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## Homeland Security Preparedness: Federal and State Mandates and Local Government

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*Local governments and first responder personnel play a key role in the nation's homeland security mission. The results of a statewide survey of local officials in Florida provide a local perspective about the impact of homeland security mandates, the kinds of unmet security needs localities continue to grapple with, and the types of security threats local officials consider most urgent.*

**W**hen it comes to homeland security policy, there is a great deal of truth to the old adage that “All politics [policy] is local.” While the federal and state governments have dominated the making of homeland security policy, local governments have been made responsible for putting it in place at the grassroots level via mandates from above.

Counties and cities across the United States have ended up bearing a considerable portion of the burden of financing and managing this vital, complex intergovernmental policy arena. This additional responsibility has also resulted in added administrative, political and legal costs. To date, the impact of federal and state homeland security mandates has varied considerably across local governments, as shown by this survey of Florida localities.

Before more mandates are heaped upon local governments, it behooves federal and state officials to take a closer look at the perceived vulnerabilities of cities and counties and their as-yet unmet security-related needs. The views of local government officials in the trenches are essential elements of any meaningful evaluation of where the nation stands in terms of homeland security.

Local officials in general management posts are charged with overseeing a vast array of critical duties associated with emergency preparedness. The nation's first responders, the specialists—emergency personnel, fire

fighters, law enforcement officials, and local health care workers—provide the first line of defense in the event of a terrorist attack. Preparedness at the local level is central to preventing acts of terrorism or minimizing the impact of such an event should one occur.

### Florida: A Perfect Place to Measure Mandate Impacts

No state is a better place in which to test the impact of intergovernmental mandates on local government readiness than Florida—with its 67 counties, 406 municipalities, and more than 1,000 special district governments. A statewide survey of Florida's county and city officials (general managers and first responders) conducted in the fall of 2004 confirms that homeland security mandates have significantly affected their jurisdiction's management, finances, politics and legal systems. The most pressing needs are for overtime pay and interoperable equipment. Chemical and biological weapons, cyberterrorism, water supply sabotage, car or truck bombs, and terrorist attacks at public venues pose the biggest threats—but these assessments vary by type of local government.

Terrorism is a big issue in the sunshine state for many reasons: a larger-than-average number of military installations; deep-water ports; commercial and private airports; the state's extensive coastline—the longest of any state; and Florida-based terrorism incidents and impacts—the anthrax incident in south Florida, the flight school training of the terrorists who flew into the World Trade Centers, and the devastating economic

impact of 9/11 on the state's tourism-based economy. National exit polls may have shown that moral values was the most important issue affecting most Americans' vote for president in 2004, but in Florida, it was terrorism.

Given the state of Florida's status as a high-risk state, we believe it offers a vital testing ground for evaluating the local perspective on homeland security implementation.

### The Survey

Our results are based on a mail survey sent to specific groups of local officials identified by the Florida Association of Counties and the Florida League of Cities. These associations also provided input regarding the content of the survey instrument. (The survey instrument is available from the authors upon request.)

Surveys were mailed to 1,079 city officials on July 2–3, 2004 and to 900 county officials on July 8, 2004. The response rate (as of August 6, 2004) for city officials was 22 percent (n=235), for counties, 21 percent (n=185). These response rates are standard for mail surveys with no follow-up.

Municipal officials who were sent the questionnaire included: city managers, fire chiefs, police chiefs, natural disaster directors, finance directors and city clerks. County officials asked to respond included those grouped by the Florida Association of Counties in the following positions: county administrator, county attorney, clerk of the court, sheriff, county engineer, health services officer, agricultural extension, public works, emergency management, children and youth services, roads and bridges, ag-

ing services, human resources/personnel/risk management, emergency medical services/fire and rescue/911, budget and finance officer, public information officer/community information, information systems/computer technology, utilities/water resources, facilities management/capital improvement, and emergency preparedness/public safety. Given that Florida's counties vary tremendously in size, not every county has officials employed in each group.

### Impact of Homeland Security Mandates on Local Government

Providing comprehensive and effective homeland security services is a monumental endeavor requiring significant funds, personnel, planning, organization, and an unprecedented level of intergovernmental cooperation. When asked to indicate the biggest impact of federal and state homeland security mandates on local jurisdictions, city and county officials overwhelmingly responded that additional financial and administrative/management responsibilities represented their greatest challenges (Figure 1). The two groups of officials differed regarding which type of challenge they see as having been the most significant impact of mandates in their respective jurisdictions.

Specifically, among county officials, 47 percent reported that administrative and management responsibilities have had the greatest impact, followed closely by financial considerations (40 percent). The report of increased administrative duties at the county level reflects the important statutory role assigned to counties in planning and coordinating the homeland security function.

