Nearly one year after responding to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in Arlington County, Va., local and state law enforcement and public safety officials from the National Capital Region were involved in another emergency situation that demanded unprecedented levels of cooperation. Two sniper suspects terrorized the region for three weeks in October 2002, forcing law enforcement personnel from more than 30 local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to work collectively to investigate the killings, and to identify and arrest the perpetrators. 1

While the attacks on the Pentagon in 2001 primarily involved one crime scene and a massive emergency response operation, the sniper case resulted in multiple crime scenes and a mix of other prevention and response activities. Despite these differences, one common requirement surfaced in both situations—the need for a coordinated regional public safety effort.

Regions generally refer to multijurisdictional areas that unite public officials to address common problems, identify communities of interest, and improve the quality and delivery of public services. 2 Today, states are developing and implementing regional approaches to strengthen public safety. “Creating regions or zones helps to remove or reduce local jurisdictional barriers for operational purposes,” states a June 2005 report by The Council of State Governments (CSG). 3 Many local jurisdictions lack the resources needed to prevent and respond to a full array of hazards and threats as well as the expertise needed to conduct homeland security planning. For these and other reasons, states are turning to regions as an alternative.

Despite the benefits of regionalization, a lack of clarity exists about the meaning of regional preparedness and activities that help foster cross-jurisdictional collaboration. Standards and methods to measure regional progress are relatively nonexistent. In addition, research and literature describing public safety regions and the mechanisms used for building regional capacities are lacking.

In 2005, CSG conducted research of 20 regional efforts in 20 states, gleaning information from a series of phone interviews and a variety of online documents such as state and urban area homeland security strategies. A comparison of the data reveals similarities and differences in regions’ structural characteristics as well as in their:

• use of existing planning efforts,
• authority and membership, and
• coordination and operational roles.

The following sections describe these variations and generally explore the notion of regional preparedness. With this information, state and local leaders will be better equipped to make strategic improvements to their terrorism prevention and emergency response policies and practices. It is also the aim of this study to help stimulate and guide future research into regional public safety efforts.

What is regional preparedness?

There are two common goals associated with regional public safety efforts: enhanced preparedness and good governance. As Hurricane Katrina showed in 2005, catastrophic events impact areas well beyond traditional state and local boundaries. Therefore, preparations for and improvements to emergency response and recovery operations should account for such large-scale events. Enhanced regional preparedness is viewed best in light of two questions:

• What added value is created on a regional level that may not be achieved among disparate local jurisdictions acting individually?
• How do regional activities help to identify and overcome jurisdictional barriers so that terrorism prevention and emergency response operations are conducted seamlessly?

In addition to enhanced preparedness, regional efforts provide opportunities for state and local jurisdictions to do more with less. For example, regional
Centralization and Standardization—
The Other Common Approaches

In addition to coordination, the National Association of County and City Health Officials identified centralization and standardization as two other types of approaches that may be used to achieve regional preparedness. Centralization is the “pooling of resources and limited capacities of individual LPHAs [local public health agencies]… by forming a separate regional entity for the purpose of responding to a serious public health emergency.” As the name implies, the standardization or interoperability of equipment and functions ensures they “can be combined, without special effort, during an emergency incident.”

Among other possible methods, coordination is an integral activity in achieving enhanced preparedness. In September 2004, the Government Accountability Office issued a report outlining several factors that characterize effective coordination. GAO defined regional coordination as “[t]he use of government resources in a complementary way toward goals and objectives that are mutually agreed upon by various stakeholders in the region.” A prerequisite for effective regional coordination, however, is that local government units within the region achieve high levels of preparedness themselves. In other words, the coordination of resources cannot take place at the regional level unless those resources are known and organized at the local level.

The coordination that takes place on the regional level is often centered on sharing resources and information. Multijurisdictional response and recovery operations require the sharing of personnel, equipment and facilities in an almost seamless fashion. Therefore, many regional planning and coordination efforts focus on developing or improving policies that govern the use of these resources.

