

From: mmarcucci@gangnewspapers.com (Michele Marcucci)
To: kellie@ire.org
Subject: RE: Missing the target

21353

39 pgs

Hey Kellie,

Thanks again for your interest in our series, we appreciate you checking us out. If you have any questions, please feel free to give any of us a call anytime.

Regards,
Michele

1) Title of story, collection of stories, or series.

Missing the Target: A flawed plan to protect the homeland

2) Date(s) published or aired.

Sept. 5-9, 2004

3) Topic and synopsis of story or series, including major findings.

After the September 11 attacks, Congress approved billions to equip police and firefighters so they could better respond to a future terrorist attack. But much of that money was used by county emergency chiefs who, with little direction from the state or federal government, defined terrorism in their own way -- while bigger cities and agencies protecting major targets got shortchanged. We found small counties using money to change the doors on their courthouse or to buy software to track fruit flies, while bigger counties got a fraction of what they need to protect big populations and major targets. The federal government gave money to states to parcel out in an attempt to get everyone talking about how to prepare for another terror attack. But that level of planning isn't happening.

4) How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc.).

Local police were complaining about homeland security grant funds not trickling down to them fast enough, so we decided to look into it and realized that huge amounts of money were being spent with little direction or oversight.

5) Major types of documents used and if FOI requests were needed.

Grant applications and progress reports, all obtained with California Public Records Act requests, some of which were only released to us after we got an attorney involved (this is detailed in the first day of the series). Also got documents (a list of the state's targets chief among them) from sources and the Internet (state anti-terrorism center rundown of what to do at different alert levels).

6) Major types of human sources used.

Law enforcement and emergency managers, politicians, experts.

7) Results (if any).

Pending.

8) Follow-up (if any). Have you run a correction or clarification on the report or has anyone come forward to challenge its accuracy? If so, please explain.

No.

9) Advice to other journalists planning a similar project.

Be prepared for a long haul, because in a post-September 11 environment, it's a lot harder to do a story like this because everything is being kept secret under the rubric of national security and fighting terror.

10) Difficulty, uniqueness of effort, or other special circumstances related to this subject.

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State officials gave us a huge fight when we tried to get some of these documents, arguing that we'd be tipping off the terrorists if we told our readers what equipment they were buying with this money. They failed to respond to some of our public records requests in a timely manner, then tried to give us redacted versions of the documents showing us what the money bought. Then they told us the documents were the property of the federal government and that they would need to get the OK from the feds before giving us anything else. A spokeswoman for the federal Department of Homeland Security -- which we also FOIA'd for the documents -- said they might withhold them in the name of national security (they have yet to respond to our FOIA). We brought in an attorney and, after a few months of fighting with state officials who brought in someone from the state attorney general's office to deal with us, prevailed. And all of this happened as the three of us struggled to keep up with our daily stories.

11)-Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story.
Eleven months.

12) If you extensively used computer-assisted reporting skills, please answer the following:

a) Did you obtain or build any electronic databases? If you obtained data, what was its name and source? What was the cost? If you created your own database(s), what records did you use?
We asked for the data electronically but only got it on paper. So we put together spreadsheets to run the dollar amounts.

b) Did you extensively use any Internet sources? If so, please list address(es) and explain how the site(s) was useful.
No.

c) What specific software did you use?
Excel spreadsheets.

d) Did you have difficulties obtaining the electronic information you used? How did you resolve this? Did you use FOIA for the data under state or federal law?
We asked for the data electronically but didn't get it (state generated reports in PDF was the closest we got).

e) Did you have difficulties with the data itself? How did you overcome them?
N/A

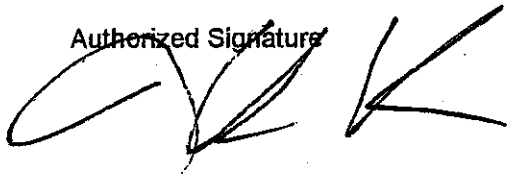
f) Was any analysis done? If so, what?
We analyzed the grant amounts for each county by running them per capita and against the number of targets each county had per a target list provided by the state and made some pretty startling findings: Tiny Alpine County, population 1,208, got more than \$218 per person in grant money, while Los Angeles County, population 9.5 million, got little more than \$8 a person. More than \$8 million went to 15 counties (out of 58 in California) with no targets. We also discovered that most of the counties were not training on the equipment they were buying, and most had problems with the way the money was (or more often, wasn't) coming to them.

g) Was data analysis done by your own staff or was outside assistance used? Who?
By our staff.

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Authorized Signature



Date

2/13/04

Your name -- PLEASE PRINT

KEVIN KEANE

Please mail this questionnaire and your story to:

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Missing the TARGET

A flawed plan to protect the homeland

First in a four-day series
DAY 1 | WHAT'S WRONG

SHAKEN BY THE SEPT. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Congress heaped billions of dollars on America's police and rescuers for a new mission: Protect the nation, one chunk of turf at a time.

There was no time to ask how — another attack may be imminent, lawmakers reasoned: States and cities knew best. The money soon flowed to police, firefighters, emergency workers, health departments, even coroners.

Three years later, California's public safety agencies are certainly better equipped — but not necessarily for terrorism, an Oakland Tribune review of more than 2,000 homeland security documents and dozens of interviews has found.

Shopping centers in Nevada County got heart defibrillators. An agriculture commissioner in the Central Valley got intelligence-gathering software to file his monthly pesticide reports to the state. Desert

Hot Springs ordered night-vision goggles to watch gangs. Chico bought traffic cones.

Stanislaus County threw a \$300,000 fence and electronic locks around its public health agencies, even as county officials cut services for indigent children and the mentally ill. Kern County hired an earthquake expert.

San Francisco and Oakland used homeland security funding to pay overtime to police anti-war protests even as the National Guard struggled to recoup 10 percent of its costs to patrol the Golden Gate Bridge and other top terror targets.

The documents, obtained under the California Public Records Act, show that more than a quarter-billion dollars has been doled out in Cali-

TARGET | News 10

INSIDE

NEWS 11 | Millions in Terror-funding is spent without guidance.

NEWS 10 | The info for this report was gleaned from 2,000 pages of documents.

ONLINE | Breakdown of homeland security expenditures.

Anti-terror money spread thin

■ = 1 of top 30 targets
■ = 1 of top 10 targets



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Poor planning, no guidance, spending gone awry



ARIC CRABB — Staff

TERROR RESPONSE | An FBI SWAT team at Oakland International Airport storms a jetliner that has been "hijacked" during Determined Promise '04, a national terrorism drill last month.

Battening down the Bay

Bay Area counties got close to \$60 million from the federal government in 2002 and 2003 to prepare their response to a terrorist attack, most of which is paying for anti-terror equipment. It's buying everything from auto-injectors for anti-nerve agents and protective suits to bomb containment devices, mobile command vehicles and even a patrol boat. The Bay Area breakdown, with estimated prices, is as follows:

ALAMEDA COUNTY

Population (2000): 1,443,741
 Grant total (2002-2003): \$6,336,359
 Total per person: \$4.39
 Total targets: 37



Targets in top 50: 6

Sample purchases: Weapons of mass destruction-compatible total containment vessel, \$405,190; 2,500 respirators for police and firefighters, \$220 each; dive boat for underwater bomb team, \$53,780; with dive suits, in-suit communications, bomb robot & sonar for detecting bombers underwater, \$67,700; tow vehicle, \$193,913; six trailers full of mass decon showers, tents and modesty clothing, \$240,000; 80 collapsible travel chairs, \$1,488

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Population: 948,816
 Grant total: \$4,066,029
 Total per person: \$4.29
 Total targets: 21



Targets in top 50: 3

Sample purchases: HazMat response vehicle, \$184,758; hundreds of protective suits and gas masks; data-collection/information-gathering software for terrorism prevention, \$335,000; 350 body bags, \$34.18; bomb-disarming robot, \$143,451; three oxygen-tank refilling vehicles, \$881,293 (half paid by locals); 10 ACU-1000 portable and mountaintop audio patches for linking incompatible radios, \$11,000 to \$20,000 apiece.

MARIN COUNTY

Population: 247,289
 Grant total: \$1,207,025
 Total per person: \$4.88
 Total targets: 1



Targets in top 50: 0

Sample purchases: 700 chem-bio suits with respirators for fire departments, \$190,000; motion detectors, barriers and alarm systems for the Marin Municipal Water District, \$55,000; radio upgrades, \$48,000; mass decontamination systems, \$50,000; 1,320 auto-injectors for countering nerve agents, \$24,000

NAPA COUNTY

Population: 124,279
 Grant total: \$747,948
 Total per person: \$6.02
 Total targets: 0



Targets in top 50: 0

Sample purchases: Antenna for public safety center, \$63,000; geographic information system for emergency management, \$87,000; mass decontamination systems, \$27,000; crisis management software, \$36,635; two chem-bio capable bomb search and defusing kits, \$10,500

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY

Population: 776,733
 Grant total: \$35,527,411
 Total per person: \$45.74
 Total targets: 51



Targets in top 50: 8

Sample purchases: Sample purchases: Chem-bio suits with cooling vests underneath and gas masks or self-contained breathing systems for police, \$480,000; plus refills for oxygen tanks, \$93,000; radios for city health and public works departments, \$314,700; video assessment systems for BART and MUNI, \$80,000; bio-decontamination vacuum for San Francisco International Airport, \$4,000

SAN MATEO COUNTY

Population: 707,161
 Grant total: \$3,068,359
 Total per person: \$4.34
 Total targets: 12



Targets in top 50: 0

Sample purchases: Sample purchases: Radio upgrades, \$375,000; eight equipment trailers for county law enforcement, \$61,800, and six for fire, \$340,000; 1,000+ chemical protective suits with gas masks for county law enforcement and fire, \$275,000; two mobile command post vehicles, \$207,000

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Population: 1,682,585
 Grant total: \$7,113,000
 Total per person: \$4.23
 Total targets: 37



Targets in top 50: 3

Sample purchases: Countywide radio interoperability upgrades, \$1.3 million; law enforcement surveillance van, cameras and data-gathering software, \$350,855; two bomb robots and related gear, \$304,000; computer-aided dispatch system, \$461,884; hundreds of pieces of hardware for breaking up rubble and shoring wreckage, including eight 10 lb. sledgehammers, 16 4 lb. drilling hammers, 8 cold chisels, 16 5-foot pinch point pry bars, 8 3-foot claw wrecking bars and 8 heavy duty hacksaws, \$1,115.60

SOLANO COUNTY

Population: 394,542
 Grant total: \$1,810,099
 Total per person: \$4.59
 Total targets: 8



Targets in top 50: 0

Sample purchases: Mobile command post, \$382,000; HazMat response vehicle, \$274,200; radio equipment, \$280,000; mobile display terminals for Vacaville police, \$42,800; 50 ballistic threat helmets, one for each officer in Vallejo police, \$20,000; 10 automatic defibrillators for sheriff's department, \$20,000

SONOMA COUNTY

Population: 456,614
 Grant total: \$2,046,893
 Total per person: \$4.46
 Total targets: 3



Targets in top 50: 0

Sample purchases: Mobile command post for sheriff's department, \$380,000; HazMat response vehicle, \$220,000; weapons of mass destruction upgrades of bomb containment vessel for Santa Rosa police, \$3,000; Segway two-wheeled transport vehicle, \$5,000; oxygen administration equipment and blood pressure cuffs for EMS units countywide, \$175,000

Source: State Domestic Preparedness Program/State Homeland Security Grant Program applications

▶ **TARGET**, from News 1

ifornia with little regard to risk or threat. Local officials have been slow to spend the money and often have little understanding about how to use the things they're buying.

In much of the state, local officials have spent more time deciding what to buy than how to deal with a terrorist attack. And they let bureaucratic inertia and turf politics get in the way of addressing critical matters, such as whether their communications systems are compatible — a key factor in the deaths of hundreds of New York fire fighters on Sept. 11, 2001.

Left alone, local officials saw threats to the homeland all around — from al-Qaida, certainly, but also forest fires, drug dealers, political unrest and their own budget troubles.

For some, desires became needs and guarding the homeland turned into a shopping spree, guided by sales catalogs and diverse notions of terrorism from county courthouse to town hall.