Among city officials the greatest impact of federal and state homeland security mandates has been financial (52 percent), with administrative and management duties rank-

ing second (31 percent). Homeland security preparedness is an extremely expensive task, made even more fiscally burdensome for municipalities, which compared to counties, have fewer revenue sources but more first responder responsibilities.

### Assessing Perceived Security Threats: New Mandates

While implementation of homeland security readiness occurs at the local level, federal and state legislation generally dictate local responsibilities and accountability. At the federal level, administration officials and members of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are working to standardize terrorism preparedness at the national, state and local levels. To achieve this goal, several initiatives will be set into motion during 2005.

The National Incident Management System will be used to standardize the preparedness and response activities of fire, police and medical first responders. The Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness housed in DHS, is preparing a National Preparedness Goal to be used as a coordination tool for all DHS-sponsored planning and training at the state and local levels. The department will also ask state and local governments to develop explicit plans for responding to 15 specific disaster scenarios and will eventually implement a Target Capabilities List to monitor progress toward the attainment of national preparedness standards at the state and local levels.

The Homeland Security Presidential Directive issued in December of 2003 directed DHS to establish a set of national preparedness standards and a system for measuring progress in attaining preparedness goals. The new standards are reflected in the State Homeland Security Grant Program—a billion-

dollar program administered by the department. To participate in the funding program, states must plan for 15 specific disaster scenarios. States are required to provide detailed preparedness plans for attacks with a nuclear device, an explosive device, aerosolized anthrax, nerve gas, food contamination, plague and other scenarios including natural disasters such as a major earthquake, hurricane or pandemic flu outbreak.<sup>1</sup>

### Current Perceived Threats: Florida's Local Governments

Many of the disaster scenarios identified at the federal level already rank among the most significant concerns of local government officials in Florida. Our survey asked: "From your position, how concerned are you about the following types of homeland security threats in your own community? Very? Moderately? Or Not Very?" The six most frequently cited concerns (very or moderately concerned responses combined) are: attacks using chemical weapons, attacks using biological weapons, cyber-terrorism, water supply sabotage, car or truck bombs, and terrorist attacks at public venues (Table 1).

Overall, city and county officials have similar security concerns. For county officials, the number one concern is cyber-terrorism (78 percent identified this threat as a concern), followed by a biological attack (77 percent), use of a chemical weapon (76 percent), water supply sabotage (72 percent), and a car/truck bomb (68 percent). For city officials, the top concern is water supply sabotage (79 percent indicated this item as a concern), followed by biological terrorism (72 percent), use of a chemical weapon (72 percent), cyber-terrorism (69 percent), and a car/truck bomb (62 percent).

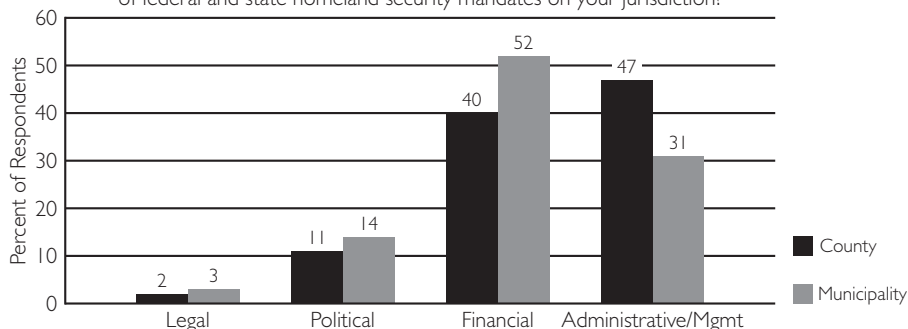
The seriousness of these concerns has intensified local government officials' fears that they do not as yet have all the tools they need to adequately address these vital security concerns.

### Greatest Unmet Needs at the Local Level: Money

The FY2005 federal budget includes approximately \$4 billion in grants to state and local governments for homeland security-related activities.<sup>2</sup> Federal grants are a key source of funds for local governments, but such funds must be augmented at the local level. Counties and cities still bear a heavy

**Figure 1 Impact of Mandates on Localities**

From your perspective, what has been the biggest impact of federal and state homeland security mandates on your jurisdiction?