Similarly, enhanced information sharing across jurisdictional boundaries leads to improved situational awareness and, therefore, decision making. Regional efforts help jurisdictions identify hazards and threats that exist outside of their jurisdictions. For example, an attack on a nearby chemical plant may impact multiple jurisdictions. The destruction of a dam upstream may have consequences for downstream jurisdictions, requiring mitigation strategies and plans. Regional efforts also help transfer best practices and professional experiences, increasing overall preparedness.

Regional characteristics

Although strong theoretical arguments for regional public safety approaches exist, regional practices can be complicated by interjurisdictional challenges. The CSG project team conducted research of 20 regions in 20 states to better understand regional characteristics and complexities. In addition to online research, the team conducted phone interviews with regional stakeholders to answer questions about the regional efforts. Ten regions were selected from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s FY2005 list of Urban Areas Security Initiative regions. The UASI program aims to “address the unique planning, equipment, training, and exercise needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas.” In addition, the project team studied 10 states segmented into regions for terrorism prevention and emergency response purposes; research was focused on the non-metropolitan regions in these states.

Research results include:
• At least 14 of 16 regions exist as part of statewide terrorism prevention and emergency response effort.
All of the non-metropolitan regions are organized under a statewide regional effort. Charlotte, Portland, St. Louis and Washington, D.C., span multiple states and are discounted from this tally.

- Seven of 10 UASI regions closely overlap with a single integrated local jurisdictional entity such as a county. All non-metropolitan regions span multiple local jurisdictions.
- Public safety-oriented regions are formed across a mix of existing regional efforts. Two of five metropolitan regions that are part of a voluntary “council of governments’” structure utilize those governance, planning and coordination entities for public safety purposes. Non-metropolitan regions follow similar patterns.
- Most regional authorities are voluntary associations of local jurisdictions and derive authority through a mix of state and local statutes, governors’ executive orders, memoranda of agreement and understanding, and the participation of local elected officials and top-level executives.
- Public safety-oriented regions generally conduct more planning and coordination than operational activities.

Variables affecting regional cooperation

Similar to a study or comparison of states, regional public safety efforts possess unique qualities that make it difficult to generalize about them, especially when these variables are not accounted for and controlled on some level. For example, the techniques regional stakeholders consider and implement to foster regional cooperation may differ significantly depending on the number and composition of member states and local jurisdictions. One approach to account for these structural variables is to separate regions into the following four groups:

- Multi-state regions or metropolitan regions that encompass local jurisdictions in more than one state. In this analysis, four of the UASI regions—Charlotte, Portland, St. Louis and Washington, D.C.—span multiple states. The National Capital Region, for example, includes the District of Columbia and counties and municipalities in Maryland and Virginia.
- Regions that closely overlap with a single local jurisdiction. The Cincinnati, Louisville and San Diego UASI regions are primarily defined within the boundary of a single county or metro government. Also, some states may argue that their local government structure already fosters regional planning and coordination. Arizona, for example, has a vast land area—the sixth largest in the nation—and only 15 counties to help coordinate state-local homeland security planning and coordination.
- Metropolitan regions that do not overlap with a single local jurisdiction. The local jurisdictions that compose seven of 10 UASI regions in this review are not part of a single local jurisdictional entity.
- Non-metropolitan regions that do not overlap with a single local jurisdiction. All non-metropolitan regions in this review span multiple local jurisdictions.

Future studies of regional efforts need to account for a multitude of variables, such as population numbers and densities, geographic and meteorological characteristics, the presence of critical infrastructure and assets, the level of authority granted to local jurisdictions through state constitutions and statutes, and regional goals and objectives.

Discounting these variables, a review of the 20 public safety regions results in the identification of similarities and differences dealing with the use of existing regions, authority and membership, and the mix of planning and operations. Special emphasis is placed on regions that are made up of more than a single county or metro government.