Although people and terrorist targets are bunched together, the money is strewn across California.

Money for nothing

On many fronts, this homeland security mission to bolster "first responders" was so poorly planned that it, in effect, has missed the target:

▶ While state officials complained that Congress's homeland security formula shortchanged large states such as California, they adopted a nearly identical approach here, basing the funding on factors unrelated to risk or threat.

Tiny Alpine County — with no identified terror targets — got 27 times per capita as much as Los Angeles County, which has 180 state-identified targets, including three in the top 10. Overall, the state's top 10 targets lie in five counties — yet almost half of California's allotment, \$128 million, went to other parts of the state, including about \$8 million to counties with no targets at all.

▶ Much of the money set aside to pay police overtime for guarding critical sites went to guarding assets not envisioned by federal grant-givers, including elementary schools, and to policing anti-war protests.

▶ Federal officials listed basic kinds of equipment for states and locals to purchase, but the Bush administration only recently has begun detailing what the equipment should do. Local officials say they aren't sure what equipment to buy, what exercises to perform or how well they are doing.

"We were kind of all wondering who knew what they were doing in the beginning," said Lt. Steve Shively, head of San Mateo County's Office of Emergency Services. "We realized later on that for WMD preparedness at the local level, there were no experts. The experts were us."

▶ Local agencies, tied by their own procurement red tape, have been slow to spend the money. The Department of Homeland Security told cash-strapped local governments to buy equipment first and get reimbursed later. In the meantime, vendors were swamped by nationwide and priority military orders for the same gear while prices rose and waits lengthened.

▶ Washington did not tell the state or locals what was expected of them during heightened alert periods. Several law enforcement chiefs said they received little federal or state guidance on what to do during heightened alerts, while others said they created their own guidelines.

▶ In isolation, many cities and counties have bought incompatible radio equipment that could hinder deployment of rescuers in a major emergency. Responders from different jurisdictions may be unable to coordinate in the first and most lethal hour of a terrorist attack.

▶ Most Bay Area emergency crews have not received training on how to use the equipment they are buying. Almost none wrote down the lessons learned after terrorism drills, fearing that they'd be sued by future disaster victims if they documented shortcomings in equipment, planning or command.

The mission goes astray

The apparent disconnect at so many levels goes beyond the growing pains of carrying out a new national mission. Local, state and federal anti-terrorism officials have pursued competing visions of what that mission even is.

Congress labeled homeland security funds for terrorism preparedness. The billions of dollars were largely for handling the aftermath of exploding airliners, massive truck and train bombs, or attacks with chemical or biological weapons, such as anthrax or VX, or a radioactive "dirty bomb." Intelligence reports said plans were afoot, and the money was needed to help victims — after the fact.

But California counties, some fearful of placing too great an emphasis on terrorism alone, took an "all-hazards" approach to spending the money. They bought equipment that would help after a terrorist attack, but was just as handy for what they knew well: floods, earthquakes and fires. They talked of saving lives by preventing emergencies from becoming disasters.

"Smarter local governments are using this as an opportunity to prepare for all hazards across the board, under the rubric of terrorism," Napa County Emergency Services Manager Neal O'Haire said. "Terrorism *may* happen in Napa County. But a natural disaster *will* happen in Napa County."

Rep. Christopher Cox, R-Newport Beach, who chairs the House Select Committee on Homeland

Security, says the money should be used for terrorism alone. His committee is pushing legislation to streamline the funding process and separate terrorism funds from those used for more traditional emergency response.

"A first responder's job is far more than dealing with the next terrorist attack," Cox said. "But a grant program for Homeland Security should not be all-hazards."

MISSING THE TARGET

TODAY | WHAT'S WRONG

Local officials spend millions, with little regard to risk or threat, on technology they don't know how to use and which may be useless for terrorism.

MONDAY | WHAT'S PROTECTED

A hastily devised, error-filled list of potential terror targets baffles local officials, who protect sites not on the list. Meanwhile, not enough money flows to patrol top targets.

TUESDAY | MISDIRECTED MONEY

A flawed funding formula and little or no oversight or accountability assures faulty aim in the war on terrorism.

WEDNESDAY | A BETTER WAY

Focusing money and efforts on helping emergency workers communicate would be a more productive use of resources.

ONLINE | oaklandtribune.com

► Map detailing potential targets and the home security spending for all 58 California counties.

► Some of the homeland security documents obtained under the public records law.

Washington itself still is coming to grips with the terrorism threat the nation faces.

More than 90 percent of terrorist attacks employ bullets, explosives and other conventional weapons. But Washington is still debating the last attack — suicide pilots — and responding to the aftermath of potential chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attacks. At the same time, California officials are considering all manner of problems as homeland security threats.

"Terrorism, often thought of as international groups with vendettas targeted against United States establishments, has come to be a more broad and encompassing term," a Marin County grant document suggests. "Civil disturbance and disobedience, riotous activity and mass shooting spree can all be defined as terrorist-related events."

Whether its priorities are on target or misguided, California is now better prepared for disasters, manmade and natural, thanks to the open valve of federal cash.

Local emergency responders say they are talking across agency and jurisdictional lines more than ever.

Better equipped than ever

Police and rescuers in all major cities — a combined force of thousands in the Bay Area alone — now have protective suits and gas masks or self-contained breathing gear. They are training to handle attacks with explosives and weapons of mass destruction. Bomb squads and hazardous materials teams are better equipped than ever. There are more bomb dogs on patrol and more video cameras watching bridges, subways and other vulnerable facilities.

Public health labs are getting sophisticated instruments to identify germs and dangerous chemicals. Rescuers now have heat-sensitive cameras and listening devices for finding survivors, and hydraulic machines to lift away wreckage.

An armada of more than 200 new vehicles and trailers — hazmat trucks, boats, firetrucks, mobile command posts and bomb-response vans — will carry help where needed. Tens of millions of dollars have been spent on radio equipment. Los Angeles and Santa Clara counties are national models for preparedness and emergency communications.

But while grateful for the money for equipment, training and planning, emergency response officials said they have gotten little cash — and in many cases watched it dry up — for the thing that would provide the best security: More people.

Even as Oakland gets millions for homeland security, police Chief Richard Word is cutting staff he said he needs to protect the city.

"What makes the difference is prevention," Word said. "And prevention is law enforcement patrolling high-risk areas like the port, the airport, the Bay Bridge and BART."

Federal spending for homeland security is expected to climb over the next five years to \$27 billion. But the Council on Foreign Relations' task force on homeland security estimates first responders will need nearly four times as much — \$98.4 billion.

But they may not get it, task force co-chairman Warren B. Rudman said, if Congress finds state and local officials spending the money for needs other than terrorism.

"It's a scandal waiting to happen," said Rudman, a former Republican senator from New Hampshire.

He predicts congressional investigations in which "witness after witness will be paraded up there to talk about misuses of these funds. I'm not saying it will, but that could cause funds to be cut back."

How this series was reported

THIS SERIES IS BASED ON more than 2,000 pages of homeland security grant applications and progress reports obtained from the state Office of Emergency Services under the California Public Records Act. Also, reporters requested every homeland security grant application and quarterly report from nine Bay Area counties.

Reporters examined grants to local emergency responders, for the federal fiscal years 2002 and 2003.

Reporters tallied every line-item expense

in California, thousands of purchases in all, and entered the results into a database. The results were compared to the latest census figures and a state list of terrorist targets, which was obtained from sources.

Scores of interviews with public safety officials, federal agents, experts and legislators were conducted to help explain the data.

State officials granted the first request for documents but left it to the counties to release or black out specific information.

In response to a second document re-

quest, state officials initially refused to provide detailed information on equipment purchases or potential targets, saying release of the information could increase the public's risk of being attacked by terrorists.

"There is little doubt that terrorists will try to determine where an attack would have the greatest impact on our society and how public officials might respond to these potential threats.

"Disclosure of this detailed information would only assist the potential terrorist in ex-

plotting vulnerabilities and harming Californians," state Office of Homeland Security Deputy Director Michael J. Levy wrote in response to the request.

Reporters challenged the state's determination and, under legal pressure, the state relented after several months. The state released detailed equipment purchase lists from the Bay Area and additional information from around California.

A similar exchange occurred after a third request of documents from later grant cycles.

Instructions not included

Agencies buy fancy new equipment, but don't know how to use it

By Sean Holstege

STAFF WRITER

BAY AREA EMERGENCY TEAMS have ordered nearly \$60 million worth of equipment in the last 18 months to prepare for a terrorist strike, but most do not know how to use what they've bought.

In two-thirds of their homeland grant reports, Bay Area agencies disclosed they had not been trained on their new protective "bunny" suits, radio patching devices or other gear.

State worker safety regulations require first responders to train with such equipment before scrambling to a real emergency.

And no Bay Area agency that conducted terrorism drills has written down the life-saving lessons it learned from any exercise, according to grant audits. Training experts say drills to deal with weapons of mass destruction or other terrorism are pointless without written findings.

Three years after the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center killed 343 firefighters, the Bay Area's first responders remain largely unprepared to respond to any attack nearing that scale. Half of California's top 10 targets are in the Bay Area.

How unprepared? Consider Oakland's Hazardous Materials Response Team.

In April, the California Department of Industrial Relations found that 36 of the 40-member team had not received refresher courses or been certified to use such critical equipment as breathing apparatus. Records show the fire department canceled training in 2003 after it already had been cited by Cal-OSHA in 2001 for lack of training. Cal-OSHA cited Oakland Fire with 13 violations, including one willful breach, and issued a \$25,245 fine.

But even those Bay Area first responders that

do test their gear in mock biochemical attacks don't write down the improved procedures that result. Instead, fire chiefs pass knowledge from a quick verbal debriefing, known as a "hot wash," by word of mouth.

In the military, detailed after-action reports follow such drills to foster a culture of perfection, said Lt. Col. John Haramalis of the California National Guard.

For four years he commanded the Civil Support Team in Hayward, one of two units in California that specializes in responding to a WMD attack. Now he leads the Guard's counter-terrorism division.

Civilian culture is different. More often officials are spurred by fear of being blamed — in court, hearings or print.

"Some have declined to participate in our drills if they know there will be an after-action report," Haramalis said. "We will do one for an entire scenario and have been asked not to. You're fighting a culture where people don't want to make mistakes."

Experts at Oklahoma City's Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism say it's a nationwide aversion.

But "it's one of the most important steps — if not the most important step," institute spokesman Ken Thompson said. "If we don't come clean in the reports about errors or the reports don't come out, we may never fix the errors. We've got to learn the lessons so we don't make the same mistakes over and over again."

Mark Lodge saw the same problem before a recent budget cut laid him off from the California Specialized Training Institute. His job was to travel the state, training the trainers.

"They're scared to death to talk about deficiencies," Lodge said. "They are morally and (legally) obligated to fix them. They may have to

He, Haramalis and others say local training conflicts arise when budgets tighten.

Police and fire chiefs know a terrorism attack is possible, but the odds are remote. Violent crime and structure fires are daily occurrences, so chiefs are more inclined to spend their training money at the firing range or the drill tower than playing what-if games in their bunny suits.

Training money is reimbursed, so to practice responding to a terrorist attack, they have to drain the coffers first from top-priority training programs.

"Shame on them," said George Vinson, chief architect of California's homeland security grant program. "It doesn't make sense to me. You're buying the equipment. What do you mean you're not trained on it?"

