



Counterdrug Technology

Advanced Systems to Help Law Enforcement and Medical Science in the Struggle Against Drug Crime and Abuse

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Technology Transfer Program's Impact:

Fewer Places for Criminals to Hide as Federal High Tech Comes to Main Street

The Trans Pecos area of Texas is known for its harsh terrain, poisonous snakes, drug dealers, and tough cops. Shortly after the Trans Pecos Drug Task Force applied for and received its Mini-Buster Contraband Detector kit from the Technology Transfer Program, the kit's handheld density detector led cops to almost a quarter million dollars in cash hidden in the rear bumper of a vehicle. The fiberscope that comes in the same kit made the marijuana in the gas tank of the vehicle an equally easy find. In Georgia, the Department of Public Safety made a drug dealer there truly unhappy when it used Mini-Buster technology to find \$1,000,000 in hidden currency. Fifteen indictments followed. Those cases reflect the broad and speedy impact that advanced technologies can have on local counterdrug law enforcement.

Nightmare and Testbeds

Before the Technology Transfer Program was proposed to Congress, CTAC wanted to make sure local cops would benefit from systems already in the federal inventory, so a number of towns, cities and counties were selected as test beds. One of them is Brownsville, Texas, at the border with Mexico. One night, Brownsville cops came under fire in an area where police estimate that a thousand dollars worth of marijuana walks into the

U.S. each night on the backs of young Mexican men known as drug "mules."

Fortunately, the smugglers' security men were poor marksmen. In the exchange of gunfire that night, none of the Brownsville officers was hit, but at least one of the criminals was killed. Still, it was a dramatic lesson to Brownsville's Chief of Police, Ben Reyna: "With the narcotraffickers having demonstrated their willingness to kill us, it became a matter of even

Photos: Thermal Imagers and Mini-Buster deployed and in training.





greater urgency that we obtain effective, reliable, night vision capabilities. CTAC came through with a Thermal Imager originally developed for the Department of Defense, which we installed in an unmarked vehicle. The system senses heat and most specifically is sensitive to the average, normal human body temperature. The Thermal Imager is superior to ordinary night vision devices because its sensitivity to body heat enables it to locate suspects hiding behind bushes and to reveal a suspect's position even in absolute pitch black."

Now, when Brownsville cops go on night operations, they are supported by the Thermal Imager, so it no longer requires a muzzle flash to reveal the location of a hidden enemy. Chief Reyna has obtained local press coverage of the Thermal Imager's capabilities by way of warning the opposition that any attempt to ambush his men will have immediate and potentially fatal consequences for the perpetrators. Since then, the guns on the other side of the Rio Grande have been silent, but the drug dealers continue to attempt to penetrate the U.S. at Brownsville.

One dark night, Brownsville police on patrol with the vehicle mounted thermal imaging device detected a small, blacked out shark boat inbound from Mexico, and alerted nearby federal and other local law enforcement agencies. Within hours, the boat with its cargo of almost a thousand pounds of marijuana and the vessel's crew were in police custody. Chief Reyna believes this case would "not have existed without the Thermal Imager," and the dope would have gotten through.

Wireless Interoperability to the Rescue

Today, the challenging border city of Brownsville has the additional law enforcement edge of the CTAC-sponsored, phone-patch-based system that permits local, county, state, and federal agencies to use their otherwise incompatible radios to communicate seamlessly in real time. This system, named RIOCOM by Chief Reyna, has tremendous implications for first and second responders to emergencies and for carefully planned, multi-agency narcotics operations. The system is so user friendly, confidence is routinely acquired by an experienced 911 dispatcher with less than one hour's training. It takes less than 15 seconds of computer mouse clicks to link up five agencies in real time!

The only thing different about communicating through the Wireless Interoperability system's phone patch is that when each cop using the system finishes speaking, he must say "go ahead" to let the other connected cops know it's clear for them to speak.

By day, a team of Brownsville cops works at bridges between the U.S. and Mexico, supporting the U.S. Customs Service and the Border Patrol. The local cops use the Mini-Buster kit's fiberscope to look

into gas tanks, the under-car mirror, and the Mini-Buster (Photo right) to hunt for density changes in door and side panels —locations favored by drug dealers to hide their money heading back into Mexico.

Chief Reyna says the combination of CTAC-supplied Thermal Imager and Mini-Buster search devices has led to many arrests and seizures. "These technologies not only make my people more capable, but they have also added to the morale of our troops. My officers work in unpredictable, dangerous environments and it is satisfying for them to know that Washington not only bothered to learn about what



TOP: Brownsville Chief Reyna speaks to some of his cops.

BOTTOM: Detail of Command and Control Screen from Brownsville Interoperability System.



they do, but has done something significant to help them. They are all very aware of the systems and we have a rigorous training program that eventually will give many of my 300 officers hands on knowledge of the Thermal Imager and the whole Mini-Buster kit. One of my detectives has truly mastered these devices and now he is called on by CTAC to teach other departments.”

Data Locator / Direct Access: CTAC Responds to a Call for Help

In the nation’s heartland, perched above the Mississippi River, sits the small city of Burlington, Iowa. Dealers hustling crack cocaine and methamphetamine were damaging the quality of life in this picturesque town. City, county, and state leaders of SEINT, the Southeast Iowa Narcotics Task Force, desperately needed to make their cops more knowledgeable and therefore more effective in the struggle against the expanding challenge from the drug dealers. CTAC responded by sending engineers to Burlington to create another

system testbed, installing the Data Locator/Direct Access System. This technology provides capabilities for secure exchange of electronic mail, access to existing or custom-built databases, and police intelligence analysis of information over a standard internet connection. The system comprises three major components:

- (1) A multilevel database access system for connecting to designated databases
- (2) A secure communications function for sending and receiving electronic mail, inquiries, and notification of investigation events and coordination
- (3) An integrated package of National Crime Information Center (NCIC)-standard formats for exchanging information and entering intelligence information into a database and/or existing databases maintained by one or more agencies.

Existing databases of images, text, video, or audio data, whether developed by law enforcement agencies (LEAs) or non-LEA organizations,

may be connected to the system. Suitable for employment within a single department, large/small regional organizations, or task forces, the system is an integrated package consisting of hardware, software, cryptographic cards, and product training. Multiple systems may be interconnected to extend capabilities as required by the nature of the law enforcement challenges.

Darren Grimshaw—the SEINT Commander at the time of our visit to Burlington—directed the planning of the drug house raid pictured here and made routine use of the Data Locator/Direct Access System in that planning. “As a result,” said Grimshaw while reviewing a videotape of the operation, “we knew the number of rooms and the number of toilets in the place and were able to make sure we had officers assigned to hit those locations so fast that it was pretty much impossible for the suspects to flush the evidence. As any cop working narcotics knows, this is no small matter. Cases can be lost if the evidence disappears.”