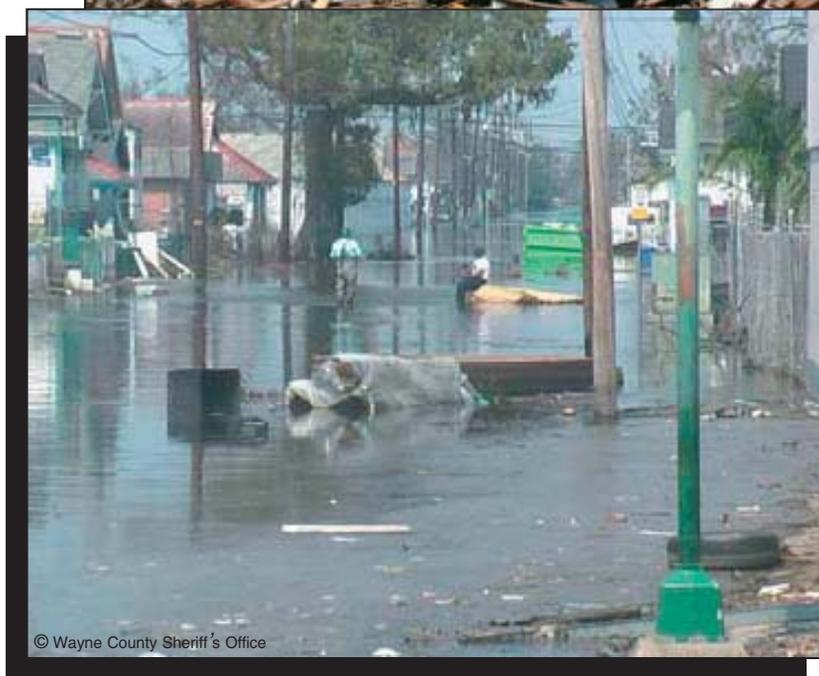

Law Enforcement Online *Facing the Challenges of Katrina*

By LESLEY G. KOESTNER



In today's age of terrorism, what does the weaponry of law enforcement look like? Perhaps, it is as hydra-headed as the enemy—evolving, expanding, and changing to meet circumstances. Such an image also may describe the FBI's Law Enforcement Online (LEO), a conduit for intelligence information that forms a cornerstone of the organization's Information Sharing Initiative by providing links to federal, state,

local, and tribal law enforcement agencies nationwide.¹

For the past 10 years, the FBI has expanded the capabilities of LEO to such an extent that when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, LEO was ready to help the community on many levels. What did LEO provide? Communication, information, expertise, full-time assistance, and direct access—all intangible resources needed by first-responding public safety officers facing the initial onslaught of an emergency. LEO's main focus after September 11 addressed terror-related events. Although not a terrorist incident, Katrina caused such widespread devastation that LEO immediately became operational to offer needed communications assistance to law enforcement personnel.

LEO's Role

A sample log illustrates how LEO helped convey information to law enforcement personnel during the aftermath of Katrina. This represents only one example of the many ways that LEO can contribute to the intelligence, investigative, and safety functions in law enforcement. Like the Internet on which it is built, LEO can be whatever its members want it to be.

Monday, August 29: As early morning weather reports warn of Katrina barreling toward New Orleans, the head of the FBI's LEO Policy, Planning, and Membership Unit keeps a close watch on the hurricane's progress. He advises the author and another agent to prepare for the possibility of setting up a virtual command

center (VCC). A VCC runs a software program that provides the capability to maintain an awareness of evolving situations for crisis management, allowing LEO members to track, display, and disseminate information in real time about street-level and tactical activities. After Katrina hits New Orleans and flood waters approach the FBI's office there, LEO personnel at the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division in Clarksburg, West Virginia, create two VCCs that serve the affected area. VCC #1 provides aid specific to the FBI's temporary emergency local office, quickly set up in Baton Rouge, that helps track FBI employees and their relatives in and around New Orleans. VCC #2, also located in Baton Rouge, is a multifaceted tool to enhance the greater law enforcement community's situational awareness; it enables FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to monitor events and resources in the affected areas and to help provide federal, state, and local support to the first responders. LEO personnel at FBI Headquarters support VCC #2 by processing LEO applications and updating the highlights page and other information.