**Table 1 County and Municipality Threat Assessment**

Security threat		Percent concerned	Percent not concerned
Car or Truck Bomb	County	67.8%	32.1%
	Municipality	62.4	37.6
Biohazard/Biological Weapon	County	77.3	22.7
	Municipality	71.5	28.5
Chemical Weapon	County	76.2	23.8
	Municipality	71.9	28.1
Nuclear Weapon	County	41	58.9
	Municipality	32	66
Radiological Weapon	County	53.5	46.5
	Municipality	51.6	48.3
Cyber-terrorism	County	78.4	21.6
	Municipality	69.4	30.6
Food Supply Sabotage	County	59.3	40.5
	Municipality	50.2	49.8
Water Supply Sabotage	County	72.3	27.6
	Municipality	78.7	21.3
Port Sabotage	County	32.4	62.7
	Municipality	31.4	65.5
Terrorist Attack at a Public Venue	County	64.8	35.1
	Municipality	60.8	39.1
Individual Suicide Bomb	County	54	45.9
	Municipality	59.4	50.6
Airplane Used as a Weapon/Bomb	County	47	53
	Municipality	45.5	54.5

burden in funding the cost of the homeland security mission. The cost of providing comprehensive homeland security services at the county and city level remains significant.

The threat of terrorism has generated tremendous activity at the local level as cities and counties take the necessary steps to fulfill their mission as front-line entities in the war on terror. In order to prevent subsequent acts of terrorism on U.S. soil and to prepare should such an event take place requires personnel, equipment, training, planning, and most of all, funding. Adequate funding is critical to the success of homeland security preparedness at the local level.

Elevation in the threat level monitored by the Department of Homeland Security translates into significant financial costs at the state and local level. During periods when the Homeland Security Advisory System national threat level is raised from yellow (elevated) to orange (high),<sup>3</sup> states and localities are obliged to provide a more comprehensive level of security. This calls for an increase in on-duty public safety personnel, greater protection of critical infrastructure and facilities (airports, borders and ports), and more staff at local Emergency Operations Centers. In some cases, state-ordered National Guard deployments may be required to augment

security at critical facilities. A 2004 Report from the General Accounting Office estimates that the additional daily costs of a threat level increase at the local level ranges from a low of \$8,000 to a high of \$68,000 depending on the size of the locality.<sup>4</sup> These additional costs place significant demands on state and local budgets.

According to our survey results, the most pressing local need is for more money to supplement overtime pay. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the city official respondents cited additional funds for overtime as an outstanding need; among county officials, it was 53 percent. Hand-in-hand with the need for overtime pay is the need for additional hiring at the local level. Among unmet needs, 46 percent of county and 44 percent of city officials cited a need for more personnel (Figure 2).

**Greatest Unmet Needs at the Local Level: Specialized Equipment**

Next to funding for overtime pay and additional personnel, specialized equipment and methods for improving homeland security practices top the county and city lists of unmet needs. A majority of city (52 percent) and county (51 percent) officials indicated that they were still in need of interoperable

communication equipment. This confirms what has been called for by national study groups.

Throughout the country, most first responder radio systems are incompatible across disciplines and do not extend across city and county jurisdictions.<sup>5</sup> According to the findings of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (the 9/11 Commission), the inability of area police and firefighters to communicate effectively over radio compromised evacuation efforts at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Interoperable communications systems are critical if multiple groups of first responders, such as police, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel, are to launch a coordinated response to a disaster or terrorist event. Local governments must have interoperable communication systems to effectively coordinate their activities.

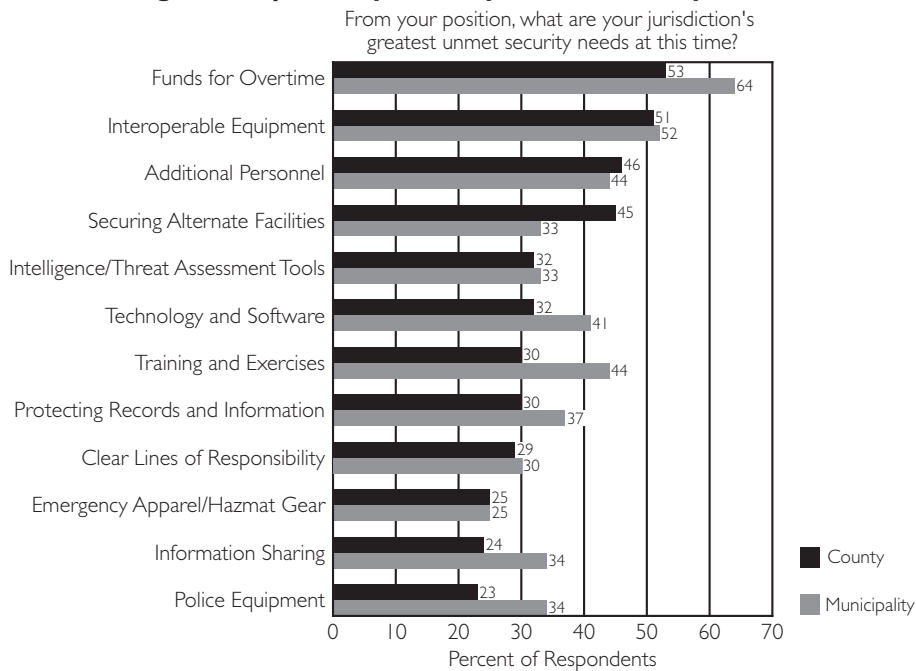
**Greatest Unmet Needs at the Local Level: Training and Information Technology**