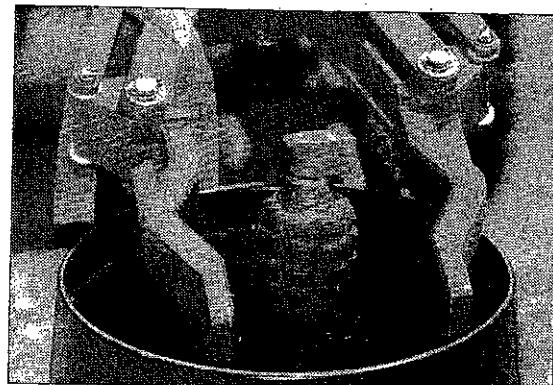
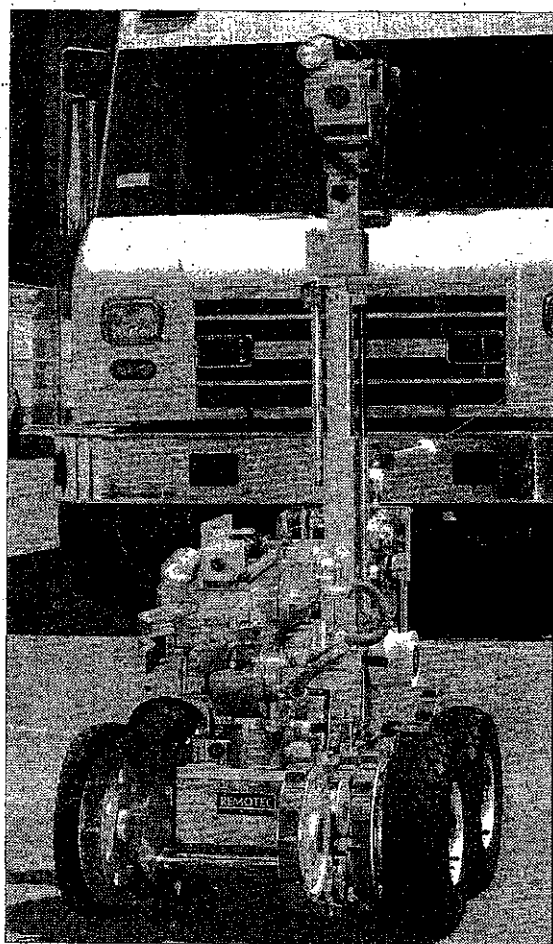
spend a lot of money they don't have."

That leaves first responders with little understanding or institutional memory of their gear or procedures. They have to count on firsthand knowledge from squad leaders who have seen teams "die" from rushing into VX nerve agent hot zones during mock drills. Hazmat teams have been trained for years not to use their protective suits except for certain chemicals, so "a lot of departments are buying them and throwing them in the trunk," Lodge said.



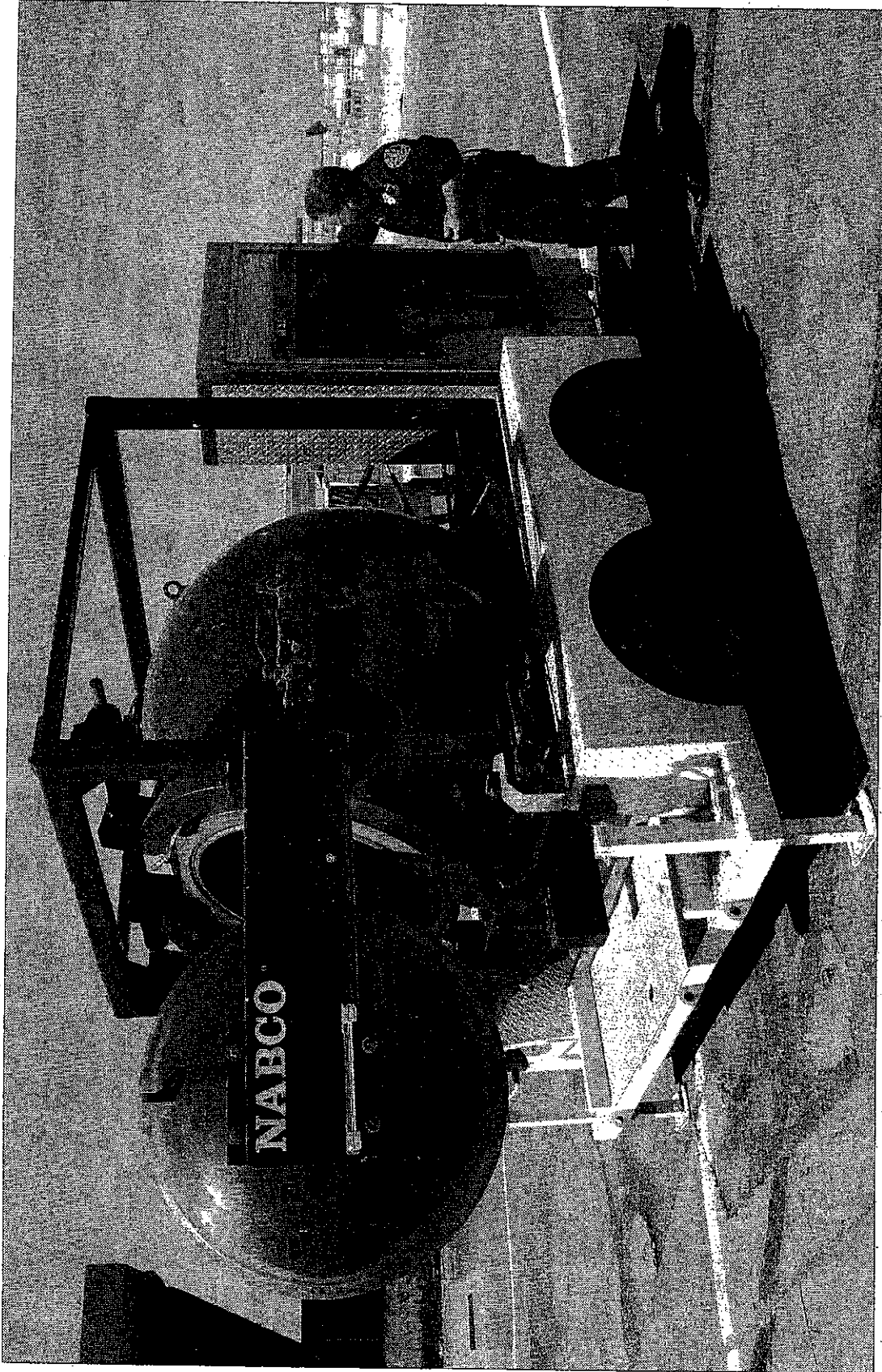
SEAN CONNELLEY — Staff

SECURING THE BAY | Alameda County Sheriff's deputies board their "unsinkable" gunboat, moored in Alameda. The boats are such a popular item in homeland security grants that there's now a two-year backlog.



JOHN GREEN — Staff photos

HIGH-TECH HELP | Santa Clara County's new bomb disposal robot (left) is typical of the thousands of purchases California emergency teams are making with the help of homeland security grants. Above, the robot, which cost \$130,000, prepares to neutralize a grenade.



JOHN GREEN — Staff

TOTAL CONTAINMENT | Officer Bob Chapman of the San Francisco Police Department's bomb squad, operates an explosive containment vessel, a 5-ton steel orb designed to detonate bombs while containing any chemical or biological agents.

High-tech toys, and Uncle

Sam picks up the tab

SUNDAY, September 5, 2004

THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE

Local agencies spend millions on anti-terror gadgets — but with little guidance about what would be useful

By Ian Hoffman

STAFF WRITER

BOMB TECHNICIANS at San Francisco International Airport were the first in California to get the latest, and perhaps most bizarre, hardware for homeland security: a 5-ton steel orb.

Costing as much as \$500,000 new, each orb appears as a deep-sea diving bell, dry-docked on wheels and linked to a chemistry lab. Two brothers out of Canonsburg, Pa., sell it as a "Total WMD-Capable Explosive Containment Vessel."

Kevlar-armored technicians or a robot slide a bomb inside, then stand back as the automated steel door swings closed and locking rings slam home. After the bomb detonates, technicians take readings inside for germs, poison gases or radioactive dust. They can isolate evidence samples for the FBI and flush the rest with a biochemical neutralizing solution into a waiting drum.

High steel prices and competing orders from the U.S. military have kept sheriffs and police from Los Angeles to Fresno to San Joaquin County waiting. Without the orb, local authorities have to contemplate evacuating neighborhoods downwind in a swath miles wide.

"It's an impressive piece of equipment," said Capt. Jim Williams, Alameda County's emergency services and bomb squad chief. "When it goes off, the tires don't even shake."

From big-city SWAT teams to rural fire departments running on bake sales, California emergency responders are girding for terrorist attacks, adding capabilities undreamed of three years ago.

They were handed millions of federal dollars, vague guidelines for spending it and access to technologies often available only to scientific laboratories and the military.

The pricey new tools are exactly what Congress intended: police and rescuers were shouldering a new national defense mission and needed specialized gear beyond what local officials could afford. Washington and Sacramento spread the money border-to-border yet never offered a comprehensive strategy for this new era of domestic defense.

Missing the TARGET

A flawed plan to protect the homeland

Everyday needs

Into that void, local officials crafted notions of homeland security that met their everyday needs and budget gaps as much as defending against terrorists.

"The emphasis of homeland security grant funding is to spend lots of money on toys, then focus in on putting together a plan," a former county emergency-services director said.

Vendors flooded California with catalogs offering dazzling high-tech tools and sales-staff help with writing the federal grant applications.

"Who are the experts? The vendors," said former state homeland security director and FBI veteran George Vinson. "Who could sell ice to the Eskimos? The vendors."

"They're very motivated to come up with something that's good for us," said Rich Brown, Alameda County assistant fire chief for special operations. "But every little thing they come up with, it's something you absolutely have to have, the best thing since sliced bread. And three months later, it's obsolete and you're holding on to a white elephant."

At times, homeland security degenerated into one-upsmanship, forcing the state to play referee.

"Locals came to us and said, 'Our brother on the other side of the border is trying to buy the

King Tut robot that will magically dispose of everything," Vinson said. "We had to play Midas, and it usually went to the biggest (county)."

Tens of thousands of California police, firefighters, medical workers, coroners, National Guardsmen — even prosecutors — now are equipped with space-age protective suits and can breathe canned oxygen or strap on military gas masks that filter germs, chemicals and radioactive dust. Firefighters and police in many urban areas can perform basic decontamination on

NEWS 11

K

themselves and a number of civilians almost immediately.

Emergency responders carry James Bond gadgetry: cell-phone tracking gear, night-vision goggles, thermal cameras for finding survivors in wreckage, WMD encyclopedias on handheld computers and mobile mass or infrared spectrometers that almost require a Ph.D. to operate.

Hundreds of new vehicles and equipment trailers stand ready to roll in case of disaster, from giant mobile command posts and bomb-re-

sponse vans carrying robots to hazmat trucks with walk-in dressing rooms and surveillance vans full of video gear and computers.

In the old days, bomb technicians and hazardous materials teams went into harm's way on foot or on the tailgate of a pickup truck.

But for a post-Sept. 11 ride into Armageddon, they're choosing two-wheeled electric Segways. From Los Angeles to Bakersfield to Sonoma counties, scooters are one of the hottest things rolling in homeland security, California-style.

Santa Clara County spent \$20,000 to buy four. Ever since bomb technicians in Ventura County test-drove Segways on a skateboard ramp, they've proven to be a hit for someone in a \$25,000 bomb suit who can't fit in a vehicle, see pedals or shift gears, or is wearing a 40-pound oxygen tank. They allow technicians to go through doorways, zipping in at 12 mph to assess damage, disarm secondary bombs and perhaps haul out survivors before their own oxygen runs out.

Justifying purchases

"These guys can't drive a car, and you can't expect them to be jogging when we're in the Central Valley and the temperature is 110 degrees," said Georgianna Armstrong, emergency services planner in Kern County, which bought two Segways, plus a third for Bakersfield police.

State officials only lately are getting a handle on what local agencies have bought. Local officials argue the tools are valuable in managing the aftermath of not only terrorist attacks, but also any disaster.

A bomb resembles a gas explosion. A chemical attack mimics a chemical spill. Rescuing people

Defibrillators, traffic cones, scooters — tools against terror?

TOYS, from News 11

from a collapsed building is more or less the same job, whether the culprit is a terrorist or an earthquake.

Yet often, the farther from likely terrorist targets, the more strained the connection of purchases were to homeland security. Almost every county without a potential terrorist target on a recent list developed by the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center has purchased alarm systems, bulletproof windows or crash barricades, as well as other items, according to state and federal grant documents.

Liz Fisher, Sierra County's emergency services coordinator, listed two purchases as "blast/shock-resistant" doors or gates. The state's list shows no potential targets in Sierra County. What she bought for \$3,500 were ordinary push-bar doors for the county's 1950s-vintage courthouse, so that people could leave when it was locked after hours, plus a door to a fire escape for court and district attorney's staff upstairs, and a fire alarm.

