Tool Provides Information Access for Emergency Response

Beep beep beep. The signal does not mark the arrival of an everyday type of text message, but rather an alert that a suspected shooter has been reported in a downtown high school. The shift commander quickly accesses the Kansas City Regional Asset Protection and Response System on his PDA and instantly begins to review critical infrastructure information that will help lead to a quick and successful resolution of the situation.

Originally developed as a Microsoft® Excel spreadsheet in the wake of the 1999 Columbine High School shootings, the Asset Protection and Response System has evolved into a sophisticated Internet-based program that can be accessed from desktops, police cruisers and PDAs/smartphones. Although the Kansas City Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Region, with the Kansas City (Mo.) Police Department serving as the lead agency, produced the package as a solo effort, the agency plans to willingly share the tool with other departments at no charge.

Kansas City police Capt. Michael Corwin, a member of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) States, Major Cities and Counties Regional Center Constituent Advisory Group, says the region will only ask that other agencies sign an agreement to not make any changes to the system, because Kansas City wants to maintain version control. NLECTC is a program of the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice.

"We will develop a working group and users will work together on what updates the system needs and who will pay for them," he says. "I think it's the most robust municipality-developed program of its sort in the country. Its primary purpose is to provide first responders with information they can use during an incident."

Corwin notes that some practitioners may be familiar with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Automated Critical Asset Management System (ACAMS), which serves more as a planning tool, and that Kansas City has worked cooperatively with ACAMS (http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/gc_1190729724456.shtm) to develop a partnership.

The Kansas City system has a secondary function of providing risk assessment tools to help determine whether specific infrastructure is well protected and recommend measures to "harden the target," Corwin says. "But primarily, it gives first responders of all types — police, fire and emergency medical services — access to floor plans, GIS mapping, contact information, photos and much more. It's as robust as the user [at the participating facility] wants it to be. It's really unlimited as to how much and what kind of information can be input. Preplanning for perimeters and command post sites, triage sites, continuity of operation plans, evacuation plans, anything you can imagine — there are examples of all of them in there."

That capability has come a long way from the original spreadsheets, Corwin explains, adding that the originator passed his work on to another supervisor, and then the program went through IT hard-coding so that personnel could perform site surveys at schools and other recognized critical infrastructures and input information. Eventually, after several years, a project rescope moved it to the Internet and the Kansas City Police Department's Homeland Security section. Once the program moved to the Internet, officers gained access from mobile data terminals, although that option had to be temporarily lifted during the latest redesign phase. However, version 2.0 brings back that access and adds the PDA/smartphone capability.

"We have approximately 1,200 sites that are at some level of completion for the region," Corwin says. "You really never complete entering data, because it will hold as much as you want to put in. We have tiers, and the critical national and regional infrastructure goes in tier 1, and we can put a drug house in tier 5 and input information that will help tactical officers. The possibilities are just limitless."

For more information on the Kansas City project, contact Capt. Michael Corwin at (816) 889-6130 or Michael.corwin@kcpd.org/.