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LESSON LEARNED

Multi-Agency Investigations: Ensuring Security on Conference Calls

SUMMARY

During a multi-agency investigation, the inability to create a secure environment on conference calls can compromise vital information and inhibit discussion. Therefore, participation on conference calls should be strictly limited to essential personnel and access codes should not be widely disseminated.

DESCRIPTION

The October 2002 sniper attacks in the Washington, D.C. area triggered a law enforcement response spanning multiple jurisdictions and agencies. Local, state, and federal law enforcement officials established regular conference calls to exchange information and solicit feedback regarding strategies, tactics, and leads. Access codes were provided to a wide variety of agencies and jurisdictions participating in the investigation.

Media leaks soon became a serious problem, as information shared in the calls began appearing in "news flashes." Finding the source of the leaks proved difficult because nobody knew how widely the access codes had been disseminated, and there was no mechanism to track participation on the calls. Eventually, participants grew reluctant to share sensitive information for fear unauthorized individuals were on the calls. Some agencies began to rely on face-to-face meetings, leading to feelings of exclusion and suboptimal information flow. One agency began to withhold the names of witnesses and suspects, relying on fictional aliases instead.

During an investigation, multi-agency conference calls should take place in a confidential environment. Access codes for the calls should be changed periodically and not be widely disseminated. Measures should be taken to track participation on the calls at all times. Such precautions will help ensure the integrity of conference calls and maximize the information agencies are comfortable sharing.

CITATION

- Police Executive Research Forum. *Managing a Multijurisdictional Case: Identifying the Lessons Learned from the Sniper Investigation*. October 2004. ([LLIS.gov ID# 10968](#))

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