For \$14,900, the county got a couple of heart defibrillators for local emergency medical services, and for \$6,000, an alarm system for a rural health clinic isolated in the mountains.

The big-ticket item was a \$10,593 thermal-imaging camera. Fisher justified it in grant applications as a tool for

finding a terrorist hiding in a building or a victim trapped after an attack. In reality, the tiny volunteer, Downieville Fire Department used it to save a stranded snowmobiler.

"We're probably getting more bang for the buck than other places," Fisher said. "I think the Congress and the president intended us to be prepared for any eventuality, for any worst-case scenario. And that would include a fire or a terrorist attack."

"Is that going to happen here in Sierra County? Probably not. But we will be able to take care of our county. We're 3,500 people in the whole county. Nobody cares about us. We have to be independent, and this grant allows us to do that."

'Nobody cares about us'

Down the mountain, Chico police had other unmet needs. They bought traffic cones, a trailer for hauling riot control gear and about \$5,000 worth of surveillance equipment. A Chico commander proposed in state and federal applications that the three sets of night-vision goggles and nine small, movable video cameras with wireless links, monitors and a digital video recorder could be used to watch terrorist targets. Chico has one such target: Kinder Morgan's 40-acre oil and gas terminal, not ranked in the top 100 on the state's target list.

The cameras are used for watching "vandalism, drug dealing and fights, things we don't have the staff or time to monitor," said Debbie Collins, Chico's police management analyst. Sixteen more surveillance cameras have been purchased.

The resort town of Desert Hot Springs has ordered night-vision goggles for "whatever crimes come up," police Chief Roy Hill said.

"There's international terrorism and there's domestic terrorism, which also includes, in my mind, gangs and drug running," Hill said. "So this night surveillance would help us look at gang and drug problems that affect the public every day. It definitely is terrorism to people who live in those different areas."

Across California, local governments are making lists of threats and targets that are magnitudes more numerous than Washington or Sacramento envisioned.

According to state anti-terror authorities, Kern County's few potential terrorist targets are industrial. The joint city-county radio dispatch center in Bakersfield already is well secured by gates and an alarm system. The county decided its fire department, which serves as a backup communications center, needed a \$95,000 security system as well, with electronic key cards for employees.

Sutter County has no targets on the state's list. Yuba City, the county seat, bulletproofed its police station lobby and sunk a 10-foot-deep barrier of steel-reinforced concrete pilings in front to stop anyone from ramming the building with a car or truck.

In Stanislaus County, a major producer of dairy products, nuts, poultry and fruit, the agriculture commissioner bought a database that federal authorities listed as a tool for intelligence gathering.

Dennis Gudgel said he uses the database every day to keep track of what the 2,600 farmers in his county are growing and what pesticides they use. He has to submit a monthly pesticide report to the state Department of Agriculture.

"We wouldn't be so concerned necessarily about the pesticides, but if we had an exotic pest introduced — right now we're looking at the fruit-fly incident — I'm going to know where all those peaches are," Gudgel said.

Health service agencies in Stanislaus County, recently forced to cut back on services, used their homeland security money to put a \$140,000 fence of wrought iron around its public health campus in Modesto and install a \$150,000 electronic key-card security system on all buildings.

Dr. John Walker, the county's public health officer, said the agencies

only had a single guard over "an open campus. Anyone can come and go." It was necessary to secure a lab inside one of the buildings where samples would be tested in the event of a chemical or biological attack, he said.

'Soft targets'

"The sad reality is that as a health department, we are now part of the public safety network. What we cannot be is the weak link in that network," Walker said. "As you know, the enemy looks for soft targets. This is the reality of 21st century public health."

The dollars spent in armoring and equipping counties with few or no targets are hardly overwhelming. The California Highway Patrol spent more on two \$650,000 command vehicles than many of those individual counties did total.

Gary Winuk, chief deputy director of the governor's Office of Homeland Security, said he's satisfied California today is at "a very high state of readiness."

"There's just so many potential targets, you want to protect everything. But it's literally impossible to protect everything," he said. "So for the resources we've been allocated, I think we've done very well."

Staff writers Michele Marcucci and Sean Holstege contributed to this report.

MONDAY
September 6, 2004

Oakland



Tribune



The target list CONFUSION

Hastily devised and error-prone, the list of potential terror targets baffles local officials. Meanwhile, not enough money flows to patrol high-priority sites.

Second in a four-day series
DAY 2 | WHAT'S PROTECTED

WHAT DO the La Brea Tar Pits and the Golden Gate Bridge have in common?

Both rank on California's list of 624 potential terrorist targets.

The classified list was obtained and confirmed by sources. Newer blacked-out versions were disclosed under the California Public Records Act.

How California ranked those targets and why it largely ignored the list as it doled out money to protect the public against a terrorist attack is a story of expediency and hip-shot planning.

By Staff Writer Sean Holstege

Missing the TARGET

A flawed plan to protect the homeland

about the mission to defend against it.

Then-Gov. Gray Davis, stinging from his indecisive reputation during the energy crisis, acted swiftly after Sept. 11, 2001. Two weeks after the attacks, his administration established the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center. It was the first state terrorism center in the country.

CATIC's guidepost was one of the broadest definitions of terrorism in the country. In California, terrorism became the threat of a criminal act aimed at "coercing a civilian population" and "influencing the policy of the government," among other similarly vague items.

With that definition, the center set about pigeonholing and ranking possible targets. The state relied on a military assessment method used to evaluate threats in war zones and turned to the California National Guard for advice.

Analysts looked at how critical, accessible, recognizable and vulnerable a target was, how quickly it could recuperate and how

LIST | News 6

INSIDE

NEWS 6 | Local agencies snap up grants to pay for OT — perhaps improperly.

ONLINE | County-by-county breakdown of homeland security expenditures.

STANDING GUARD | National Guard troops and the CHP were called to defend the Golden Gate Bridge shortly after the 9/11 attacks.



SEAN DONNELLY — 3/6/04

Cities bill 'terror' overtime for anti-war protests, schools

By Michele R. Marcucci
STAFF WRITER

WHEN the federal government decided to help pay overtime costs to local agencies defending terror targets, many California counties, cities and towns jumped at the money.

The money was supposed to be used to protect "critical infrastructure," including public water and power, major transit and primary data storage and processing centers, or any-

where where an attack would result in "catastrophic loss of life and/or catastrophic economic loss."

But an Oakland Tribune survey of more than two dozen of the 70 agencies that received grants shows that state officials gave pieces of the state's \$15.9 million grant to local agencies for policing things that may not meet the government's definition — everything from schools to local government buildings and anti-war protests:

▶ The Oakland Police Department used some of its money to cover a high school walkout to protest the then-impending Iraq War — which may not even have happened in the time period covered by the grant. The grant is supposed to pay overtime generated during federally declared orange alerts.

▶ San Francisco, which received the second-largest overtime grant in the state behind the Highway Patrol, used most

OVERTIME | News 9



PRICED PROTEST | A line of San Francisco police try to keep downtown streets clear from the protests at the start of the Iraq conflict in this March 2003 photo. The massive protests resulted in 2,300 arrests, and San Francisco spent most of its \$3.3 million in federal overtime funds on such protests.

SEAN CONNELLEY — Staff file

OT funding for major targets cut short

► OVERTIME, from News 6

of its money to cover the costs of policing anti-war protests, as did many state colleges and universities.

► San Jose State University campus police used some of its money to investigate hate-related incidents directed at some individuals on campus.

► The San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District got money for providing standby medical services at an anti-war protest at ChevronTexaco's corporate headquarters in San Ramon and for cutting arm locks off protesters' arms.

Meanwhile, a handful of larger agencies protecting some of the state's top potential terrorist targets were stuck with multimillion-dollar overtime bills.

The California National Guard, which patrolled the state's airports and major bridges — including the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge — got a little more than a tenth of what it cost to patrol the bridges in the state's 2003 fiscal year alone.

"We billed the federal government to be paid, and got a fraction of the total bill," Guard spokesman Lt. Jonathan Shitroma said.

The California Highway Patrol — which racked up \$11.5 million in overtime costs protecting bridges, state buildings, oil refineries, chemical plants, the aqueduct and the power grid — was repaid \$6.9 million, outgoing CHP Commissioner Spike Helmick said.

Responding in part to pressure from local governments that complained about the overtime costs they were racking up in pursuit of homeland security, the federal Department of Homeland Security in June 2003 set aside \$200 million to help cover costs incurred during federally declared orange alerts.

In their haste to deliver the funds, state and federal officials did little to ensure they were being spent properly. A Department of Homeland Security official said the department is having a tough time figuring out how the money was spent and the state official in charge of the program admitted that, with the exception of a handful of applicants his agency checked on, he didn't ask.

"My goal was just to get the money out the door. It was not to make these people jump through a bunch of hoops for something they already did anyway," said Michael Levy, deputy director of the state Office of Homeland Security. But some agencies included that in-

formation anyway, Levy said.

And federal officials admitted that, despite talking to California's grant managers several times a day, they never discussed the overtime grant with them.

Unlike other homeland security grants, which were fixed according to a formula in advance and delivered to every California county for distribution, local agencies were required to apply for a chance at overtime grant money. As a result, some agencies with no sites on the state's list of potential targets or agencies that spent money protecting sites that are not on the list received grants, while cities that had targets got none.

For example, in San Mateo County, the city of San Carlos — which has a local airport but no sites on the state's target list — got a grant of \$2,608, while tiny Broadmoor received \$5,903. Daly City and Redwood City, two of the county's largest cities with two potential targets each, received none.

None turned down

None of the local agencies that applied for grants was turned down, while one state agency — the Highway Patrol — got less than it asked for because there wasn't enough money available, Levy said. State agencies could only take half the grant money, with the rest for locals, according to federal rules.

If local agencies had applied for more money than was available, each likely would have received a percentage of the amount it applied for, he said.

State and federal officials refused to comment on specific grant awards, and federal officials said they would need more specific information.

But they defended the awards, saying that states had wide latitude to determine which expenses qualify for reimbursement and that need for the money is largely dependent on context.

"All of those look like costs that are justifiable to us," said David Kaufman, who oversees the state grant program for the Department of Homeland Security, of a partial list of California grant awards provided by the Tribune.

"Anything could be allowable, based on the situation."

Some local agencies also defended their need for the money. They said they received little guidance from state officials on what expenses were allowable and little guidance from federal officials on what steps they should take when an orange

Overtime outlays

Bay Area public safety agencies collected about \$4.7 million of the \$15.9 million the federal government gave California in 2003 to pay for police overtime during orange alert periods, particularly the month period that followed the start of the Iraq War.

Applicant	Award
City of Oakland	\$424,243
City of San Jose	\$252,537
San Mateo County	\$53,554
CSU S.F.	\$39,041
UCSF	\$18,569
City of San Carlos	\$2,608
Broadmoor Police Dist.	\$5,903
City of San Carlos	\$2,608

alert is declared.

The state's anti-terrorism information center did release guidelines on what to do during different alert periods, a state attorney general's spokeswoman confirmed. But several departments denied getting any state or federal instruction.

"Every agency plays a part in the big picture. Our residents deserve just as much money as the other areas," said Cmdr. Ralph Cole of the Broadmoor Police Protection District, who said the district used its money to protect two elementary schools and Colma BART.

But one DHS official conceded that the department was focused on the protection of nationally critical infrastructure and events that could have widespread impact, such as the blackouts that hit the Northeast in August 2003.

That official said schools, for example, do not fall into that category.

Still, several grant awards did appear to directly fit a list of key sites in the federal guidelines, and officials from several law enforcement agencies said they put in more overtime than they were reimbursed for.

For example, the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department used some of its money to cover the cost of policing electric substations, some of which are on a February 2003 version of the state's target list. The Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority, which manages 50,000 acres of open space in Southern California, policed parkland that includes major

water sources and an oil pipeline.

But other grants went to agencies whose concerns were more local or were not directly related to concerns about terrorism. For example, San Jose State University — which, like many state universities and colleges, was on the February 2003 target list — used some of its \$13,960 grant to investigate hate-related incidents directed at some individuals on campus and, like several other state schools that received grants, to police anti-war demonstrations, said Shannon Moloney, field operations commander of the university police.

