

CQ HOMELAND SECURITY

Grant Aims to Ring New York City With Portable Radiation Detectors

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By Matt Korade, CQ Staff

Terrorists attempting to smuggle a nuclear or radiological “dirty” bomb into New York City could soon be met with a thousand-man mobile radiation-detection net.

The Department of Homeland Security granted http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1221602938361.shtm \$29.5 million to New York’s finest, as well as 11 fellow law-enforcement and public-health partners across the Hudson, out east, upstate, and across the Sound, to set up a roving network of portable radiation detecting devices with one goal in mind: to help ensure the devastation seen on 9/11, or worse, never happens again.

The program will equip 4,000 officers in the tri-state area with portable detectors to carry around on patrol. As they move, the devices would use GPS and remote, automated communication technology to beam data to a \$6 million communication center, allowing command and control to see exactly where radiation is being detected in the metropolitan area, should an alarm go off.

“Seven years after 9/11, we know that New York City is still the No. 1 target for terrorists,” Rep. Peter T. King, R-N.Y., said in a news release on the grant’s announcement. “We also know that al Qaeda would like nothing more than to get their hands on a nuclear or ‘dirty bomb’ and detonate it in one of our cities. Simply put, the stakes could not be higher. This funding announcement is a victory for securing the New York region from the unthinkable.”

NYPD Deputy Commissioner Paul J. Browne said that while a vehicular bomb is the easiest and most likely attack – as the experiences of Pakistan over the weekend and the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center show – and what the city has geared most of its protective measures toward, the consequences of a nuclear or radiological bomb would be so catastrophic the city and regional partners felt it was important to have a number of defenses in place.

In the case of the pilot, the defenses would start out on the New Jersey Turnpike or the Long Island Expressway or the New York State Thruway in the hopes that a vehicle would be identified before getting to the city. In any scenario, the greatest effort goes first into intelligence. “But after that, we want to have a system in place that would alert us if the plot wasn’t detected and was under way,” Browne said. “We need something to interdict it and tell us it’s coming our way, and that’s what this is about.”

The pilot program is the main thrust of the “Secure the Cities” initiative launched by DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff in July 2006. It stems from a previous cooperative agreement in which \$3.2 million was awarded to the NYPD in September 2007 to build a regional architecture for the real-time sharing of data from fixed, mobile, maritime, and portable radiation detectors. That architecture will expand outward to nearly 100 regional municipalities as time goes on, Browne said.

Some of it is deployed now, he said.

Testing Applicability Elsewhere

Ryan Eddy, a spokesperson for the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, DHS’s lead agency for the program, said the program was intended to be a three-year pilot just for New York City, starting with a \$3.2 appropriation in fiscal 2007, a nearly \$30 million award this year, and a request for another \$20 million for additional equipment and \$10 for more research and development in fiscal 2009.

That time frame would allow DNDO to do an analysis of the program and determine later this year or sometime the next if the model would be applicable elsewhere, Eddy said.

Syndicated columnist James Pinkerton, who chairs an advocacy group called the Radiological Threat Awareness Coalition <<http://www.r-tac.org/>> , said the pilot program is a step in the right direction and another example of how New York City continues to lead the nation’s counterterrorism efforts, but there is plenty more to do.

“The bombing in Pakistan reminds us that every security measure we’ve taken heretofore is still probably not enough,” Pinkerton said. “There was a barrier there, they intercepted the truck before it go to the hotel, and it still killed more than 50 people.”

Preparedness can be conceptualized as a pyramid, he said, with the government, research and development, the business community, and the public each taking up a corner.

His group conducted a survey earlier this month that found that although four out of five respondents consider a dirty bomb a serious threat, only about one-third feel they are prepared.

“It tells all of us we need to work harder,” Pinkerton said. “There are solutions, there are things we can do.”

Matt Korade can be reached at mkorade@cq.com.