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The CAT EYES Program

Enlisting Community Members in the Fight against Terrorism

By Donald Giannone, Chief of Police, and Robert A. Wilson, Lieutenant, Teaneck, New Jersey, Police Department

Last year, the Teaneck, New Jersey, Police Department launched a community-based counterterrorism training program that has drawn praise from numerous community groups and helped empower residents to be proactive in the fight against terrorism.

The township of Teaneck is Bergen County's seventh largest municipality, located just five miles from New York City. Teaneck is a culturally diverse community of approximately 38,500 residents that measures just 6.22 square miles. The city contains 37 houses of worship, including a mosque and 14 synagogues. The police department has a staff of 99 sworn police officers.

Before September 11, 2001, members of the community's various religious congregations occasionally reported their fear of hate crimes or terrorism. The police department sought to educate community residents by meeting with religious leaders separately and collectively. During these meetings, the department performed a variety of crime prevention functions, including the use of security surveys and environmental design studies. Where necessary and appropriate, officers would discuss currently available intelligence.

A Heightened Need for Training

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, the department recognized that the need to address community concerns about terrorism and hate crimes had clearly increased. Residents wanted to know specifically what the police depart-

ment was doing to combat terrorism, especially given the community's close proximity to New York City. They also asked what role they could play in improving the safety of their neighborhoods. In response, the police department evaluated its training programs. The evaluations revealed that existing programs

statewide educational law enforcement group. The institute sought a training curriculum that would strengthen police relations and promote community participation in the department's fight against terrorism.

The Cat Eyes Program

The solution was found in a curriculum developed by the Community Anti-Terrorism Training Institute. The Community Anti-Terrorism Training Initiative known as Cat Eyes, was designed to help local communities combat terrorism by enhancing neighborhood security, heightening the community's powers of observation, and encouraging mutual assistance and concern among neighbors. It has the following purposes:

- Watch for terrorist indicators, not peoples' race or religion
- Teach average citizens about terrorism
- Educate and empower citizens
- Set up a national neighborhood block watch program
- Educate schoolchildren

The program involves the joint efforts of federal, state, and local governments along with community residents and private companies who donate time, money, and resources. It began as a two-hour training presentation. Issues covered include an overview of terrorists' motives, organization, and objectives, types of operations, ways to detect terrorist planning, an overview of potential targets, and how to properly report observations.

For example, the program provides community residents with tips on how to detect terrorist surveillance or planning. It describes three main forms of terrorist surveillance: (1) stationary surveillance, the most commonly used method and the easiest to spot, (2) mobile surveillance (on foot or by vehicle), and (3) technical surveillance, which may include use of cam-

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lacked a good counterterrorism training component. A search of available alternatives in the law enforcement community also proved fruitless. The department sought input from agency members and organizational partners on how to address the concern about terrorism. It concluded that a void existed in its resources to educate residents in this area.

To fill this void, the department sought the assistance of one of its partners, the New Jersey Regional Community Policing Institute (NJRCPI). The department was one of the founding members of this

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class of recording or listening devices and is usually the most difficult to spot.

The program encourages citizens to dismiss popular television myths about what terrorists look like and how they act. It teaches that (1) terrorists are not all male, (2) terrorists are not all "religious nuts," (3) terrorists won't come at you screaming and wearing hoods, and (4) terrorists' surveillance teams will not wear trench coats but will attempt to blend into the surrounding area.

Trainers also teach several techniques citizens can employ in the observation of objects and places. First, the watcher should observe general characteristics. Second, the watcher should note any distinguishing physical characteristics. Third, the watcher should note permanent details. Finally, the watcher should note changeable details. For example, in describing a vehicle, the observer should note (1) body style, size, and color, (2) make, model, and year, (3) license plate number, state, and county, and (4) any peculiarities, such as body damage to the vehicle.

In teaching reporting of suspicious persons, the trainers teach citizens the importance of articulating why someone or something was suspicious. For example, rather than stating "I saw a suspicious guy near the water tower," the observer should be prepared to state in detail "I saw a white male, about six feet tall, wearing blue jeans, a brown jacket, a red hat, and a black backpack, climbing the north side fence of the water tower on Washington Street."

Application of the Program in Teaneck

The first step in implementing the program was obtaining training for the trainers themselves. The NJRCPI agreed to host a train-the-trainer program that members of the Teaneck Police Department attended. Today, primary responsibility for the Cat Eyes program rests with the seven members of the department's Community Policing Bureau, who serve as a police liaison to the community. They are responsible for community organization, problem solving, and education. The department's detective bureau has taken on a support role, providing expert knowledge on terrorist activity in the region, criminal investigation, and criminal intelligence.

The department adapted the two-hour Cat Eyes training program to meet the needs of the community it served. Top

elected officials and government leaders were trained first. Thereafter, the department made presentations at several different venues. It hosted a training program for religious and civic leaders. It held a training session to educate members of its Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association, which then in turn educated its respective constituencies.

The department then incorporated the training module into its current and future citizen police academy, which hosts twice annually for residents of Bergen County. In addition, the department facilitated a train-the-trainer program for the North Jersey Regional Crime Prevention Officers Association, during which time it trained approximately 75 police officers from throughout the state of New Jersey.

Program trainers teach citizens the importance of articulating why someone or something was suspicious.

Continuous Improvement through Evaluation

The department regularly evaluates the success of the program through exit interviews and qualitative analysis. After each presentation, course evaluations are conducted to determine strengths and weaknesses. Through its review of input from participants and individual performance appraisals, the department has been able to maintain its focus, adapt the program as required, and monitor success.

Although the department has not used the Cat Eyes program for long, it has received positive feedback from community groups. The reaction of those trained is consistent with the department's desired result of empowering the community. One of the unanticipated benefits of using the Cat Eyes program has been that the training officers' confidence has increased. In addition, many segments of the community report that they want to foster even closer relations with the Teaneck Police Department.

The goals of the program suit the police department's goals perfectly. It provides the department with a viable tool to educate members of the community. Through the education of its citizens, police can strengthen their ability to protect the community. Each recipient of the training becomes a new ambassador for community safety and, by extension, law enforcement in general.