Tuesday, August 30: About 20 calls per hour from FBI offices across the country come



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***With LEO,
law enforcement
personnel nationwide
can exchange vast
amounts of
information in
real time.***

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Plugging Into LEO's Vast Resources

Law enforcement personnel who want to participate in LEO's services need only fill out a form and have access to an industry-standard personal computer and an Internet connection. To apply for a LEO membership application and for information about LEO, contact the LEO Program Office at 202-324-8833, by fax at 202-324-3364, or by e-mail at leoprogramoffice@leo.gov. After signing up, LEO members will receive a packet of information, a disk of software, and scheduled training.

The LEO Web site is easy to navigate for quick access to information. Most law enforcement agencies have a staff member dedicated to watching the site. Immediately upon logging on, the member sees the highlights page, which presents the headlines and summaries of crucial news of the day culled from sources around the world with hotlinks to the full articles. LEO personnel usually update the highlights once a day. During unusual events, however, hourly updates are common. Representatives of the LEO Special Interest Groups may post highlights as needed.

into the Baton Rouge command posts to update the two VCCs. Most cellular and landline phones in the area do not work because of disabled electricity and communications lines, but a generator at the command post recharges cell phone batteries and powers the VCC.

Wednesday, August 31: VCC operators continue providing disaster recovery services to Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. They track supplies and keep in touch with federal, state, and local government agencies and FBI Headquarters.

Thursday, September 1: From August 29 to September 1, LEO personnel process more than 150 new applications from federal government entities and local law enforcement for membership in LEO. This tally includes only those applications

from personnel whose duties relate specifically to the Katrina disaster.

Monday, September 5: As part of the VCC's services, LEO personnel generate the Hurricane Katrina Resource Locations map, which identifies the location of supplies, incident command posts, dispatching centers, FEMA offices, and other key resources. This and other maps, such as the Water Depth Analysis one, demonstrate how information and expertise can translate into ways to deliver concrete assistance. All LEO members can view the maps to learn the type and location of available resources and the areas deeply affected by flooding. From September 5 through 7, FBI staff from CJIS hold conference calls with LEO personnel and

law enforcement officers from affected areas to continue coordinating support for disaster recovery efforts.

Friday, September 9: By now, the flood waters have receded enough for the administration of VCC #2 to move from Baton Rouge to a newly established multiagency command post in New Orleans. Three days later, a new phase of LEO's response to Hurricane Katrina begins when the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division requests that LEO personnel set up a third VCC, operated from a command post at CJIS, to provide antifraud support. The TV news programs display the FBI's hotline number that people can use to report suspected fraud related to relief efforts. Examples of such fraud include people posing as

Katrina victims while trying to cash counterfeit FEMA checks or attempting to file fraudulent insurance claims.

The National Alert System

As seen in the Katrina-related activities, the VCCs can help law enforcement use LEO's services during crises. In July 2004, the LEO Operations Unit introduced the software program on which VCC services rely, emphasizing its use in conjunction with the National Alert System (NAS). Employed together during national and regional special security events, the VCC and the NAS can help facilitate communication within the law enforcement community. For example, NAS alerts generated from the VCC can reach all recipients simultaneously without the delay inherent in traditional phone trees.

The NAS, introduced in 2003, can deliver secure pop-up message boxes containing law enforcement sensitive information to 20,000 online members within 5 minutes—and simultaneously transmit them to all members' LEO e-mail accounts. An alert message contains a short synopsis and directs the recipient to additional information posted on a secure LEO site. The NAS also can send up to 160,000 unsecure notifications to pagers, cell phones,

and other wireless devices to advise users of an alert.²

The FBI's Strategic Information and Operations Center, which keeps a close eye on trends worldwide, posts NAS alerts as needed. Additionally, one member of each LEO Special Interest Group (SIG) has the appropriate authority to post a national alert.³ The VCC and NAS features of LEO are, in part, the reason it is called "a one-stop shop for the law enforcement community for FBI



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intelligence information, providing a central hub for horizontal and vertical information sharing to support investigative programs."⁴

In a presentation at the 2003 Annual International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference, FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III endorsed the LEO NAS as the means by which the FBI would securely and expeditiously provide critical

information to the law enforcement community. This effort constitutes part of the recommendation—included in the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan developed by the Global Intelligence Working Group—that LEO become the national communications system for all levels of the law enforcement community. LEO's partnership with the Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS) enhances its capability to share information. The LEO-RISS electronic interface enables registered users to access both systems with a single logon and provides them with a secure e-mail system.

