A new series of updates to Congress on RAND’s research on public safety and justice

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HOT TOPICS

RAND Research on Emergency Responders

The RAND Corporation has a wide portfolio of research examining the readiness of emergency responders and their organizational, training and equipment needs.

Gilmore Commission  RAND undertook a nationwide survey of emergency responders for the recent Gilmore Commission report to the Congress and the President. Most emergency response organizations want the Department of Homeland Security to improve coordination, information-sharing, and communication among all levels of government, which could help unify their efforts with federal programs. However, few organizations have applied for security clearances to access intelligence. Also, agencies receiving external resources were more likely to undertake preparedness activities than agencies not receiving such support. The report concluded that, without standardized measures of performance, it will be difficult to determine the level of preparedness of various response organizations.

Lessons Learned from Terrorist Attacks  RAND is also investigating the personal protective equipment, training, information, and other needs of emergency response personnel. Shortly after the September 2001 terrorist attacks, RAND and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health convened a conference of emergency workers. The conference highlighted areas where improvements can be made in emergency responders’ personal protective equipment, training and information.

Safety, Health Risks, and Personal Protection Needs

Subsequent RAND research analyzed the risks to which first responders are exposed to identify the personal protective technologies, training opportunities, and other interventions that offer the greatest reduction in risk of injury. Interviews with emergency responders revealed critical shortcomings in current protective technologies and procedures and widespread concern about the adequacy of protections against biological and chemical agents. Key areas where policy changes could improve safety and effectiveness for all emergency responders include more widespread adoption of digital communication systems, better guidance about potential risks, and assessment of protective equipment and performance.

Future Reports  Forthcoming RAND reports include an analysis of the pattern of injuries sustained by first responders within various disciplines, and a detailed analysis of the RAND nationwide survey of first responder emergency preparedness.

Project ALERT Helps High-Risk Teens

Critics have argued that school-based drug prevention efforts fail to help high-risk adolescents. But a new study has shown that the Project ALERT program, developed by RAND, curbs the use of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana among middle-school students—even high-risk youths who have already started smoking and drinking. The results are based on a study of Project ALERT in 55 South Dakota middle schools from 1997 to 1999. Nationwide, the program reaches more than one million adolescents. Compared with control students, Project ALERT students reduced their use of cigarettes, marijuana, and alcohol. The program was especially successful with the highest-risk early drinkers, reducing their likelihood of engaging in binge drinking or experiencing other problems from drinking. The program also helped prevent those who had experimented with cigarettes from making the transition to regular smoking. More generally, curbing alcohol and cigarette use among high-risk youth in middle school may help prevent later, more serious problems.

Welfare Reform and Youth Probation Services

The federal Welfare Reform Act of 1996 replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program with a new welfare system, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and gave states increased flexibility in use of TANF funds. California is using part of its TANF funds for a Comprehensive Youth Services Act (CYSA/TANF), which seeks to keep youth on probation from further crime and to help probation and at-risk youth develop skills to avoid dependence on public assistance. A recent RAND study evaluates the impact of funding provided by this act to county probation departments for juvenile probation services. Researchers found that most counties operated within the intent of the Act, and in many cases counties used funds to fill in funding gaps that had been left when other funding had been eliminated. Overall, counties used funding from the act to support programs in custody settings or to support other programs ranging from prevention and early intervention to supervision to custody.

For more information, go to RAND Washington External Affairs or contact us at wea@rand.org or 703.413.1100 x5431.

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