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Tampa Taps Technology to Capitalize on Crime Reduction

Center for Homeland Defense and Security

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

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Tampa Taps Technology to Capitalize on Crime Reduction

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Tampa Assistant Police Chief John Bennett wanted to reinforce the city's nine years of crime reduction, and found the approach through technology and a plethora of research while a student at the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security.

The Tampa Police Department is amid a pilot project using a software application called Situational Awareness for Enforcer's Common Operating Picture, or S.A.F.E. C.O.P, which was developed in partnership with NC-4, a company based in El Segundo, Calif., that specializes in public safety technology. The application is a direct product of Bennett's CHDS experience.

Bennett researched the technology in his thesis, "Local Policing: Using real-time, Situational Awareness and Case Management Within a Technological Common Operating Picture to Combat All Crime; and Aid in the Deterrence, Disruption, and Detection of Terrorism – Project V2I2SION and S.A.F.E.-C.O.P"



SAFE COP is an application that provides real-time data and a common operating picture to officers in the field, eliminating the need for old school paper pushing and reliance on morning briefings. SAFE COP provides a virtual fusion center in the patrol car, according to its manufacturer.

"The important piece for me was that we had built myriad best practices in Tampa," Bennett said "We have been on nine-year journey. I felt best way to harness our best practices was to build technology around how we approach policing."

SAFE COP incorporates real-time data to expedite crime solving, which betters the opportunity to detect precursors of terrorism. The application allows patrolmen to map the location and blog about a crime incident, instantly making that information available to other police on duty. Types of crime by geography and time are immediately available, rather than waiting on an analyst to process the information days later.

It is like a doctor's chart," Bennett noted. "Like doctors, different officers work at different times. I need to know what the last doctor did when I pick up the chart. As we work on cases you can log updates. All the information is available all the time. It's not buried in a report."

Bennett credited Tampa Police Chief Jane Castor's vision in embracing public safety technology as a solution and for supporting education. Ohio State University Professor Brenda Dervin, whose research pioneered the "sense-making" approach to synthesizing and understanding information from disparate disciplines.

Additionally, CHDS was beneficial in facilitating his research on a topic important to his agency and to the whole of the homeland security enterprise. He was able to channel class projects into his work, including researching SAFE COP and conducting a mock threat assessment related to the Republican National Convention.

Aside from the expected topics related to terrorism and threats, the CHDS course also enabled what he called "sense-making" of complex, inter-related issues.

"That whole approach is trying to take big data and make sense of it," he observed. "When I dove into the sense-making process, it helped put academic parameters on my work. That is what law enforcement is. We want to make

sense out of data to solve crimes faster. The faster you solve them, the more preventative you get."

The Tampa Police Department has been piloting SAFE COP since August 2012, and utilized it during the Republican National Convention. Along with NC-4, the department was also assisted by Microsoft. It spent less than \$400,000 and the bill was paid by federal grants. The department had previously used a similar project produced by NC-4, E-Sponder, which provided the basis for SAFE COP.

"The learning curve on this was almost nil," Bennett noted. "We gave them (officers) a tutorial, but you really can't break it. The younger generation officers know how to blog and jump between interfaces. Every officer is capable of issuing their own bulletin."

As of January 2013, the department and NC-4 had developed a revised version of the application and Bennett wishes to share the technology with other agencies. Tampa plans to showcase SAFE COP to a dozen agencies during the city's popular Gasparilla Pirate Festival in late January 2013.

"Our attitude is since we built this on federal money we want to share design so you just have to pay for implementation," Bennett said. "If you have an agency that has a strong crime fighting approach, technology is your booster. You are making processes more efficient and timely. We want to de-randomize our efforts and that's what this does. If you don't have a strategy there is enough frame-work in this to develop one. Or, maybe an agency is losing resources and downsizing. Technology can be your gap filler."

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