



# How Prepared Are State and Local Law Enforcement for Terrorism?

**A**fter the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created. It is aimed at unifying federal capabilities and protecting the country from future terrorist attacks.

Within DHS, the Office of State and Local Governments Cooperation and Preparedness (SLGCP) is charged with coordinating first-responder terrorism preparedness efforts and working with state and local first responders to improve terrorism preparedness in such areas as training, exercises, and equipment support. SLGCP is also responsible for directing terrorism-preparedness grant programs at the federal level for all emergency response providers and for measuring programmatic performance and improvements in domestic preparedness.

To meet this charge, DHS (and SLGCP) need to collect information on how first responders and other emergency responders are meeting the challenges of their new terrorism-related responsibilities. To help in this effort, the RAND Corporation, with support from the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, surveyed 209 local and all 50 state law enforcement agencies, achieving response rates of 81 and 78 percent, respectively.

The survey, conducted one year after 9/11 and just before DHS was formed, focuses on law enforcement's experience with terrorism, its efforts to counter the threat of terrorism and shore up vulnerabilities, its support needs, and its resourcing of preparedness activities. The survey also focused on the relationship among perceived risk, jurisdiction size, funding, and preparedness activities.

## Experience with Terrorism

Prior to 9/11, few local law enforcement agencies had experience with terrorist-related incidents; after 9/11, most state agencies and about half of local agencies were involved in responding to terrorist-related hoaxes or incidents (primarily anthrax-related). The response burden was relatively high, especially for local agencies in large counties (counties with a population of one million or more) and state agencies.

## Abstract

A national survey of state and local law enforcement agencies one year after 9/11 shows that agencies have bolstered their preparedness efforts, but substantial variation exists in the approach to preparedness and the preparedness needs of local agencies in small and large counties. The survey results provide an important baseline for the Department of Homeland Security as it continues to meet its mandate of helping first responders to improve their terrorist preparedness efforts in such areas as training, exercises, and equipment support.

ties with a population of one million or more) and state agencies.

Although most local agencies assessed the chance of a future terrorist attack occurring within the next five years in their jurisdictions as being "low," one out of five local agencies assessed it as being "somewhat likely." State law enforcement agencies and local agencies within large counties assessed the chance of such attacks as being "relatively high," and they were most concerned about chemical, biological, or conventional explosives attacks.

## Efforts to Counter the Terrorism Threat

In response to 9/11, local law enforcement agencies (particularly those within large counties) and state agencies undertook a number of steps: increasing the number of personnel engaged in emergency response planning; updating response plans for chemical, biological, or radiological attacks and, to a lesser extent, mutual aid agreements; and reallocating internal resources or increasing departmental spending to focus on terrorism preparedness.

The 9/11 attacks also served as a catalyst for increased assessment activities, especially at the local

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level. For example, prior to 9/11, only a quarter of local agencies within smaller counties had conducted a risk assessment; during the year after the attacks, nearly three-quarters had done so.

However, the survey results showed variation by size of county in law enforcement's approach to preparedness. For example, local agencies within large counties were more proactively engaged in planning and training activities than were local agencies within smaller counties.

## Support Needs

The types of support needed to strengthen response capabilities fell into two categories—training and equipment. For each category, two to three times more law enforcement agencies in large counties than in small counties expressed a need for support. Also, large-county agencies were similar to state agencies in the proportion of their departments that wanted more or better intelligence information about the terrorist threat, support to improve communications interoperability, training on how to conduct lessons learned from tabletop or field exercises, and training on the use of the incident-command system. In other areas—such as training on how to conduct operations in hazardous environments—local law enforcement agencies in large counties indicated an even greater need than did state agencies.