The Long Beach Unified School District — the only district in the state to receive a grant — used its \$4,387 to cover overtime school safety officials worked to protect its students, security chief Charles Clark said.

Kids, not terrorists

Oakland Police Chief Richard Word said it was vandalism, not terrorism, that led to the decision to provide extra police coverage during a high school walkout.

"It's a concern that kids, especially when they are unsupervised, get rowdy, and they break things. Windows are a concern," Word said. The protest was at Oakland's City Hall, which is on the February list.

State and federal officials said the process for the recently released 2004 homeland security grants have changed and that they are working to provide better guidance on orange alerts.

Levy said his agency now requires grant applicants to say what they protected before their overtime costs are paid. Kaufman said DHS is working on orange alert guidelines for major cities, and that the department is allowing cities, counties and states to use 25 percent of their grants for security and police overtime.

But officials in Los Angeles, which gets a special grant designed to meet the preparedness needs of big cities, said that cuts into their efforts.

"Now we are forced to dip into our grant money and take out orange alert costs," said Paul De La Cerda, grant specialist in Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn's Criminal Justice Planning Office, who said the city used most of its grant to cover the cost of policing Los Angeles International Airport, which has been listed as the No. 1 target in the state.

"It really reduces your grant amount, when you look at it."



FRIGHTENING SCENARIO | Emergency teams practice responding to a "dirty bomb" explosion at the Port of Los Angeles/Long Beach during a national drill last month. The port and the nearby Vincent-Thomas Bridge are both high on a state list of potential targets.

STEPHEN CARR — Long Beach Press-Telegram

Missing the TARGET

A flawed plan to protect the homeland

MONDAY, September 6, 2004

Left alone, locals chose what to defend, and how

► LIST, from News 1

widespread the attack aftermath would be. Each factor got a score, and the target with the biggest total score topped the list.

In a February 2003 list, nine of the top 10 targets were transportation facilities — ports, airports and bridges. The other was the tourist icon Disneyland.

The 624-target list, which later grew by about 20 sites, featured power, water and transportation facilities, popular tourist destinations, plus key government facilities and tall buildings — all obvious sites.

But CATIC's rankings are littered with quirks. A more recent version contains dozens of errors, such as listing Modesto as a county with two targets. There is no Modesto County. Three Santa Rosa targets are listed in Solano County, when Santa Rosa is actually in Sonoma County, which is missing.

The center locates Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Contra Costa County, not Alameda County.

The lab is ranked lower than Harris Ranch, the Interstate 5 beef mecca, which in turn is 35 slots above BART's Transbay Tube and 311 positions above Oakland police headquarters. The Port of Humboldt Bay and Alcatraz Island also rank higher than BART's Transbay Tube.

The rationale for these rankings hinges on access and vulnerability. The Transbay Tube is hard to reach, while armed guards defend the weapons lab and law enforcement centers. The limited access and existing defenses lower the rankings.

Plenty of quirks

But there are other quirks. A major Los Angeles freeway interchange appears high on the list, but all the other critical interchanges throughout the state are absent.

"I wouldn't put much stock in that list. That list is SWAG — a scientific, wild-assed guess," said George Vinson, the homeland security adviser under Davis and the chief architect of California's counter-terror plans. "It was put together quickly.

"Those guys at CATIC were trying to become junior G-men and compete with the FBI," added Vinson, who built a career as a counter-terrorism expert at the bureau's San Francisco office.

California attempted what RAND Corp. and Mineta Transportation Institute terrorism expert Brian Jenkins had recommended to presidential commissions for years. He said that three years after the Sept. 11, 2001, attack the nation still needs a systematic inventory of threats and vulnerabilities and a strategy to prioritize which targets to protect first.

MISSING THE TARGET

SUNDAY | WHAT'S WRONG

Local officials spend millions, with little regard to risk or threat, on technology they don't know how to use and which may be useless for terrorism.

TODAY | WHAT'S PROTECTED

A hastily devised, error-filled list of potential terror targets baffles local officials, who protect sites not on the list. Meanwhile, not enough money flows to patrol top targets.

TUESDAY | MISDIRECTED MONEY

A flawed funding formula and little or no oversight or accountability assures faulty aim in the war on terrorism.

WEDNESDAY | A BETTER WAY

Focusing money and efforts on helping emergency workers communicate would be a more productive use of resources.

ONLINE | oaklandtribune.com

- ▶ Map detailing potential targets and the home security spending for all 58 California counties.
- ▶ Some of the homeland security documents obtained under the public records law.

The government started but never finished that work.

Before 9/11, the FBI played a pivotal role after President Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive 63 in 1998. The directive established the National Infrastructure Protection Center and ordered the FBI to fuse the work of federal agencies and private industry to identify targets and threats. By 2003, the new center was to have a plan to protect key facilities.

Paula Wendell was tapped to run the center's Key Asset Program. She's now an assistant special agent in charge at the FBI's San Francisco division. Working with top-level federal officials, including former presidential terrorism adviser Richard Clarke, Wendell's team identified 400 key targets in six months. It categorized them into three tiers, based on potential disruption from an attack.

In the Bay Area and other metropolises, the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force refined the effort, working with local contacts in law enforcement and key industries, such as power, water and telecommunications.

But 9/11 changed everything. The new Department of Homeland Security later took over the role and much of Wendell's staff as it launched into a new undertaking to prioritize "critical infrastructure."

The department has increased security on these sites and is working with local agencies to help them with better security, spokeswoman Valerie Smith said. But that view is not universally shared.

"All that key asset contingency planning (and) target hardening has all been transferred over to Homeland Security," Wendell said.

"We get a lot of requests about how to protect a bridge or a dam. We cannot tell them how to protect their entities. Homeland Security prioritizes targets. We don't."

Except Homeland Security doesn't either, according to Jenkins and numerous internal government audits and reports. So the FBI, the agency with the counter-terrorism analysts who sift through leads about plots all day long, has no

direct say in what to protect.

FBI agents familiar with the work describe a system in which tips and analyses get sent to Washington, with no word back whether anybody acted on, or even got, the information. FBI counter-terrorism agents are in the dark about whether the people protecting local targets get any help at all.

California left on its own

On the other end, the people protecting targets are not the people with the best knowledge of what terrorists might be planning. California was left to fend for itself.

The result, Jenkins said, is "public attention tends to shift as our political leadership careens from one threat to another."

Instead, he urged the government to "watch what terrorists do."

"For al-Qaida, they have a playbook. They do the same thing over and over and it becomes a core competency, like boat bombs," Jenkins said. Into the breach stepped CATIC.

Analysts came up with more than 600 priority targets, some as obscure as 20-screen cineplexes, others as vast and impossible to defend as Yosemite National Park. An attack on any was plausible, and the list's sense of priority withered.

Locals got ideas of their own, finding terrorism

under every rock.

Butte County officials gazed up at Oroville Reservoir, ranked below the top 100 on the state's target list, and saw a giant dam waiting to be detonated and vast water supplies open to poisoning.

Federal agents disagreed: Dams don't blow up as easily as in the movies, and it takes a lot of chemicals to turn millions of gallons of water lethal.

Targetless Madera County worried about pesticide storage at farms and propane tanks at mountain homes. Ventura County has eight targets on the state's list, but locals came up with more than 100, most of them government buildings.

Mendocino County has no listed targets, but local authorities identified half a dozen. Ukiah Fire Chief Kurt Latipaw said any remote, rural area could be a terrorist training ground and any highway a path for a bomb to target.

"I'm not one to say the sky is falling because the sky is not falling," Latipaw said. "But there's not an area in the state that doesn't have some level of risk."

Vinson and California Office of Homeland Security Deputy Director Michael Levy said locals know best. They designed the homeland security grant system to reflect that.

"I didn't believe the state ought to make that determination," Vinson said. "We shouldn't be meddling that deep into what they're doing, as long as they're getting good equipment."

Jenkins understands California's quandary.

"Threat analysis is very tricky in terrorism. In war it's based on enemy intentions and capabilities," he said. "In the Cold War it was easy. The Soviets had lots of nuclear missiles pointed right at us. When we are talking about terrorism it is much different. We switch. Instead of talking about the threat end, we reverse course and start with vulnerability.

"We post a hypothetical terrorist foe and conjure up a plot. It becomes a substitute for real threat analysis. So things that are hypothetical at the top of the paragraph by the middle of the paragraph are possible. By the end of the paragraph they become probable and by the end of the page they're imminent."

Locals found it easy to justify their grant requests, especially when their equipment could be used day in, day out.

Alpine County Assistant Sheriff Rob Levy said the pragmatic "all hazards" approach saves taxpayer dollars, not wastes them.

"You'll never see us buy a robot or Segway scooter in Alpine County," Levy said. "What I would not want to see is specialized equipment that sits there for 20 years gathering dust."

But why does tiny Alpine County need any homeland security gear at all? Is "all hazards" just a euphemism for something other than counter-terrorism? Certainly, Congress never expected homeland security money would go to everyday

wildfire gear. Small-county emergency coordinators have an answer.

Osama bin Laden is not the only type of terrorist in the world, they point out. There are domestic terrorists, lone nut cases who can be just as deadly, and terrorists pass through or stop in rural areas hoping to stay unnoticed.

Domestic terror fears

In Sierra County, emergency coordinator Liz Fisher said she worries about domestic splinter groups.

The Ku Klux Klan used to have parties celebrating Adolph Hitler's birthday in the area, which also is populated by constitutionalists, "people who don't believe the government is legitimate," as Fisher described them.

That logic resonates with Vinson, state grant writers and FBI counter-terrorism agents.

"Are people living in (sparsely) populated areas more expendable?" one key FBI agent asks. "If anything happens in Alpine County, who's going to respond? Alpine fire and police. And if it's a chem/bio attack, then they'll need the same suits as Oakland."

But Fisher, Jenkins, Vinson and Wendell all agree that intelligence gathering should play a bigger role in California's counter-terrorism strategy. Much of that intelligence points at conventional truck-bomb explosions, not chemical weapon threats such as ricin or biological threats such as anthrax.

"We're all geared up for a chem/bio/radiological event. A WMD event is certainly possible based on the world situation. If a bomb goes off in a train, it kills a carload full of people. But if a chem/bio weapon goes off, it kills two-thirds of San Mateo County," said the FBI agent, exaggerating to make his point. "I'm going to spend money trying to prevent the chem/bio attack. I would spend the money on the thing that can do the most damage."

Amid the imprecise guessing game that is intelligence gathering, California didn't have the luxury of waiting for a detailed analysis, Vinson said.

"The RANDs of the world wouldn't know a terrorist if (he or she) jumped out and grabbed them by the throat. You can't do a national threat assessment. It sounds nice, but it's just a lot of bs," Vinson said. "You have to do something now. Terrorism is a local fight. They know their territory. If you try to dial it in, it would be fool's play."

Meanwhile, Vinson said, information sharing is better than he's seen in his 40-year career. Levy, thumbing through California's homeland security grants, said the state is moving toward assigning grants to the places with targets.

"You're not going to see grant managers who know where the targets are. It's not coordinated," Levy said. "Do I think we'll get to that point? Yes. But we're not there yet."



Oakland



Tribune

TUESDAY
September 7, 2004



A flawed funding formula

While rural counties obtain enough state Homeland Security funds to arm every resident, areas with terrorist targets struggle.

Third in a four-day series
DAY 3 | MISDIRECTED MONEY

ALPINE COUNTY boasts two gas stations, one bar, 1,208 souls and not a single terrorist target. Tucked against the Nevada state line and cut off in winter by the snowed-in Carson Pass, it's California's least populous county.

Los Angeles County teems with 9.5 million people and is home to nearly a third of the state's potential terrorist targets. That includes California's top target, Los Angeles International Airport, site of a thwarted 1998 bomb plot.

But for every anti-terrorism dollar targetless Alpine County got per person, Los Angeles got 34 cents to prevent and respond to a terrorist attack on any of its 180 threatened sites.

That's because the state replicated a

widely criticized federal funding formula that steers millions to isolated rural areas and leaves target-rich communities high and dry.

"Every dollar spent in Sierra County is one less dollar spent protecting the Golden Gate Bridge," said Sierra County Sheriff Lee Adams III, whose county got \$79.52 per person, 10 times the state average.

