

Homeland Security Update...



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Terrorism and the Media's Response

When news is breaking, information can be difficult to track down. In the event of a terrorist attack, however, the public needs to get accurate information right away about what is occurring and how to respond. Starting this summer, the Department of Homeland Security will conduct a workshop series, entitled "News and Terrorism: Communicating in a Crisis," focusing on how to provide media and information officials with the instruments necessary to convey the life-saving news that the public requires during an attack. The Committee applauds this initiative, as it promotes the goal of improving communications systems to allow a faster, more effective response to a terrorist incident.

In a crisis situation, information sharing can save lives. We've seen that with our first responders, who have shown how crucial radio interoperability and improved communication systems are in emergency situations. Providing reliable information quickly to the public is just as critical under these circumstances, as the events of 9/11 demonstrated. The public relied upon media coverage as the events unfolded, and many people reacted based on the information they received from news sources. During this time, the Pew Research Center reports that 78% of Americans followed the news coverage "very closely."

While most understand that information sharing plays a key role in preventing and mitigating terrorist incidents, the media's role is often overlooked. Just as first responders rush to the scene of an attack, so too do news media, who in turn affect the public's reaction and response. We need to ensure that media has the government contacts and information to provide citizens with the most accurate reports possible in a time of crisis. Timely and accurate information always will be key to coordinating evacuation plans and preventing a chaotic response, so to save lives.

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