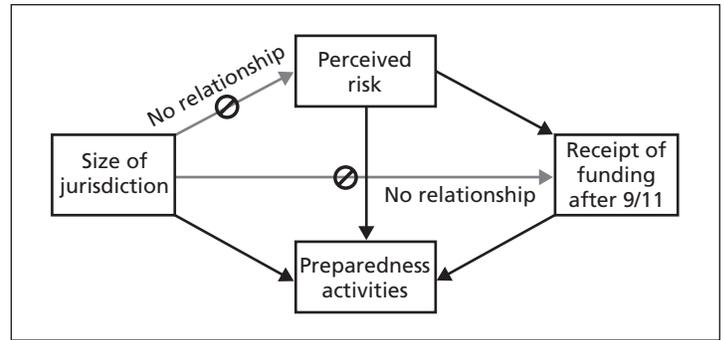
## Resourcing of Preparedness Activities

For many local law enforcement agencies, investing departmental resources in terrorism preparedness was a low priority compared with other agency needs. Still, after 9/11, about a quarter of local agencies (particularly those in large counties) increased agency spending or internally reallocated resources to focus on terrorism preparedness. But only about one-fifth received external funding to do this, raising concerns about what public safety trade-offs are being made at the local level to focus on terrorism preparedness.

For state agencies, investing in terrorism preparedness was a higher priority, with half increasing departmental resources and two-thirds internally reallocating resources. However, unlike local agencies, the majority of state agencies received external funding following 9/11, primarily from the federal government.

## Relationship Among Perception of Risk, Funding, and Preparedness

To better understand the relationship among the perceived level of risk of a future terrorist attack, the size of a jurisdiction, receipt of funding, and preparedness activities, RAND developed a measure of perceived risk using survey information on threat perceptions and physical vulnerabilities. The flow chart shows the results of the analysis.



Perceived risk is an important predictor of agencies taking steps to improve their level of preparedness. Specifically, law enforcement agencies that perceived the risk of future terrorist attacks in their jurisdictions to be higher are more likely to undertake steps to improve their preparedness. Although the size of a jurisdiction and the level of perceived risk were predictive of law enforcement's undertaking preparedness activities, level of risk was a better predictor of receipt of funding. The survey also found that perceived risk was not correlated with the size of a jurisdiction. That is, even agencies in smaller counties, if they assessed the risk to be higher for their jurisdiction, were proactive in improving their level of preparedness. That both perceived risk and size of jurisdiction were predictive of an agency's undertaking preparedness activities, but that the two factors were not strongly correlated with each other, suggests that agencies take both into account in improving their preparedness.

## Conclusions

One of the key findings from the survey is that law enforcement agencies vary substantially in their approach to preparedness and in their support needs. In addition, perceived risk is predictive of agencies taking steps to improve their preparedness, regardless of county size. This suggests that future programmatic support at the federal, state, and local levels will need to be tailored to account for these differences, and that any effort to model or develop objective measures of overall U.S. preparedness will also need to account for differences in risk levels.

Finally, given the timing of the survey—on the eve of the formation of DHS and prior to law enforcement agencies receiving substantial federal-preparedness funding—the survey results can provide important baseline information for DHS/SLGCP. Also, continuing to conduct the survey in the future would provide DHS/SLGCP and other federal departments with an opportunity to gauge the progress of their programs in improving domestic preparedness and in meeting programmatic goals for supporting state and local responders, and to gauge how much current federal-preparedness grant programs are making a difference and where there is room for improvement. ■

This research brief describes work conducted within the Homeland Security Program of RAND Infrastructure, Safety, and Environment, a unit of the RAND Corporation, and documented in *When Terrorism Hits Home: How Prepared Are State and Local Law Enforcement?* by Lois M. Davis, K. Jack Riley, Greg Ridgeway, Jennifer Pace, Sarah K. Cotton, Paul S. Steinberg, Kelly Dampousse, and Brent L. Smith, MG-104-MIPT, 2004, 180 pp., \$22, ISBN: 0-8330-3499-5, available at <http://www.rand.org/publications/MG/MG104/>. Also available from RAND Distribution Services (phone: 310-451-7002; toll free 877-584-8642; or email: [order@rand.org](mailto:order@rand.org)). The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.



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