An Investigative Tool

Members use LEO's broad range of services in many different ways, depending on the needs of their individual agencies. LEO's value during the investigation of crimes and terrorist threats comprises a key feature that appeals to many members. For example, regional law enforcement agencies attempting to combat the proliferation of sales of stolen property in pawn shops could learn about similar initiatives nationwide by going to a topic-specific Web site. Using LEO, however, might provide more comprehensive investigative information because law enforcement personnel can

A Sample of LEO Services

Native Services ⁵	Hosted Services ⁶	Portal Services ⁷
eLearning: Courses include antiterrorism, forensic, and investigative training	Hostage Barricade Database System, e.g., records attempted incidents; uses data from participating agencies nationwide	Regional Information Sharing Systems: Program funded by U.S. Department of Justice; targets such activities as drug trafficking, terrorism, violent crime, cyber-crime, and gang activity; shares intelligence across jurisdictions
Special Topics Index, e.g., cargo theft, legal updates, drug trafficking, stolen art	Infrastructure Protection Directorate: National focal point fostering dialog about computer intrusions	Joint Terrorism Task Force Information Sharing Initiative: Access at LEO controlled through LEOSIG
LEO Library: Publications and technical bulletins; controlled access to relevant Internet sites	Law Enforcement Interagency Linguist Access (LEILA): Sharing with intelligence community linguist resources who have consented to being in the LEILA database	Joint Automated Booking System: Handles data collected during booking process; shares with Bureau of Prisons, DEA, FBI, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and U.S. Marshals Service
LEOSIGs: Custom services, e.g., private segmented areas for user groups; SIGs create, for example, newsgroups and chat rooms	National Alert System (NAS): Real-time secure alerts via LEO to law enforcement community nationwide; for sensitive but unclassified security-related alerts; generates pop-up screens sent to wireless devices	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: Helps local and federal law enforcement share information
Mailing lists via listserv: Supports general and SIG mailing capability		National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System: Connectivity tool
E-mail within LEO community: Scanned for viruses, worms, trojan horses—both incoming and outgoing; hourly virus updates		Internet Café: Can facilitate NAS postings propagating from LEO to café e-mail system
Search engine: Controls access within LEO portal services	**Note: This is only a brief summary of the many services that LEO provides. Security measures differ as needed among the various services.	



track trends of not only specific crimes but also multiple criminal offenses throughout the country. This broad picture could prove valuable in an investigation. During Katrina, people posing as victims tried to file false insurance claims on hurricane-damaged property that they never owned and tried to cash computer-generated checks supposedly from FEMA, claiming that they had lost their identification papers during the hurricane. With LEO, investigators tracked these fraudulent activities and identified trends showing spikes as a direct result of the hurricane. Thus, law enforcement nationwide knew to look out for these types of fraud.

Conclusion

As the FBI evolves from its traditional focus on law

enforcement to its post-September 11 mission, which includes the homeland security priorities of counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and cybercrime, LEO plays a crucial role. During the disaster recovery and antifraud efforts following Hurricane Katrina, law enforcement personnel nationwide used LEO to exchange vast amounts of information in real time. LEO's services were ready and available during the aftermath of Katrina and remain on call for the nation's next emergency. ♦

Endnotes

¹ For further discussion about the FBI's post-September 11 focus, access its Web site at <http://www.fbi.gov/pressrel/speeches> for such entries as "Statement of Robert S. Mueller III, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations,

Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and Commerce," September 14, 2005; "Tomorrow's FBI: Changing to Meet New Challenges," Director Robert S. Mueller III, for the Council on Foreign Relations, June 22, 2004; and "The New FBI: Protecting Americans Against Terrorism," Director Robert S. Mueller III, for the American Civil Liberties Union 2003 Inaugural Membership Conference, June 13, 2003.

² Encryption and secure transmission methods maintain the integrity of the alerts.

³ LEO Special Interest Groups are made up of authorized users who share a common organizational purpose or technological discipline.

⁴ Special Agent Kenneth A. Cassine, chief of the FBI's LEO Policy, Planning, and Membership Unit, Programs Support Section, Criminal Justice Information Services Division, Clarksburg, West Virginia.

⁵ Native services are provided to all LEO members via a Web browser or other interface.

⁶ Hosted services exist within the LEO network and have their own database or applications for storing and retrieving interest-specific information.

⁷ Portal services provide connectivity to or from remote law enforcement services not housed or maintained on the LEO network but connected via a wide-area network or secure Internet link.

While Hurricane Katrina overwhelmed the area, many stalwart men and women from local and state law enforcement, fire services, and other public safety agencies tried valiantly to rescue citizens and provide relief to those in need. The author dedicates this article to these unfaltering and selfless individuals who performed their duties in the face of extreme adversity.