Use of existing regions

Public safety-oriented regions have formed across a mix of existing regional efforts. Two of five metropolitan regions that are part of a voluntary “council of governments” structure utilize those governance, planning and coordination entities for public safety purposes. Although some go by other names such as “regional planning commissions,” there are more than 600 regional “council of governments” entities in the United States that exist for a myriad of public policy purposes such as regional land and growth management, water and transportation planning.13

The National Capital Region, for example, utilizes the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments for a range of public safety and homeland security planning and coordination purposes. In fact, MWCOG has approximately 41 separate homeland security and public safety committees covering different aspects of corrections, police intelligence and communications, emergency management, and fire planning and operations.14

The Dallas/Fort Worth UASI region utilizes a similarly robust “council of governments” structure for public safety planning purposes. The North Central Texas Council of Governments includes 16 counties and other local government units surrounding Dallas and Fort Worth. Emergency preparedness is one of many priorities for the council.15
Public safety-oriented regions have formed across a mix of existing regional efforts. Two of five metropolitan regions that are part of a voluntary “council of governments” structure utilize those governance, planning and coordination entities for public safety purposes.

However, not all urban areas with “council of governments” entities appear to use them for public safety purposes. Cincinnati, Denver and Portland, for example, are part of “council of governments” entities—the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Council of Governments, Denver Regional Council of Governments, and Greater Portland Council of Governments respectively. These UASI regions do not appear to use those planning structures for public safety purposes.

It is likely that the non-metropolitan regions are part of a statewide regional effort, and many new terrorism prevention and emergency response regions overlap with other existing regions “to make planning and coordination easier and to minimize administrative costs.” For example, Pennsylvania’s nine Regional Counter-Terrorism Task Forces were created in a bottom-up process that considered existing local mutual-aid alliances, multiple state agency districts such as police, environmental and public health, and federal jurisdictions including the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Environmental Protection Agency.

Colorado, on the other hand, established All-Hazards Emergency Management Regions in 2003 to “coordinate the state’s efforts to respond and respond to potential terrorist attacks in Colorado.” These All-Hazards Emergency Management Regions are different from the Colorado State Patrol’s and Bureau of Investigation’s districts.

**Authority and membership**

There are a number of different authorities, incentives and disincentives that states and local jurisdictions use to help foster regional collaboration.

The National Capital Region may be the only region to derive authority from federal law; the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and Title 10 of the United States Code defines the NCR’s geographic area and membership. Regions utilizing a “council of governments” such as the Dallas/Fort Worth UASI region may obtain authority through those planning structures. For example, Texas Local Government Code authorized the creation of North Central Texas Council of Governments as a political subdivision of the state. Soon after the 2001 terrorist attacks, Governor Jeb Bush of Florida signed an executive order creating a Regional Domestic Security Task Force in each of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement’s seven regions.

The active participation of elected and top-level executive officials in regional planning and coordination efforts also serves as an authority for action among lower-level practitioners. The San Diego County Board of Supervisors is part of the San Diego region’s decision making process. Louisville’s Criminal Justice Commission is the primary conduit for that region’s collaborative planning.

Also, the availability of federal and state homeland security funding and guidelines attached to those programs may serve as a strong incentive for fostering regional planning and cooperation. In 1997, only select cities received funding for domestic preparedness related to weapons of mass destruction through the federal Nunn-Lugar-Domenici Domestic Preparedness Program. In 2005, however, $2.5 billion was allocated to states for the State Homeland Security Grant Program, including the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program and Urban Areas Security Initiative. Recognizing the value of regional structures, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued specific guidance for the FY2005 Homeland Security Grant Program encouraging states “to employ regional approaches to planning and preparedness and to adopt regional response structures whenever appropriate.” There is likely a strong correlation between the relatively recent proliferation of statewide regional efforts and federal homeland security grant program guidance.

**Regional operations**

Public safety-oriented regions conduct operational activities to a lesser degree than planning and coordination. Most regional operations are conducted for specific terrorism prevention and emergency response purposes, such as urban search and rescue teams and hazardous materials response teams. The Charlotte Urban Area’s 2004 Homeland Security Strategy, for example, identifies the objective of providing “a Regional Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team with redundant capabilities.” Similarly, Kentucky has 12 regional WMD/HazMat teams equipped and trained to respond within a one-hour notice to local, regional and statewide hazardous material incidents.