Alpine County has gotten \$218.20 per person in anti-terror grants since the Sept. 11 attacks.

By Staff Writers

Michele R. Moretti and Sean Holstega

Missing the TARGET

A flawed plan to protect the homeland



FORMULA | News 6

State officials complained loudly about a federal formula they said cheated California out of badly needed anti-terror funds. But state officials used an almost identical formula to dole out money to counties, giving small, rural counties more money per person and per target than many larger, urban counties.

INSIDE

NEWS 6 | Much of California's federal Homeland Security money is caught up in bureaucratic red tape and local budget problems.

ONLINE | County-by-county breakdown of homeland security expenditures



STANDING GUARD

Federal funding stuck in red tape

Grants awarded to state, counties were misdirected, corrected a year later

By Michelle H. Marzicel
STAFF WRITER

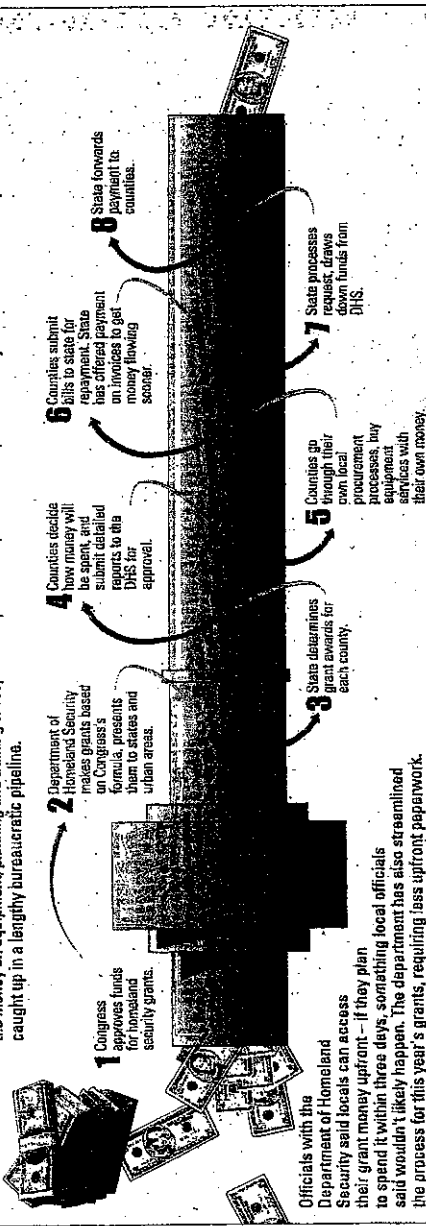
Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the federal government has promised California's emergency responders more than a quarter billion dollars for terrorism preparedness, but there was a catch: The money would not be provided until the equipment and services it was supposed to fund were bought and paid for.

As a result, California has been slow to spend the money it was awarded to help protect its homeland, according to grant progress reports and interviews with local officials responsible for administering the grants. Cities, counties and the state have recouped barely a quarter of the grant money earmarked for them in 2003, according to an Aug. 31 state expenditure report figures for the first round of urban area grants were not included. Spending figures for a tiny fraction of the funds allocated to the state's Office of Emergency Services — about \$2.6 million — were not available.

Two California counties, Del Norte and San Francisco, had recouped none of their grant money as of the end of August, a year after the grants were awarded. Records for San Francisco's first urban area grant were not provided. County emergency officials said they've spent more than the records show, or have ordered equipment that is on the way; San Francisco's police and fire

The Grant Process

Congress approved more than \$3 billion in homeland security grant funds for emergency responders for 2003 with the expectation that locals would quickly spend the money on equipment, planning and training to respond to a potential terrorist attack. But the money has been slow to flow, caught up in a lengthy bureaucratic pipeline.



JAMES GAYLES - SHIP

ment, emergency services directors in those counties said.

They said they are facing long waits for some equipment — and in some cases, payment for that equipment — because the rocketing demand for items that local emergency responders rarely, if ever, requested before the 9/11 attack.

Local officials said the reimbursement structure has forced them to go through their own procurement channels, adding an extra layer of bureaucracy and a measure of uncertainty to the process.

For instance, Robert Powell, Solano County's emergency services manager, said at least one of his county's supervisors balked at providing county funds to cover homeland security purchases up front.

And emergency service officials in several counties, who said they are responsible for administering the grants, said their offices were not set up to handle the amount of work the other, routine work their offices handle is falling by the wayside.

Still, officials in some counties said they deliberately

slowed the process because they wanted some time to think about how the money would be spent.

"It isn't as simple as 'Yes, we got some money, let's go buy something.' There's a lot of thought that has to go into what's a thoughtful, appropriate purchase," said Celeste Cook, acting director of Santa Clara County's Office of Emergency Services.

But some counties hit other roadblocks. In San Francisco, officials were required to formulate a regional plan for one grant and needed approval for all their grants from the Board of Supervisors.

And officials in other counties have had disagreements about how the money should be spent. California is the nation's only state that requires an approval authority, made up of fire, police and public health officials, to OK purchases.

Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman Valerie Smith defended the reimbursement process, saying it simply wants to keep track of how the billions in grants it is awarding are being spent.

"It ensures that we know

what states are spending. It's important that we are not just handing over money with no accountability whatsoever," Smith said.

Smith said that most federal grants offer reimbursement rather than cash upfront. But the federal government does offer a loophole: Those who win the grants can get the money upfront, if they spend it within three days, Smith said.

Local officials scoffed at the claim and said DHS requires detailed information on planned purchases upfront.

The state has offered to pay locals based on invoices for goods and services, instead of forcing counties to wait for them to arrive, said Mike Dayton, deputy director of the state Office of Homeland Security. But some county officials said their local procurement processes prevented them from taking advantage of that offer.

Still, Smith and Dayton conceded the systems in place to handle grants were not designed to handle such an avalanche of cash.

"I don't think anybody envisioned the amount of money that was going to come down for

preparateness from the federal government," said Dayton, who added that state officials have asked the federal government to reconsider the reimbursement scheme, to no avail.

Despite their issues with the process, county officials said they are better prepared for all types of disasters than they were before the grants were issued, and that the process has gotten first responders statewide talking about security like never before.

And they say the process is improving. This year, several major grants have been combined into one, and counties will have more time to submit applications for it. Also, Rep. Christopher Cox, R-Newport Beach, and head of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, has submitted a bill that could give local governments funds faster.

"It would have been cool to have a grant a year, instead of three at a time," said Neal O'Haire, emergency services manager for Napa County. "But these opportunities arise so seldom. You've got to make hay when the sun shines."

TUESDAY, September 7, 2004

Missing the TARGET

A flawed plan to protect the homeland

Funds distributed 'without any thought to risk'



JOHN GREEN — Staff file photo

FUNDING'S RESULT | Santa Clara County bomb squad technicians unload a new bomb disposal robot from their trailer. The county spent \$130,000 in homeland security funds on the robot.

MISSING THE TARGET

SUNDAY | WHAT'S WRONG

Local officials spend millions, with little regard to risk or threat, on technology they don't know how to use and which may be useless for terrorism.

MONDAY | WHAT'S PROTECTED

A hastily devised, error-filled list of potential terror targets baffles local officials, who protect sites not on the list. Meanwhile, not enough money flows to patrol top targets.

TODAY | MISDIRECTED MONEY

A flawed funding formula and little or no oversight or accountability assures faulty aim in the war on terrorism.

WEDNESDAY | A BETTER WAY

Focusing money and efforts on helping emergency workers communicate would be a more productive use of resources.

ONLINE | oaklandtribune.com

► Map detailing potential targets and the home security spending for all 58 California counties.

► Some of the homeland security documents obtained through the public records law.

► FORMULA, from News 1

enough to arm every man, woman and child with a 12-gauge pump shotgun, or an Uzi automatic pistol for each hand. Los Angeles County got \$8.15, an Oakland Tribune analysis shows.

Congress set up the federal grant program to distribute 40 percent of the grant money equally among states, without regard to risk. Lawmakers used a formula that had proved politically saleable for paving highways and favored rural states.

Wyoming, with a 2000 population of 493,782, got \$35.31 per person in 2003 alone, while California got just \$4.68 to protect each of its 33.9 million residents, according to one report.

"The biggest pot of money goes out without any thought to risk or threat. For a typical federal program, that would be sad. For a program dealing with (something) as important as homeland security, it's dangerous," said Tim Ransdell, who studied the funding formula for the Public Policy Institute of California.

California complained loudly about the federal formula. But state officials used an almost identical method to dole money to the state's 58 counties. Each county got an equal portion of the grant off the top, and the remaining cash was divided up based on population, not risk.

State officials earmarked \$8.5 million for the 15 counties with no targets and \$56 million for the 49 counties that don't have any of the top 50.

Urban counties generally fared poorly. Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties got less than \$5 per person in grant funds versus \$79.52 per person in Sierra County and \$32.16 in Modoc County. San Francisco, which got an additional grant for big cities, got \$45.81 per person.

Bay Area and Los Angeles-area counties also got fewer dollars per target than other California counties, but those dollar amounts are much higher: \$171,253 for each of Alameda County's 37 targets, versus \$1.24 million for Santa Cruz's lone target.

"Everybody fought for their nickel and they got their nickel. Maybe San Francisco needs a quarter, but nobody

had the guts to say so," Adams said. "It would be like giving San Francisco the same amount of money to fight forest fires as Sierra County" where 70 percent of the land is in a national forest.

But state Office of Homeland Security Deputy Director Michael Levy defended the state's formula, saying locals, and not the state, would best decide how the money should be spent.

"The money was to get to first responders, the people on the backs of trucks and in patrol cars. That was the intent and it's been pretty successful," said Levy, who runs the state's grant process. "Our job as a state entity is to get as much money for California as possible. We don't want to put any restrictions on it."

Small counties justified, with a sprinkle of politics, their needs for

homeland security money.

"What's the difference if you're responding to a fire and people are trapped in a building or the building has been blown up?" said Sierra County emergency coordinator Liz Fisher.

Like many rural crisis managers, Fisher looked at "all hazards" equipment, life-saving tools in terrorism attacks or everyday emergencies.

Californians also rely heavily on neighbors pitching in. Most cities can't sustain the extraordinary manpower and equipment needed for huge fires, earthquakes and other disasters, so they call for mutual aid.

Targetless counties sent firefighters to Los Angeles County's giant wildfires last year and to the East Bay Hills fire that destroyed more than 3,000 Oak-

land and Berkeley homes in 1991.

Alpine County has no paid firefighters and for the better part uses hand-me-down firetrucks and gear. It chases every federal grant. The Department of Homeland Security cash bought a heavy rescue truck and two Jaws of Life extrication tools, plus a dozen self-contained breathing systems and a refiller for their oxygen tanks — all needed for tourist car wrecks and burning mountain homes, or helping a nearby county.

"I doubt the terrorists are going to drop a bomb on us," said Markleeville volunteer fire chief Wayne Thomson. "But it could happen to our neighbors and have a tremendous impact on us and our ability to deliver services."

Those arguments made sense in Sacramento, said former state homeland security chief George Vinson.

"They were saying good things. Where did they find these al-Gaida cells? In places like eastern Oregon, with 50 sheriffs and 150 cows." I said, "You're damned right. Who am I to say no?" Vinson said. "But it comes down a little to politics. How do you tell volunteer firefighters they don't get anything?"

But emergency officials in some urban counties questioned the state's reasoning. They said they are being shortchanged.

"Does Amador County really need the same amount of funding that an urban area like Alameda County or San Francisco needs? Probably not. There are not as severe threats in rural counties as urban counties," said Bill McCammon, fire chief for Alameda County.

Back in Congress, at least one Californian sees it like McCammon.

Rep. Chris Cox, R-Newport Beach, head of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, has authored a bill to change the way the money is distributed. The bill, which has run through several House committees, would require the Department of Homeland Security to award grant dollars based on risk.

Cox decried California's formula for awarding grants, saying it's unfair for small, rural counties like Alpine to be treated the same way as San Francisco or Los Angeles.

"The answer is not to deprive Alpine County of the equipment and training

need to protect the 1,200 Californians that live there, but to make sure it's part of a regional effort that shares responsibility," he said.

