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Fusion Centers are Meeting Shifting Security Challenges

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Fusion Centers are Meeting Shifting Security Challenges

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Educating fusion center leaders remains critical to the success of state and local law enforcement and homeland security agencies combating terrorism and other emerging threats.

That was a point of consensus stemming from the sixth iteration of the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security's Fusion Center Leaders Program (FCLP) conducted June 5-8 in Monterey, Calif. Some 25 fusion center leaders along with federal counterparts attended the weeklong session aimed at enhancing the management capabilities across the national network of fusion centers and enable best practices in information sharing and leadership to be shared among the fusion center directors.



The dedication and professionalism of our fusion center leaders is most impressive. All are focused on the evolving missions of homeland security intelligence and each center's role in making viable contributions to the national fusion center network," said Robert Simeral of the CHDS Faculty. "The FCLP is a place where our leaders avail themselves of the chance to better understand that each of their centers is a distinct and valuable component of the network. In FCLP, fusion center leaders are enabled to take on the challenges and opportunities they have in common."

Almost a decade after state and local agencies began establishing fusion centers in an effort to combat crime and terrorism, the mission has morphed. While exchanging and analyzing information to combat terrorism remains a priority for most centers', they may vary in focus and emphasis depending on their location.

"They started out with a counter-terrorism focus," said Scott McAllister, deputy undersecretary, State and Local Programs Office, Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security. "They have morphed into address all-hazards and all-crimes as well."

Certainly terrorism remains a focus of fusion centers, and McAllister urged to avoid complacency about groups that target the United States, even as al-Qaida appears weakened. He noted the time lapse from the attempted 1993 World Trade Center bombing to the 9/11 attacks.

"We're facing an enemy that is constantly trying to identify our vulnerabilities in order to attack folks in the homeland," McAllister said.

Emerging threats such as violent extremism or cyber-security are also threats that fusion center intelligence gathering and analysis can help mitigate, McAllister added.

Justin Parker, analyst with the Iowa Department of Public Safety, said educating fusion center leaders is crucial to addressing a shifting threat landscape. His presentation focused on the role of and varied types of analysts charged with discerning patterns from mountains of data.

"A threat remains, but that threat is dramatically different," Parker said. "We need to be clear that the threat is different."

Mark Stainbrook of the San Diego Harbor Police agreed education was an important piece of maintaining best practices as new leaders assume roles in the enterprise. The FCLP enables veteran leaders to pass along lessons learned.

"NPS plays a great part in not only educating but providing an opportunity to network and share potential solutions," Stainbrook said. "NPS helps us codify that accumulated knowledge to educate that next generation of fusion center leaders."

His presentation centered on decentralized networks as well as continuity with state and locals, assisting agencies in threat domain analysis, sharing of plans and tradecraft and research on using a social media tool to improve continuity between agencies and individuals.

Captain Rick Salyers of the Phoenix Fire Department and Sgt. Bill Wickers of the Phoenix Police Department discussed information sharing requirements as well as addressing the important roles fusion liaison officers (FLOs) play in the fusion center enterprise.

As the priorities of fusion centers mature and expand, Wickers said the centers are here to stay and the need for educating future leaders remains.

"I think fusion centers are going to evolve," Wickers said. "They did start out with a terrorism focus, but the reality is it positively affects hazards and other crimes. It's an institutional mechanism that benefits all of public safety."

The first FCLP was conducted in June 2010 and CHDS has hosted two per year since that time. The FCLP is sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in cooperation with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Department of Justice (DOJ), and state and local partners through the Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Council (CICC) and National Fusion Center Association (NFCA).

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