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Lessons Learned Information Sharing

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PRACTICE NOTE

Information and Intelligence Sharing: The South Florida Virtual Fusion Center's Assistance during the H1N1 Influenza Outbreak

PRACTICE

The Palm Beach County, Florida, Sheriff's Office (PBSO) initiated the development of the South Florida Virtual Fusion Center (SFVFC) to serve as a collaborative workspace for law enforcement, public health, fire, and emergency response personnel. The SFVFC has provided up-to-date national and local threat information throughout the 2009 H1N1 influenza outbreak.

DESCRIPTION

In early 2007, the PBSO wished to increase intelligence and information sharing among law enforcement, public health, fire, and emergency response personnel in the state. To address this need, PBSO worked collaboratively with their federal, state, regional, and local partners to develop the SFVFC, an online mechanism that allows its users to access and share up-to-date national and regional threat information and intelligence. The PBSO modeled the SFVFC after the Central Florida Intelligence Exchange SharePoint portal. The PBSO worked with the area's Regional Domestic Security Task Force (RDSTF) to launch the SFVFC in June 2007. The RDSTF and SFVFC Steering Committee oversee the operations of the SFVFC and approve changes to the system.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement established seven Regional Domestic Security Task Forces (RDSTF) in 2001 to help coordinate and respond to Florida's domestic security issues on a regional level. Each task force is a cooperative effort between fire, emergency management, public health, law enforcement, and private sector officials.

The SFVFC Steering Committee is comprised of personnel from the Federal Bureau of Investigation as well as state, county, and municipal law enforcement and emergency management agencies.

The SFVFC serves as an "interactive collaboration site" that provides its users with all-crimes, all-hazards threat and situational awareness information. SFVFC users can sign up to receive daily or weekly email notifications alerting them to new SFVFC bulletins or reports. PBSO analysts and system users develop the content for the system, which covers the following subject areas:

- Corrections information;
- Crime reports;
- Homeland security information;
- Intelligence reports; and
- National and regional situational awareness updates.

Users can choose to receive notifications based upon their geographic regions and can upload their own content to share with others on the system. Users can request to create subpages on the system pertaining to specific threats or events on an as-needed basis. Those who create a page can restrict its access to individuals with a specific “need to know.” Likewise, the SFVFC has the ability to store classified information and to restrict its access to those with the appropriate security clearance level.

PBSO and its partners determined that federal, state, and local law enforcement, public safety, emergency management, and public health personnel in the region are eligible to access the SFVFC. Individuals can request access to the SFVFC by filling out a short application available to them on the SFVFC homepage or distributed to them by SFVFC personnel during regular meetings. The application asks users to provide their names, occupations, contact information, and reason for requesting access. Each applicant requires sponsorship from a representative at their place of employment. SFVFC personnel evaluate each application and determine if the applicant is eligible for access to the system. A private vendor creates user accounts for approved members and provides them with access to the SFVFC. The vendor also addresses technical questions from users, hosts the SFVFC server, and ensures that the system runs smoothly. As of June 2009, 1,200 users have access to the SFVFC. PBSO funds the operation of the SFVFC through a \$30,000 state homeland security grant.

In April 2009, personnel from the Miami-Dade Police Department created a SFVFC subpage specific to the emerging H1N1 influenza threat. The page contained news feeds from the state health department, links to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Department of Health and Human Services information, national and local outbreak statistics by location, and information on pandemic influenza preparedness and safety measures. Public health, law enforcement, fire, and emergency management personnel accessed the page and uploaded their own relevant content. The page served as a valuable resource for up-to-date information on the outbreak and helped local agencies prepare for the threat in their own jurisdictions.

CITATION

Nugent, Scott. Intelligence Manager, South Florida Virtual Fusion Center. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 25 Jun 2009.

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