Regional-level operations may also be conducted to enhance state, regional and local terrorism prevention efforts. New York state is segmented into 16 Counter Terrorism Zones to assist in the identification, analysis and dissemination of terrorism-related information and intelligence, among other purposes. The primary mechanisms to enable the analysis of intelligence information are the Upstate New York Regional Intelligence Center and the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Regional Intelligence Center. Together, these systems provide for the seamless sharing of criminal intelligence throughout New York.

Operational plans and activities are especially common in regions that closely overlap with a single local
jurisdiction. For example, the city and county of San Diego as well as 17 incorporated cities within the county are organized as the San Diego Operational Area, a requirement of the state’s Standardized Emergency Management System. The region’s Operational Area Emergency Plan outlines its emergency response system, including details about the roles and responsibilities of key agencies and officials.

Similarly, the greater Cincinnati area, including the city of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, and municipalities within the county formed the Terrorism Early Warning Group to “collect, evaluate, analyze and disseminate criminal intelligence information” and to “[f]acilitate the investigation of threats or hoaxes, suspicious devices or suspicious outbreaks of disease.” Although there is evidence of regional operations, planning and coordination activities are more common at the regional level.

Assessing regional preparedness

Improving regional preparedness appears to be a high national priority, especially in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the enormous homeland security financial investments made on the federal level in recent years. On the state and local levels, evidence suggests that regionalization is becoming more commonplace. However, “thinking regionally” is not a simple notion, and requires planning and coordination at the policy and practitioner levels to overcome cross-jurisdictional issues. In addition, the concept of public safety regionalization is relatively new, and few, if any, studies have focused on regional development and activities. For these reasons, few tools or methods exist to help public safety officials demonstrate heightened levels of preparedness or process.

Highlighting these challenges, the U.S. Government Accountability Office identified factors that support regional coordination in a 2004 report, including the need for regional standards to help identify gaps between the current performance status and strategic goals. However, many of the standards that exist in the public safety sector are tailored for state and local departments, agencies and programs.

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies establishes standards that reflect the best practices for a law enforcement agency. The Standards Manual of the Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program, 4th Edition, includes 38 topic areas encompassing 439 individual standards ranging from organization and administration to specific law enforcement operations. Although the CALEA standards are applicable to law enforcement agencies of any size or type, it is unclear how well the standards apply to regional or collaborative law enforcement agency efforts. Chapters dealing with criminal investigation, criminal intelligence and crime prevention may provide content for assessing terrorism prevention and response efforts at the regional level.

Similarly, the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative (Global) produced and disseminated the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan in April 2004, providing a national framework for criminal intelligence and information sharing standards. The plan provides 28 recommendations that “local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies should use as a road map to ensure that effective intelligence sharing becomes institutionalized throughout the law enforcement community nationwide.”

To assist in the implementation of the plan’s recommendations, states and local jurisdictions are establishing intelligence fusion centers. The Global initiative released 17 guidelines in August 2005 to assist law enforcement agencies in the development and operations of these intelligence fusion centers. According to Fusion Center Guidelines: Executive Summary, fusion centers are “an effective and efficient mechanism to exchange information and intelligence, maximize resources, streamline operations, and improve the ability to fight crime and terrorism by merging data from a variety of sources.” In other words, intelligence fusion center efforts share common goals and characteristics with other regional-level initiatives. Therefore, the accepted practices, guidelines and standards associated with intelligence sharing and fusion center activities may contribute to future assessments of regional preparedness.

Together CALEA, and the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International administer the Public Safety Communications Accreditation Program. Consisting of 216 standards, this accreditation program assesses public safety communications agencies, units of public safety agencies with a responsibility for communication services, and private entities with similar mandates.

Although these programs provide examples of accepted professional practices and benchmarks for measuring public safety preparedness, their applicability to a regional entity or effort is unclear.