Homeland Security Department spokeswoman Valerie Smith said her agency is shifting more money to urban areas. She said it has asked Congress for more money for its big-city grant program in an effort to better deal with the risks they face.

"We are committed to getting the money to the areas that need it. We are certainly looking at ways to improve the distribution process," Smith said.

Staff writer Ian Hoffman contributed to this story.

Oakland



Tribune

WEDNESDAY
September 8, 2004



Communication failure is deadly

Federal, state agencies have been slow to fix
a key disaster problem: incompatible radios

By Staff Writer **Ian Hoffman**

Missing the TARGET
A flawed plan to protect the homeland

INSIDE

NEWS 7 | Many counties are using new technology to solve their communication problems, but is it working?

ONLINE | County-by-county breakdown of homeland security expenditures.

Last in a four-day series
DAY 4 | A BETTER WAY

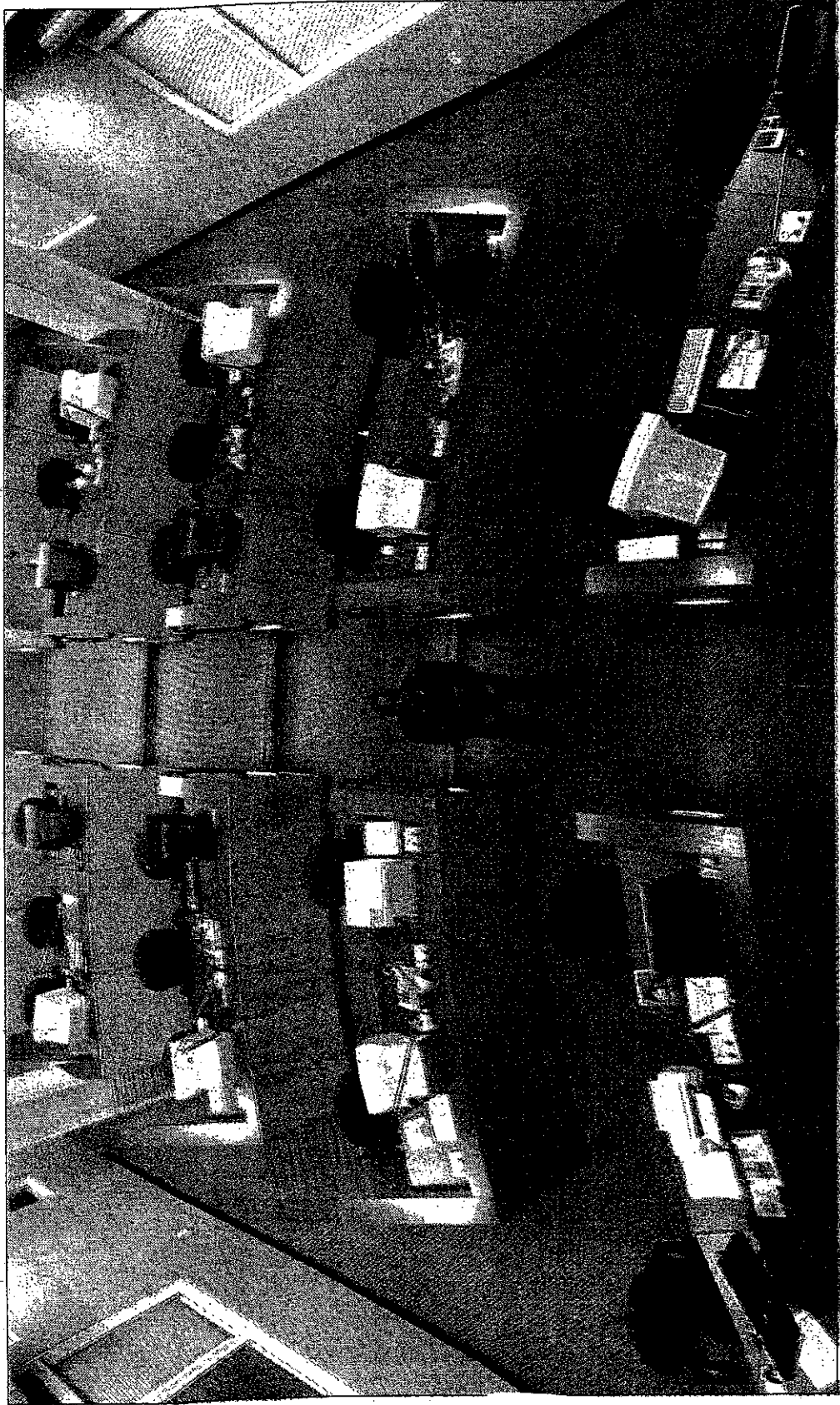
WHEN TERRORISTS slammed American Airlines Flight 11 into the World Trade Center's North Tower, a fireball of jet fuel shot out of the lobby elevator shaft, sending a commander of the Port Authority police diving for cover.

Twelve minutes later, he radioed for evacuation of the entire World Trade Center. But his order never reached the towers' security, most of his own officers, the New York Police Department or the Fire Department of New York.

Some 421 rescuers died. Fractured and overloaded communications kept emergency commanders from knowing where rescuers were and what was happening. As many as 121 firefighters are thought never to have heard the final evacuation command before the second tower collapsed.

"People watching on TV certainly had more knowledge of what was happening a hundred floors above us than we did in the lobby," FDNY Assistant Chief Peter Hayden told the 9/11 Commission.

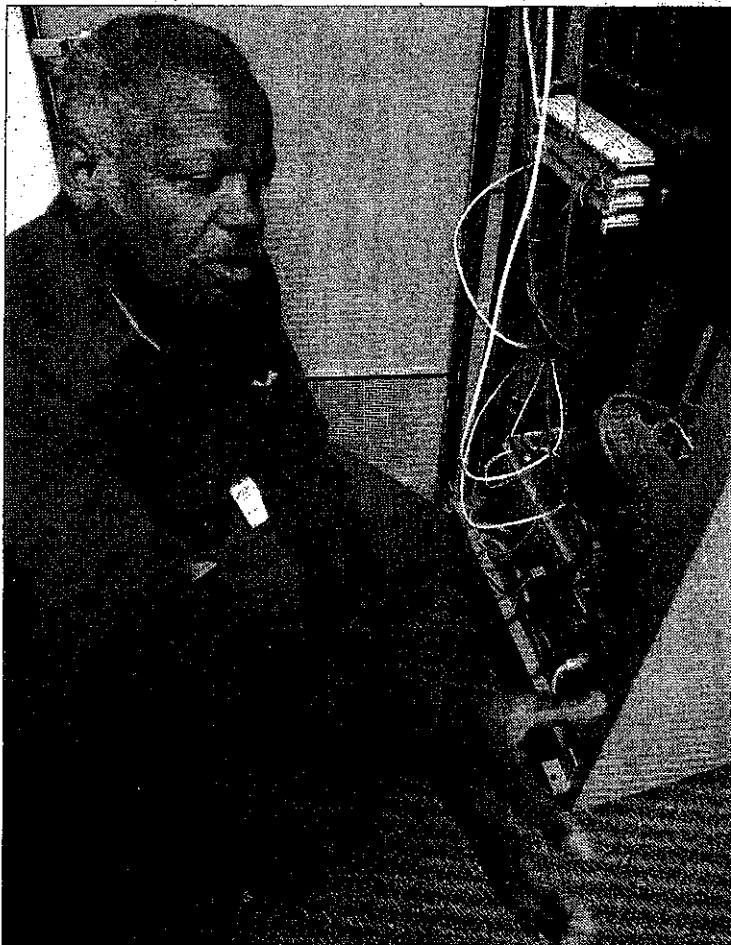
RADIO | News 7



Photos by **KEED CLARK**

COMMUNICATIONS CENTER | Oakland's Emergency Operations Center, created after the 1989 Loma Prieta quake, is designed to orchestrate the response of multiple city agencies to a man-made or natural disaster, according to Dennis Doss, assistant city chief of communications.

Incompatible radios could create deadly scenario



REED CLARK

BROKEN LINKS | Dennis Doss, assistant city chief of communications, displays Oakland's audio patch, an ACU-1000 from Raytheon JPS Communications. The unit is unprogrammed and unconnected to the radios that it would link.

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► Some of the homeland security documents obtained through the public records law.

► RADIO, from News 1

The commission echoed reviews of almost every major U.S. attack — the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the 2002 Washington, D.C.-area sniper attacks. — concluding that incompatible or inadequate communications slowed emergency response and were a major factor in the loss of life.

Three years later, California counties and cities are still using different radios, different airwaves and different coded languages.

"There always have been questions among agencies about why don't we do this?" said Terry Betts, communications chief for the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department. "Why don't we put in systems that can talk to each other?"

An Oakland Tribune review of Bay Area emergency communications systems found a potentially dangerous mix of incompatible technology, turf battles and bureaucratic inertia is to blame.

"We're very slow off the gate here," said Glen Corbett, an associate professor of fire sciences at John Jay College of the City University of New York and a New Jersey fire captain. "They're relying on the state and local guys to handle it, and the Department of Homeland Security needs to play a much more active role."

The Bush administration and state officials have encouraged local agencies to forge common radio systems. But federal and state officials have not offered a strategy for compatible radios, even though California has a storied history of disaster and communication problems. Firefighters have burned, police officers have been killed by friendly fire and civilians have died because public-safety agencies could not talk to one another.

Federal and state officials also haven't decided what those systems should do or look like, leaving local agencies uncertain about venturing tens of millions of dollars on new radios, repeaters and towers.

"We're trying to get a handle on that and figure out what our goals are," said Gary Winuk, California's chief deputy director for homeland security since 2001.

Both the Clinton and Bush administrations failed to deliver on multiple demands for standards for common radio communications. Top Bush aides explained to a Bay Area expert two years ago that "We're not in the business of forcing industry" to share radio-industry software secrets, even if those secrets keep first responders from talking to each other.

Cities and counties, focused on red ink, workaday problems and control of their own forces, have been slow to build joint radio networks.

As a result, most state and local first responders could be out of effective control in the lethal first hour of an attack. It's a critical window for preventing more attacks or saving lives.

Instead of pressing a button and talking, the region's emergency commanders first will ferry messages through overwhelmed dispatchers, then race to set up "black boxes" that patch together their radios.

The black boxes have proved effective in exercises on the Golden Gate Bridge and the Bay itself, and probably will work for most of the region's iconic targets for terrorists — its bridges, maritime ports, airports and other waterfront attractions. But they don't work everywhere, and they can take an hour or more to set up.

How did the Bay Area come to rely on black boxes and luck?

Earthquake, fire and terror

California, so accustomed to disaster that emergency managers dub the state "an Act of God theme park," is better equipped for communications than much of the country. State and local radio officials led the nation in setting aside "mutual-aid" channels for talk between agencies.

Berkeley student unrest in the 1960s led to creation of the California Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Radio System. It lets neighboring police coordinate response to day-to-day emergencies. Firefighters gained their own mutual-aid or "white" chan-

neils in the 1970s and have a statewide plan for communicating in large wildfires.

But mutual-aid channels are limited in size and number. Only one responder can speak at a time. And they are almost certain to be overwhelmed in a major terrorist attack: The giant wildfires in Southern California last year repeatedly strained the state's most capable radio network, state and local experts said. Oakland's radios and command staff were strained by fires the same year.

In a catastrophe, dozens of agencies must work together at a moment when radios, cell phones and land lines are jammed with traffic. The right message to the right place could evacuate people in front of a cloud of germs, deliver antidotes to nerve-gas victims or stop a suspected truck bomb short.

Instead, Bay Area police and rescuers are likely to lose precious time struggling to share information and coordinate their efforts. In killer quakes and large urban fires, as in the Sept. 11 attacks, such delay and confusion could mean lost lives.

Oakland officials promised to buy a new communications system after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, when emergency call centers were overwhelmed and fire, police and public works officials could not communicate directly. Two years later, the city still had incompatible radios that were overwhelmed by the Oakland hills fire, which claimed 25

lives.

More than 250 outside agencies rushed in to help Oakland fight the fire. But radio contact was so spotty, they were forced to rely on an ancient method — foot messenger. Fire observers in helicopters had to land to file reports as the blaze torched 790 homes in the first hour.

