

Information Sharing Deters Terrorism and Solves Cases The NJ Suspicious Activity Reporting System (NJSARS) and NJ Data Exchange (NJDEx)

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The recent 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and the horrific violence this summer in Norway provide ample reminders that vigilance must be maintained to counter the threat of terrorism.

To assist in this mission, as well as to assist crime-fighting efforts, New Jersey provides two massive databases that allow police officers and intelligence analysts to share information. These tools, managed by the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP), make it easier to “connect the dots.”

The goal is that by sharing information among departments, activity that could indicate terrorist planning, acquisition or deployment can be detected before an attack.

The value of these databases – the New Jersey Data Exchange (NJDEx) and the New Jersey Suspicious Activity Reporting System (NJSARS) – continues to grow, in large part because more New Jersey police departments have become linked to them.

Training for NJSARS, which is now part of the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative (NSI), is available through NJLearn (www.njlearn.com), administered by OHSP's Training Bureau.

NJSARS is a prime part of OHSP efforts to detect terrorism, and to include all New Jerseyans in the effort. The system accepts “tips and leads” from law enforcement, the private sector and citizens through its 24/7 tip line staffed by the Counter-Terrorism Watch (CTWatch) Unit. That Unit is based at the state's fusion center, the Regional Operations Intelligence Center (ROIC).

All reports are shared immediately with the FBI, which has first right to investigate. In 2011, over 1,275 SARs were forwarded to the FBI, up from over 1,200 in 2010. If the FBI relinquishes a lead, it goes to OHSP for processing, investigation and disposition.

Counterterrorism coordinators in the 21 County Prosecutor's Offices not only can submit SARs, but have the ability to view SARs in the database maintained by OHSP. This demonstrates how OHSP works to maintain a two-way avenue of communication. SARs are also submitted by mass transit agencies and police departments, as well as the private and public sectors.

The 2007 Fort Dix case illustrated that the system could detect a terror plot. A clerk at a Circuit City store in Burlington County became concerned after viewing a video he was asked to copy: it contained images of men shouting in Arabic and firing weapons. Store management contacted police, who contacted the county counterterrorism coordinator in Burlington County. She alerted CTWatch, and the FBI and OHSP began investigating. Arrests followed an undercover investigation, and five New Jersey residents were convicted of plotting to kill soldiers at Fort Dix.

With NJSARS linked to the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative (NSI), New Jersey is now part of a unified process for reporting, tracking, and accessing SARs, as called for in the *National Strategy for Information Sharing*. The long-term goal is for state, local, tribal, and federal law enforcement organizations, as well as private sector entities, to participate in the NSI, allowing them to share information about suspicious activity that is potentially terrorism-related.

To support suspicious activity reporting, OHSP's Training Bureau developed three courses, all of which are available through its NJ Learn online education center for New Jersey sworn and certified first responders.

One course, "NJSARs Basic User," is required for access to the NJSARs database. By December 2011, over 1,600 had completed the online module, while over 200 completed the course through instructor-led training. OHSP also developed an online "Roll Call" course to provide an introduction to NJSARs that nearly 1,800 users have completed.

And in support of the US Bureau of Justice Assistance and Institute of Intergovernmental Research, OHSP created an online training video and materials for the Nationwide SARs Initiative course, "NSI SARS – Line Officer Training." To date, over 2,400 users have completed it and OHSP encourages all Law Enforcement officers to view this training and become familiar with the NSI.

NJDEx – think of it as Google for cops – is available to all New Jersey law enforcement through CJIS 2000, which can also be utilized to access NJSARS.

NJDEx, operated by OHSP, NJ State Police, and the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI), will ultimately allow every police department in the state to get timely information from any other department in New Jersey.

After three years of operation, it contains over 4 million records from departments in about three-quarters of the 21 counties as well as the New Jersey State Police. The remaining counties are working to come online.

The data is extracted automatically from the various records management systems, often with the aid of technology purchased through state and federal grants. It aims to create no additional work for police departments that are already burdened. Yet it gives all departments instant access to data, and the appropriate officer, when they are chasing leads.

One example of the value of NJDEx came in 2009 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, the mega-base comprising Air Force, Army and Navy facilities in southern New Jersey. Personnel with S-2 Criminal Investigations & Intelligence located four more subjects in a case by utilizing NJDEx. Several subjects had been captured on film, but only two had been identified, according to the investigators. When those two names were entered into NJDEx, military investigators discovered they were involved in similar criminal activity around the county.

NJDEx is now linked to the FBI's N-DEx (National Data Exchange), which joins law enforcement agencies around the country. N-DEx is a powerful investigative tool that allows officers and analysts to search on incident data from participating data sources across the nation. With the integration of NJDEx and N-DEx, it allows law enforcement agencies to link information not only across jurisdictions, but state borders. Access is through LEO.

It's a tool every police department can use.

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