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Statewide Information Sharing in South Carolina

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TECHNOLOGY TALK

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wo young girls in one municipality report an attempted abduction, giving a detailed description of a suspect that includes a description of a lizard tattoo on his neck. Less than 24 hours later, a child in a neighboring jurisdiction makes a similar report, giving a very similar description, including the neck tattoo.

Investigators search a multijurisdictional shared data warehouse for records of potential suspects with similar tattoos. The search yields three potential suspects, one of whom is a registered sex offender residing in another county. Officers from all three jurisdictions confront the potential suspect, only to learn that he has an excellent alibi and could not have committed the offenses.

Armed with this information and photo graphs of the suspects tattoos, the investigators return to the alleged victims, all of whom recant their story. The first two had made up their incident, and the third had gotten her description from news reports of the first.

In less than 30 hours, police resolve two cases, save the expense of a follow-up investigation, and spare the public unnecessary anxiety about child abductions. To do it, they rely on a statewide system for sharing law enforcement information from disparate information systems.

Regional System Links Six Jurisdictions

In South Carolina, the Low Country Information Technology Improvement Project (ITIP) was activated in 2001. It was the product of a collective vision of the sheriffs of Charleston, Berkley, and Dorchester Counties and the chiefs of police for the municipalities of Charleston, Mount Pleasant, and North Charleston.

The six agency executives wanted to integrate their information systems through a secure, integrated network that would allow information to be shared electronically across jurisdictional boundaries. The six participating agencies serve coastal South Carolina, a 3,200-square-mile region that 540,000 people call home.

Early in their collaboration, the agencies sought technical assistance from the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center Southeast Region (NLECTC-SE). With help from NLECTC-SE, the agencies launched the system and eventually adopted public domain development tools and concepts, which meant that they could provide the system to other law enforcement agencies at no cost.

Regional System Goes Statewide

Officials with the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) soon saw the attractiveness of making ITIP available to agencies around the state. The result is the South Carolina Information Exchange (SCIEx), a system created with the help of NLECTC-SE. SCIEx will allow state, county, and municipal police agencies to use Web technologies to receive the replicated data from the various RMS data bases and query the stored information.

The National Institute of Justice, the parent agency of NLECTC-SE, has adopted the SCIEx project as a center initiative. The South Carolina Research Authority (SCRA), which administers NLECTC-SE, will provide project management.

SCIEx is designed to provide law enforcement officers, investigators, and analysts with the data and resources they need to investigate cases and suspicious activities, as well as a source of information from which officials may glean intelligence that may signal a terrorist threat to homeland security.

How It Works

Through SCIEx, SLED expects to create a central data warehouse to store all incident information from incident reports and field interview documentation, to include narratives, from all law enforcement agencies in the state. Computer-aided dispatch system information will ultimately be stored in this warehouse. The SCIEx warehouse will offer the following features:

- Rapid replication from the host records management system (RMS) of common law enforcement incident report information (name, property, vehicle, location, narrative, comment fields, supplemental reports, field interview information, and so on)
- Query capabilities
- Digital image importing, displaying, printing, storing, and transmitting
- Connection to similar systems in other states

State law enforcement officials plan to provide a Web-based RMS with statewide licensing to law enforcement agencies in the state that do not have an existing RMS capability. They also hope to establish a mechanism to provide connectivity or access to desired databases of six state agencies in order to allow the South Carolina Information Exchange Fusion Center access to the information for the purposes of mining and analyzing the information. The state-created SCIEx Fusion Center will have the capability to display incident and other geo-referenced data on a GIS map and perform crime mapping and analysis functions typically found in commercial off-the-shelf products.

SCIEx planners are working now to address all areas of data security and integrity, user authentication, and transactional accountability. ■

For more information, call Captain L. J. Johnson, special agent in charge of the SLED Criminal Justice Information System, at 803-896-7051, or Captain Teresa Woods, special agent in charge of the SCIEx Fusion Center, at 803-896-7008.

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