Oakland fire commanders didn't know where the fire was, where their firefighters were or where safe evacuation routes lay.

A battalion chief jumped to the street to save a woman. Getting no help on his radio, both burned. A police officer died under a sheet of flame surrounded by homeowners that he was trying to lead to safety.

Turf politics, packed airwaves

Creating a better, more integrated system is far from easy.

"Getting all our agencies on the same radio format — Marin County alone took eight years," said county emergency service director Christopher Godley.

Police and rescuers have very limited airwaves for talking. Radio real estate in the Bay Area became overcrowded eight years ago. Open frequencies are largely unavailable without bumping into cellular, television or other public safety transmissions.

Agencies also are faced with a bewildering array of radio technologies, none universally embraced. New radio systems cost tens of millions of dollars.

So far, most improvements in California's communications after Sept. 11 have been inside counties, not between them.

Many cities and counties — including San Francisco and Oakland, and Marin, Santa Clara, San Mateo and Alameda counties — have put their own police, firefighters, public works engineers and health officers on the same radio networks. But agencies' desire to make their

own decisions has been an unspoken roadblock to greater cooperation.

Agencies paid millions for radios tailored to their narrow needs, their unique frequencies and control of their forces. Some fear losing authority in moving to a larger, integrated system.

"The city would like to keep control of their own stuff because they like to, and the county would like to keep control of their own stuff because they like to," says Oakland chief technology officer Bob Glaze.

"There are a lot of walls that need to be broken down," said John Powell, a longtime figure in Bay Area communications who chairs the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council's Interoperability Subcommittee. "We have all these agencies all over the country who think they're so big they don't need help. But they will need help."

In a time of shrinking budgets, local officials are trying to keep firehouses open and police officers on the payroll to deal with everyday crime. Terrorist attacks are a low probability and lower priority.

"Nobody really thinks it will happen," one Oakland fire official said. "But people in the flatlands hear gunfire on their streets every day."

Promise on the horizon

Despite the high hurdles, Bay Area emergency radio managers have started to talk about what was unthinkable nine months ago: Building a network of shared, common radio systems that would allow an immediate, coordinated response at the flip of a switch.

With millions of federal dollars going to purchase new radio systems elsewhere, emergency communicators in the South Bay and East Bay recently persuaded commanders to rate

common radios as their top priority.

"We're at a time in our nation when we have to put aside those issues of local control and realize no one jurisdiction is an island," said Alameda County Fire Chief Bill McCammon, president of the California Association of Fire Chiefs. "As we move into this new mission, we are more interdependent on one another than anyone has been in the past."

Not everyone was fully on board. Charged with submitting an application for anti-terror money to be used across the East Bay, Oakland officials initially reassigned funds earmarked for regional radio equipment to bolster the city's own budget for manpower.

When Alameda and Contra Costa county officials protested, the city restored the money. But Oakland still is weighing a \$12 million purchase of thousands of new digital radios that offer cloudy prospects for connecting to its neighbors unless more money is spent.

Glaze, the city's chief technology officer described it as a work in progress: "Everyone's looking for a way to do it."

Still, pockets of cooperation are cropping up around the Bay. Santa Clara County, the region's pioneer in building a common radio system, is proposing data links to Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties. San Francisco is talking about linking dispatchers in San Mateo and Marin counties, and possibly across the East Bay. Alameda and Contra Costa counties are proposing a full, shared radio system, with dispatch links to Santa Clara and San Francisco.

Sacramento and Contra Costa counties are eyeing Solano County as critical for a Bay-to-capital radio link along Interstate 80.

"Within the last month, I have seen more excitement and more energy going into this than I have in the last five years," said Contra Costa's Betts in July. But "even if we had all the money right now, we would be looking at a single system (for the East Bay) in five years."

"It's going to happen," agreed Jim Gobel, a senior communications official in San Francisco. "It's just, for me, it's like herding cats."

For those who remember Oakland's 1970 and 1991 hills fires, patience is thin.

Frances Gray Scott, 85, never was evacuated from her son's home in the 1991 East Bay hills fire, despite having Oakland police and three dozen firefighters from San Francisco, Berkeley, Marin and Alameda counties within four blocks. Scott's family found her remains in the ruins the next day.

"We need somebody in a very high position to just take them by the lapels and say this needs to happen," said her son, Peter Gray Scott.

Technology in place, but is it working?

■ Bay Area supplied with black boxes, but many of the devices aren't tested.

By Ian Hoffman

STAFF WRITER

In a terrorist attack, rescuers can expect overloaded radio channels and overwhelmed dispatchers. Increasingly, they are relying on black boxes that can patch together the voices of commanders across city and county lines.

These boxes have proved effective in drills held at the Golden Gate Bridge and in Contra Costa County and in Los Angeles. They sell for a fraction of the cost of new radio systems and have been heavily endorsed by the federal government.

But experts say the devices come with sharp limitations that local agencies are starting to appreciate.

The black boxes work by patching together audio signals from different radios and cell phones that otherwise couldn't talk to each other. In simplest terms, it's akin to feeding the sound from each radio or phone into the microphones of the other radios and phones.

The hands-down California

best-seller among these magical devices is the ACU-1000, made by Raytheon JPS Communications, thanks in part to a glowing endorsement from U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

California governments bought more than 100 of them, at \$11,000 to \$40,000 apiece. A sales representative figures each of the 58 counties bought at least one. The California Highway Patrol bought 50, San Francisco has three. Contra Costa County has 10, and Alameda County is buying five.

But experts say they're not sure agencies always knew what they were buying.

"It has its usefulness, and it has its problems," said Glenn Nash, frequency coordinator for California's state radio systems and a former president of the national Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials. "It currently has a lot of hype as being the right tool for everything, but it's not."

The box only works in places where plugged-in agencies have overlapping radio coverage. It requires an experienced radio engineer and a careful plan for linking radio systems together, said John Powell, a 32-year veteran of Bay Area law-enforce-

ment communications and part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's RAP-IDCOM project to link incident commanders by radio within an hour of a disaster.

Tying radios together on the fly in a major emergency, Powell said, is "a disaster waiting to happen." Absent a plan, powering up two or more ACU-1000s can snarl multiple frequencies in the region.

Los Angeles region officials test their network of ACU-1000s twice a week to ensure smooth talking in a crisis. In contrast, a Bay Area agency's "black box" may still be bubble-wrapped in a shipping box.

Contra Costa County is an exception. Its patches wove together state and local radios on multiple exercises, starting with an anti-war protest at Chevron-Texaco headquarters in San Ramon.

"Short of giving everyone a new radio, it's the only way to do it," said Chris Suter, deputy chief of San Ramon Valley Fire Department. "It's very viable for an interim solution and very economical. But long term, we need more."

Oakland, the first Bay Area city to buy a black box, is a dif-

ferent story. One of its devices resides at the city's combination fire dispatch and emergency operations center. But recently a top city communications official could not find evidence of the machine on the central dispatch computer. The device's own computer screen showed no radios yet had been programmed into it, and the black box itself, situated in a storage room on a separate floor, appeared not to have any radios plugged into it.

Powell suspects most audio patches in California are in the same shape.

"I would say it's not unusual to have these things sitting out there still in the shipping box, or it's installed and nobody's got any radios hooked up to it or they don't have anyone trained," Powell said. "I would guess that one in 10 are properly coordinated. Somebody needs to figure out how these things are going to be used."

In the Bay Area, that's Mike Griffin, assistant chief of law enforcement for the governor's Office of Emergency Services.

"He's been a real kick-starter," said Jim Gobel, a senior communications official in San Francisco. "He's the one who said 'let's get something



JAY SOLMONSON — Staff

BLACK BOXES | Chris Suter, deputy chief of San Ramon-Valley Fire Department, says black boxes have worked well in Contra Costa County.

under our belt, let's get an accomplishment."

Griffin, working out of a regional headquarters in Oakland, made sure two audio patches in the Bay Area really count.

One ACU-1000 connects the half-dozen agencies responding to a disaster on the Golden Gate Bridge. It is a linchpin of the most refined disaster communications plan in the Bay Area.

A second sits in a state emergency services truck parked in San Francisco and poised for hauling to a major attack or disaster. At present, it is the best hope for common communications in the city and its imme-

diolate environs.

"The terrorists aren't going to wait and this is the only rational way to tie these systems together," said David Boyd, deputy director of the Department of Homeland Security's interoperable communications program.

Griffin sees the state's truck in San Francisco and the device inside as the first of several for the North, East and South Bay.

It's only an interim measure, he said, but "I consider it the first real step toward interoperability in the Bay Area."

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THURSDAY
September 9, 2004

LOCAL 6

Opinion

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Bureaucrats err on side of secrecy, not public safety

THE spending of public dollars is the public's business. Taxpayers have a right to know how their money is being spent and whether it is being used in their best interest.

That is what presumably separates reporters working under the cloak of the Constitution from the rest of the world's journalists.

But as reporters working on our series, "Missing the Target," discovered, America's bureaucrats in the post 9/11 world would rather err on the side of secrecy than provide taxpayers with information that is rightfully in the public domain.

Reporters looking to review the appropriation of millions of dollars in homeland security funding had to file

multiple requests under the California Public Records Act just to get the attention of the appropriate government officials. Once they noticed us, they tried for months to stare us down, hoping we'd just go away.

We didn't. Even when handed copies of documents with all the pertinent information blacked out, like some troubled kindergarten project, reporters kept the heat on, filing repeated written and verbal requests for the appropriate financial data.

In the end, we got most of what we asked for and discovered that homeland security money wasn't being spent well after all. And that's important information, for all of us. What a shame that our government tried to keep us in the dark.

Are we as safe as we should be? It's time to face reality

IT was understandable when, in those frantic weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks, Congress rushed billions of dollars to America's first responders for a new anti-terror mission without a strategy and with little guidance or oversight.

Three years later, the absence of a plan or an accepted target list or priorities for domestic defenses would be an embarrassment. But that's what a four-day Oakland Tribune series has found.

As the 9/11 commission said, "We understand the contention that every state and city needs some minimum infrastructure for emergency response. But federal homeland security assistance should not remain a program for general revenue sharing. It should supplement state and local resources based on risks or vulnerabilities that merit additional support. Congress should not use this money as a pork barrel."

Yet that's how everyone from the White House to the Capitol to California is treating homeland security funds, doling them out just like dollars for paving highways, not defending against a real enemy bent on attacking real targets.

Smaller counties are using the money to buy basic fire gear, night-vision goggles and surveillance cameras, while bigger counties are left wanting.

If the new equipment were needed to respond to a terror attack, first responders may not know how to use it. Exercises are scattered and infrequent, and few emergency agencies are recording what they learn from anti-terror exercises for fear of being sued.

Tom Ridge's Department of Homeland Security is only now starting to provide guidance to locals, such as what a protective suit should be able to protect against or what to do in an orange alert. His agency doesn't expect to recommend a basic design for

common radio systems until December.

At this rate, it could take years for first responders to figure out whether they have spent tens of millions of federal dollars on the right gear.

Three years is too long for Californians to wait for answers to straightforward questions: Where should you spend the first dollar on homeland security? What is the priority? What are we defending against and why? Washington and Sacramento have no answers, and they should.

Local agencies need guidance, and it's been sorely lacking. California has been through three directors of homeland security in nine months and is looking for its fourth.

California owes its people more. Homeland security can't mean all things to all people, where notions of terrorism are blurred to include drug dealing, gangs, vandalism and political dissent. California must decide what terrorism really is, where gaps exist in its defenses and how to fill them.

There is no excuse for covering up or failing to fix deficiencies. But federal and state lawmakers should devise limited liability protections for first responders. Agencies must be able to document their needs and fill them without fear of legal action, at least for a reasonable period of time.

The common thread in California's homeland security misadventures is a lack of vision, strategy and political courage — stretching from Washington to Sacramento to city hall. California doesn't need overbroad notions of terrorism that see threats under every rock and targets all around. It needs leaders, people who aren't afraid to say no and who will weave strong security nets around California's targets.

Are we safer than on Sept. 11, 2001? Absolutely. Are we as safe as we should or need to be? Far from it. It's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work.