Cities and counties differ in the degree to which they have unmet needs in the areas of training, software and information. In general, a greater percentage of city officials reported some kind of unmet security need than did their county-level counterparts, particularly with regard to training and exercises, information sharing, and technology and software (see Figure 2). This is in part attributable to differences in their respective functional responsibilities, especially in areas where cities handle a greater portion of the area's fire, emergency rescue, and HAZMAT operations than their surrounding counties.

Among the city officials responding to the survey, 44 percent identified a need for more training/exercises for first responder personnel, 41 percent for more technology and software geared toward managing domestic security, and 37 percent for better means of protecting records and information. Over a third of the municipal officials also said they needed greater information sharing among agencies responsible for the homeland security mission (34 percent), more police equipment (34 percent), better identification of secure alternate facilities (33 percent), and more intelligence and threat assessment tools (33 percent).

Among county officials, 45 percent cited the ability to secure alternate facilities as an

**Figure 2 Top County and City Unmet Security Needs**



unmet security need. Other needs at the county level include better intelligence and threat assessment tools (32 percent), more sophisticated technology and software (32 percent), more training and exercises for first responder personnel (30 percent), improved methods for protecting records and information (30 percent), clearer lines of responsibility among federal, state, and local entities responsible for preparedness and response activities (29 percent), and more emergency apparel and HAZMAT gear (25 percent).

### Conclusion

The biggest impacts of homeland security legislation on local governments have been financial and administrative, rather than political or legal. This is to be expected. Mandates from higher levels of government, with a short timeline for implementation, put tremendous pressure on the finances of local governments and dictate intensified administrative oversight. Administrative duties increase most for counties—the administrative arms of state government. Financial pressures are most intense for municipalities, the units of government with the most restricted revenue-raising capacities but with the greatest responsibility for preparedness.

Homeland security mandates have squeezed local budgets and left Florida's city and county officials scrambling for funds to

cover overtime pay related to the fight against terrorism. Supplemental overtime pay ranks as their highest unmet security need. Adequate funding is also the key to securing more sophisticated equipment and additional personnel. But management-related challenges, primarily those involving changes in inter- or intra-governmental relations, also plague many local governments.

As local governments take action to prepare for the possibility of cyber-terrorism, an attempted sabotage of the water supply, or any of the many disaster scenarios identified by the federal government, an unprecedented level of intergovernmental cooperation, funding, and administrative organization will be necessary. This is easier said than done, primarily because “one-size-fits-all” mandates rarely have uniform impacts at the local level.

In our federal system, states ultimately bear the responsibility for the actions—or inactions—of their local governments. The time for thorough needs assessments of local governments' capabilities, readiness, and unmet needs is now, not later. Our nation's security depends on it.

### Authors' Note

The authors wish to thank the Florida Association of County Officials and the Florida League of Cities for their assistance. We also thank the many city and county officials who responded to the survey, however, the views expressed here are our own.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Alice Lipowicz, “State and Local Officials Worry Standards Too High for Emergency Preparedness,” *CQ Homeland Security*, (November 8, 2004). Available at <http://homeland.cq.com>.

<sup>2</sup>Statement by Secretary Tom Ridge at the Annual Conference of the Republican Governors Association in New Orleans, LA, November 2004.

<sup>3</sup>Since its creation in March 2002 and January 2004, the Homeland Security Advisory System national threat level has remained “elevated” or code yellow, except for five periods during which the threat level was elevated to “high alert” or code orange. High alerts ranged from a period of a few days to a month. See: General Accounting Office, *Homeland Security Advisory System: Preliminary Observations Regarding Threat Level Increases from Yellow to Orange*, (Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office, February 26, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>General Accounting Office, *Homeland Security Advisory System: Preliminary Observations Regarding Threat Level Increases from Yellow to Orange*.

<sup>5</sup>Alice Lipowicz, “Ridge, Democrats Vie to Fix Emergency Radio Problems as 9/11 Commission Bears Down,” *CQ Homeland Security*, (May 19, 2004). Available at <http://homeland.cq.com>.

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