly than they could have done on their own. These agencies were able to learn from those that had existing programs and who willingly offered their guidance, experience and procedures. Even agencies that had fairly robust existing preventive radiation detection programs improved their programs within the collaborative environment of STC and with guidance from federal subject matter experts. It was quickly learned, without a doubt, that one unified region-wide program is far superior to several stand alone programs.

Having radiation detection equipment deployed throughout the region on a daily basis will certainly increase the odds of a cold interdiction of a hostile device containing radiation. Law enforcement personnel have been successful with cold interdictions (wherein no advanced intelligence had been distributed) of terrorist plots in the past. The program hopes to deter terrorists from adding radiation to an improvised explosive or other hostile device by making it a liability rather than an enhancement for those planning an attack.

Institutionalizing the preventive radiation / nuclear detection mission within the law enforcement community will take time. This wasn't part of the job description when most law enforcement personnel took their jobs. Many officers never thought that high school Chemistry classes would later play a role in their law enforcement careers. As equipment is deployed and utilized on a daily basis law enforcement personnel will refine their skills and hopefully come to see this mission as just another aspect of the 21st century law enforcement job. This program is being built from the ground up and will take time to develop, much like other transitions that law enforcement has gone through. Unfortunately this threat is not going away and is likely increasing. If credible intelligence was uncovered indicating that a radiological attack on an American city was imminent, how would this threat be effectively addressed without the involvement of local law enforcement? Obviously it couldn't. As our adversaries continue to work on acquiring radiological or nuclear weapons, American law enforcement agencies must continue to work on strategies to counter this threat. The longer our adversaries work to acquire these materials the greater the likelihood of their success. We do not have the luxury of waiting for the threat to increase substantially before definitive action is taken to prevent an attack.

Suffolk County has benefited tremendously from its participation in STC. The addition of state-of-the-art detection equipment and training has moved Suffolk's program along far more rapidly than it could have on its own. Working closely with other law enforcement agencies and federal subject matter experts has also helped refine Suffolk's existing program. Lessons learned from post 9-11 analysis show that interagency cooperation and coordination is the key to successful prevention, detection or response to future attacks. The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office's Securing the Cities Program unified many independent efforts and rapidly created capability where it didn't exist before, thereby establishing this vital interagency collaboration in the region surrounding New York City.

Suffolk County continues to work on enhancing homeland security preparedness. The county has recently been working with Louisiana State University to develop a new biological awareness course. Like many other federal homeland security courses, this will be a train-the-trainer and will allow Suffolk to continue to become better prepared to deal with its role of homeland and home town security.

1 Newsday Long Island Edition Vol. 69 No. 92, December 3, 2008

2 British Medical Journal 2006,333 (August 5), doi:10.1136/bmj.333.7562.1-a

3 National Security Presidential Directive 43 / Homeland Security Presidential Directive 14, Subject Domestic Nuclear Detection

4 The first pilot of STC includes law enforcement agencies from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Deputy Inspector Stuart Cameron is presently the Commanding Officer of the Suffolk County Police Department's Special Patrol Bureau which consists of the Emergency Service Section, Canine Section, Aviation Section, Crime Scene Section and Airport Operations Section. Deputy Inspector Cameron is a graduate of the 208th Session of the FBI National Academy. He has a Masters Degree from the State University at Albany. Deputy Inspector Cameron is the Co-Chair of the Concept of Operations Committee with the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office's Pilot Securing the Cities Program. He has worked with the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, the Counter-Terrorism Operations Support and Louisiana State University as a subject matter expert to develop and pilot several new homeland security courses that are now available to first responders nationwide. He is married and has three children.



*Suffolk County Police Department
2175 Smithtown Avenue,
Ronkonkoma, NY 11779*

(631) 854-5701 Camerstu@suffolkcountyny.gov