Leaders in the National Capital Region, however, decided in 2004 to use a nationally recognized emergency management standard and accreditation program—the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP)—to assess the region’s emergency management capabilities. The 58 EMAP standards are
Making regional improvements

Regional cooperation will likely become more important and common in the public safety sector as is the trend in other public policy areas. Blind to jurisdictional barriers, the public will continue to demand more public safety services at a higher quality and lower overall cost. “Regionalizing” is one way for public safety providers to share responsibilities and resources, improve operations, and meet these future demands.

However, there are inherent challenges with any collaborative effort. A lack of authority and differing opinions about sharing information and resources are often cited as reasons that inhibit regional development and progress. State and local officials may also be uneasy about relinquishing decision-making authority to a regional public safety structure. How do states overcome these challenges and identify effective approaches when a “one size fits all” approach is not workable? To address these issues and strengthen regional preparedness, public safety officials at all levels of government should consider the following:

- **Future studies.** Additional research into the development of terrorism prevention and emergency response regions would provide states with meaningful information to improve regional activities. The development and dissemination of regional planning tools, established using information from case study examinations and expert work groups, would enhance regional planning, operations and resource management responsibilities. Lessons should be gleaned from a variety of comparative and inter-disciplinary studies involving the public safety and health, transportation and land use and development sectors.

- **Financial incentives and support among elected and appointed officials.** Federal, state and urban area homeland security grant monies appear to be effective incentives for fostering regional cooperation. Also, the involvement, decision-making and support of elected and high-level administrators in regional efforts help to demonstrate the individual jurisdictions’ commitment to cooperation and provide authority for action among lower-level practitioners.

- **Measuring preparedness.** The public will continue to demand that public safety administrators demonstrate regional improvements. To benchmark progress, professionally recognized standards need to be developed and applied at the regional level. Emergency management standards and assessment processes may provide a model for other regional assessments and the development and application of terrorism prevention standards. Furthermore, it is equally important to assess the capabilities of the local jurisdictions that serve as the foundation for any regional effort.

Whether preparing for another high-profile sniper incident, terrorist bombing or massive earthquake and hurricane response, regional planning and coordination efforts pay dividends in tangible and intangible ways. Although different regional approaches exist, most share a common goal—identifying and overcoming jurisdictional barriers to enhance overall preparedness.

Thus, “thinking regionally” is more than an abstract concept for public safety officials today; it’s the new way of doing business.
A Regional Terrorism Prevention Case Study—The 2002 DC Sniper Investigation

In October 2002, two sniper suspects shot 14 people and killed 10 in the greater National Capital Region. Involving more than 30 law enforcement agencies at the state, local and federal levels, this incident challenged the most senior police chiefs and experienced investigators in the region.

After the shootings and arrest of the perpetrators, the Police Executive Research Forum conducted a study of public safety officials involved in the sniper investigations and released a report in 2004 entitled Managing a Multijurisdictional Case: Identifying the Lessons Learned From the Sniper Investigation. The following lessons identified in the report support the need for collaborative regional efforts in preparation for and during high profile crime and terrorism investigations.

- Whenever possible, agencies should develop mutual aid agreements prior to any major incident or investigation.
- Radio systems should be interoperable and encrypted whenever possible.
- In a task force arrangement, personnel must be accountable to a single command-and-control structure.
- Roadblocks should be used to achieve a specific law enforcement purpose, and should be carefully planned and coordinated across jurisdictional, regional and state boundaries.
- Many of these law enforcement organizations work closely with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments…[which] provides a forum for action and develops regional responses, including public safety and transportation.
- We would strongly encourage chiefs from adjoining communities to meet periodically to address together these and the other questions that pepper this report, perhaps even to develop a plan they would agree to follow in the event of a crisis such as the sniper shootings.


Endnotes
5Endnotes
The Impact of Terrorism on State Law Enforcement

CSG and Eastern Kentucky University released findings in June 2005 from a national study of state law enforcement agencies and their changing roles since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. “Today, state law enforcement agencies face a host of new responsibilities—many related to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks while others are due to shifting federal priorities,” says the authors of the 2005 report. To download the report and read about project findings and recommendations, visit: http://www.csg.org (keyword: protect).