

# **THE SAFETY ALLIANCE OF CUSHING – A MODEL EXAMPLE OF COOPERATION AS AN EFFECTIVE COUNTERTERRORISM TOOL**

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Oklahoma, known for its oil, is home to the Cushing Pipeline Junction (CPJ), one of the nation's most critical infrastructure assets. In wake of the modern terrorism threat that has specifically identified the petroleum industry as a target, CPJ stakeholders have implemented the most basic of tools - cooperation - to counter this threat; in doing so, they have sharpened this tool to a degree that their cooperation has become a model for the nation.

The CPJ's nine major oil companies and their respective tank farms, pipeline operations, and transport operations, span two counties in central Oklahoma, spilling into the city limits of Cushing, a town of 8,500 that is located one hour northeast of Oklahoma City.

The CPJ is the largest oil pipeline gathering facility in the United States (U.S.). On a daily basis approximately 40% of the crude oil from the Gulf Coast region flowing to the Midwest region (which is between 2% and 5% of the nation's crude oil) travels through the CPJ. Approximately 20% of the Midwest region's crude oil is stored at the CPJ.

In April 2001, a CPJ oil company's transport truck overturned and a small product spill ensued. Numerous CPJ oil companies offered to provide mutual aid but local emergency services single-handedly worked the crisis. After the spill, safety officers from each of the oil companies met with local emergency services leadership and discussed how the oil companies' equipment and training could be used to assist each other, and local emergency services, during a future crisis. They proposed the creation of the Safety Alliance of Cushing (S.A.C.) and a model for public-private cooperation was born.

To provide for more resources, the S.A.C. quickly expanded to include other local, as well as county and state, government agencies.

Initially the S.A.C. was only a response-based organization, formed simply for the purpose of providing mutual aid to member companies and agencies in times of need. However, when airplanes flew into buildings in September 2001, the mindset of this organization changed. Because intelligence reports repeatedly stated that terrorists want to cripple the U.S. economically, the S.A.C. realized that a new threat existed and reacting to CPJ incidents was not enough to keep the CPJ safe. With its resources in people and equipment, preventing terrorist acts against the CPJ became a necessary mission that fell into the lap of the S.A.C.

After September 11, 2001, the Oklahoma City Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) realized that the S.A.C. provided an existing terrorism prevention backbone that could help protect the CPJ. The FBI joined the S.A.C., provided education on terrorism, and held two tabletop exercises to train the S.A.C. in reacting to both physical and cyber threats. In addition, in 2004 the FBI executed a full-field exercise that simulated multiple terrorist attacks on CPJ facilities. This nine-hour exercise was an enormous undertaking that involved 100 different agencies and companies. 62 controllers trained 388 participants while 162 observers from numerous organizations watched. The exercise successfully trained the incident response of all participating companies and agencies.

Since its inception, the S.A.C. has grown to 23 member organizations representing the oil industry, law enforcement, emergency management, emergency services, and local government.

Open communication amongst S.A.C. members is one of the keys to its success. As an example, the S.A.C. has created and maintained a call circle that is activated regularly in emergency training and real life scenarios. In addition, the S.A.C. member organizations have a common radio frequency, with a repeater tower, that is used for emergency radio communications when needed.

The S.A.C. meets monthly to discuss safety, security, and emergency response issues and stays abreast of pertinent unclassified intelligence through regular email contact with, and personal visits from, the FBI.

The S.A.C. realizes that technology will play a large part in the organization's continued success and future projects include the formation of a listserv to enhance communication and the offering of online safety and security training.

Civic organizations, along with government and industry leaders, have asked S.A.C. representatives to speak at meetings and provide information on how the S.A.C. functions. In Midland, Texas, where similar oil assets are located, oil companies have begun to imitate the S.A.C. and work closer with industry and government partners.

The most useful aspects of the S.A.C. – open communications, joint training, public-private cooperation, and a common mission – can be used by similar organizations in any infrastructure sector. It is not necessary that the organizations wishing to use the S.A.C. as a model be response-oriented; what is necessary is only that organizations realize that cooperation, whether it is with the government or with competitive industry partners, is the key to taking on a terrorism prevention role.

Post September 11, 2001, the S.A.C. has emerged as one of the best public-private cooperative efforts in the nation, efficiently combining the resources of government and private industry to ensure a common goal – the protection of a national critical infrastructure asset. Built on cooperation and strengthened by technology, the S.A.C. should be viewed both as a tool for countering terrorism and as a model to be emulated by other communities who live and work near our nation's critical infrastructure assets.