

Navy Yard shooting reiterates importance of information-sharing networks

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As new details emerge regarding today's shooting at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., we're seeing many conflicting reports, retractions and clarifications from the press. The intense efforts by the press to verify exactly what happened can also be said for the law enforcement community at this time. Due to the nature and location of the shooting, multiple local and federal agencies are involved in the investigation and protecting those on the ground, which makes an already complicated situation even more complex.

After 9/11, one of the greatest failures reported was the inability for different agencies to communicate. Without the ability to communicate via radios and other traditional methods, coordinating rescue efforts was next to impossible. Significant steps have been taken to ensure the situation never repeats itself and that law enforcement agencies are well-coordinated and more efficient.

Many agencies upgraded their radio systems post-9/11 to ensure different departments could communicate, and many other agencies have plans to update their systems in the future (Deltek's database has more than 400 [Lead Alerts](#) for radio systems). At this point, it has been reported that the FBI is now leading the Navy Yard investigation, while naval intelligence; the D.C. Metropolitan Police; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the U.S. Park Police; U.S. marshals, and other agencies are also likely involved. There have been significant steps taken in the National Capital Region (NCR) and across the country to ensure that interoperability exists across jurisdictions, and based on responses to both this incident and the Boston Marathon bombing (which also involved multiple agencies), the efforts appear to be paying off.

Analyst's Take

The creation of an effective information-sharing environment (ISE) is key to ensuring the safety of individuals involved in potential mass casualty events that involve multiple jurisdictions. It is of the utmost importance that not only first responders and others on the scene be able to talk to each other through dedicated public safety radio channels, but also that the information they relay is accessible to all agencies involved. This is particularly true when the intelligence community may have information in advance of an incident, such as police receiving complaints or tips of suspicious behavior that could directly relate to a threat. The ability for law enforcement officials at all levels to access comparable information is essential to the effective running of any multi-jurisdictional emergency task force.

Several years after the September 11 terrorist attacks, the FBI opened a portal to the Guardian system, called eGuardian. The portal provides local law enforcement officials the ability to view tips and information gathered by the FBI and also allows the submission of reports of suspicious activity to be shared with those in the bureau. It is essential to the safety of civilians and law enforcement officers that these information-sharing systems continue to be used and expanded, and that

additional permissions are added to criminal history reporting systems to allow access to officers from different types of agencies. During future incidents of mass casualties or disasters, it is the hope of many that, through the implementation of the FirstNet initiative, agencies will be able to seamlessly communicate voice information as well as data so that images of shooters and crime scenes can be shared in real time.

In the case of the Navy Yard shooting, access to federal fingerprint databases may also prove necessary. It has been reported that the FBI will be using fingerprints to help identify the deceased shooter. His fingerprints will be run through a single database of fingerprints compiled by and accessible to authorized law enforcement officers at all levels – city, state, federal, tribal and others. The ability for the FBI and other law enforcement officers (LEOs) to access the National Crime Information Center's fingerprint database could be essential in determining who the shooter was and what his motives were. It could also aid in capturing any additional gunmen that may exist.

Though the individual pieces of evidence gathered by each agency may seem small at first, the big picture comes into focus once they are all brought together, and information-sharing systems are key to providing the complete view.