

LAW and ORDER

U.S. Attorney LECC 25th Anniversary

by Kevin Gordon

The various Law Enforcement Coordinating Committees of the U.S. attorney offices across the country celebrate the 25th anniversary of the program in July 2006. In July 1981, because of the findings of Attorney General William French Smith's Task Force on Violent Crime, an order was issued to all U.S. attorneys requiring them to create the position of Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee (LECC).

The purpose of the LECC was to respond to the need for better communications between federal, state and local law enforcement. The LECC was to act as a liaison between these levels, improving communications, facilitating cooperative efforts and providing training opportunities.

The office of the attorney general of the United States was created in 1789, and over the years evolved into 94 distinct district courts across the country. Depending on the state, there may be one to four districts. Since 1870, the U.S. attorney general has led the Department of Justice, which has the distinction of being the world's largest law office, as well as the central agency for the enforcement of federal statutes. Current Attorney General Alberto Gonzales oversees a vast group of agencies including ATF, DEA, FBI, and the U.S. Marshals. The U.S. Marshals structure is set up using the same 94 districts.

The Law Enforcement Coordinator, in its role as link between the U.S. attorney general and state and local law enforcement, serves as the true liaison between these entities. There are differences from district to district that generally reflect the differences from region to region. Functions that are important to the local agencies in one part of the country often are not the same in other parts of the country.

It is the role of the LE coordinator to find what his exact role is based on the local needs and relationships. As an example, the coordinator of each district is the contact for local law enforcement to assist in the training and meeting needs of the Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council (ATAC) set up in each district after 9/11. How involved the LECC becomes with the ATAC may vary from district to district.

The LECC can assist agencies in locating the scores of brochures, training and information CDs, guides and assorted publications provided by various federal agencies. While some LECCs maintain a library of law enforcement related material, understand that the LECC might not have all the requested items on hand but he can get them.

According to Ron Shownes, LECC for the Southern District of Illinois, "The law enforcement coordinator will be able to reach out and locate the needed items much easier and quicker due to in place networking and relationships with all federal agencies."

Often, local law enforcement officials overlook the vast array of information available to them free on all topic areas such as school safety, seizing computer evidence, Arabic terms, and counterfeit detection. The list is endless.

Training is another big area of assistance. The LECC sponsors or co-sponsors low-cost training seminars for local and state law enforcement on a variety of topics, including but not limited to critical incident response, responding to suspicious mail packages, emergency response to terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and law enforcement officers flying armed.

Like many LECC's, Shownes has been involved in an impressive list of training provided to local law enforcement over the past few years.

"Both the State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training Program (SLATT) and Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS) are funded by the Department of Justice, and many of the LECC's use that relationship to bring in SLATT and RISS training into their Districts," Shownes said.

Shownes suggested that all interested chiefs or sheriffs should contact their LECC to determine what training is available and to request training they are interested in. SLATT focuses on preincident terrorism and criminal extremist awareness from both domestic and international perspective. No reason to pay for a private vendor to provide training when such excellent low-cost or free training is there for the asking.

Since 9/11, an increasingly important endeavor is intelligence and information exchange as demonstrated in various committees, task forces, and joint operations, including the Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council. The ATAC originally was named the Anti-Terrorism Task Force (ATTF) when formed in the third week of September 2001. Police chiefs and sheriffs are brought together with state and federal agencies to support anti-terrorism training programs, coordinate anti-terrorism initiatives, and facilitate terrorism information sharing.

Committees vary from district to district, but information is shared and problem solving is addressed on areas such as infrastructure concerns, electronic threats, agricultural issues, community preparedness, financial vulnerabilities, etc. Many law enforcement coordinators also assist in anti-gang programs, clandestine lab issues, and anti-drug and gun initiatives, and promote and facilitate the Department of Justice's equitable sharing of federally forfeited property. For more information, contact your LECC at your local U.S. attorney's office.

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