

Western Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council
CBRNE/IED Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes
April 7, 2022, 2:00 pm

Subcommittee members present: Jon Davine (Northampton Fire), John Dearborn (WMFCA), Daniel Dupre (D4 Hazmat), Tom Grady (BCSO), Tim Nelson (D4 Hazmat), Barry Ross (Hampden County Sheriff's Office), Alan Sirois (WMFCA/WMTRT), Sean Walker (Arson & Bomb Squad / Springfield Fire)

Non-members present: CJ Bartone (West Springfield Fire / Hazmat), Raine Brown (FRCOG), Chris Greene (Franklin County Regional SRT), Josh Hoffman (Franklin County Regional SRT), David Johnson (Franklin County Regional SRT), Rachel Mason (FRCOG), Philip Wonkka (Franklin County Fire Chiefs)

Subcommittee members absent: Bob Barry (MEMA), Matt Kirchner (Pittsfield PD/BCSRT)

This meeting was conducted remotely on Zoom. The meeting was recorded.

Open Meeting

John Dearborn called the meeting to order at 2:01 pm. Introductions followed.

Approval of Minutes

The committee reviewed the minutes from the March 11, 2021 meeting.

<p>Motion: Jon Davine moved to approve the March 11, 2021 meeting minutes as submitted. Alan Sirois seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. Jon Davine, John Dearborn, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Alan Sirois, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. The motion was approved.</p>

Review Past Years' Funding and Projects

Raine Brown reported on projects. There have been some projects flipped between grant years due to delays and to give other subcommittee projects more time. In FFY19 some projects are completed and others are nearly complete. There is a Tech Rescue Team project split between FFY19 and FFY20 that is now in process. In FFY20 most projects are in process. In FFY21 we still have more water rescue equipment to purchase and a regional exercise for the Tech Rescue Team, as well as funds available for Hazmat.

FFY2022 Investment Planning

There was agreement to hear all requests before considering how to invest FFY2022 funds.

Requests

1. Franklin County Fire Chiefs Ground Crew Shelters – Philip Wonkka presented the request. Franklin County formed a specialized hand crew to actively fight brush fires. FEMA recently released typing for wildfire shelters. They are looking for almost \$19,000 to purchase 30 fire shelters and 10 practice shelters, to practice with and deploy. Alan Sirois asked if this is the only item the crew is missing. Chief Wonkka replied that training is ongoing, but this is biggest critical piece they are missing.

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2. Franklin County SRT Equipment – Chris Greene thanked the Council and the CBRNE subcommittee for the equipment currently being purchased for the Franklin County SRT. This year they are looking for additional equipment to boost the team. The first is a Quad Crisis Response phone. David Johnson further explained the need for this phone, as in crisis negotiation it is critical to be in direct contact with the subject. They currently have no way to do that other than using bullhorns or their own cell phones. Quad phones available to borrow from other teams might not arrive for 1-3 hours, but they need to be able to start negotiations right away. This is reputable throw phone used by FBI field officers, with Bluetooth capability and 1000 ft of cord to help keep negotiators out of the hot zone.

Sgt. Greene and Josh Hoffman presented the remaining equipment requests. The team recently switched over to APX radios but have no connector from Peltor to headsets. They also have seven new tactical team members and are looking for headsets and related equipment for them. They are also requesting gas masks with drop down pouches and simunitions rifle conversion kits to get new operators up to speed. Additional requests are for new breaching equipment including halligan tools and break-and-rake tools; a telescopic ladder to put on van; a Lemur S drone that is capable of interior searches; and a TEDD electronic distraction device. Additional details are in the request in today's meeting packet.

Discussion about the requests followed. Tom Grady expressed concern about the sustainability of the Franklin County team and also noted that when tactical teams began to be regionalized, we went through a lot of exercises to make sure equipment is standard and interoperable, which the equipment requested here does not seem to be. Sgt. Greene replied that these would be regional assets that they could send anywhere they are needed. Regarding sustainability, towns are fully supportive of keeping the team trained up and going. The team doubled in size very quickly, so they need to get the necessary equipment for new people. David Johnson added that they now have a fully functioning crisis negotiation team that was fully trained with no funding. Tom asked that the team reach out to the three Law Enforcement representatives to the Council, Chiefs Wynn, Kozloski, and Paciorek, to make sure they are aware of and supportive of this request. We are wanting to move more toward negotiations and away from use of force.

Additional discussion addressed the questions about interoperability and regional SRT teams collaborating and exercising together. Barry Ross reported that regionalization has come a long way and that in the last year they have cross trained with Franklin County SRT, UMass, Springfield PD, and the FBI SWAT team. He also noted that the interior drone being requested is state of the art but quickly becoming the norm. They are also looking to purchase the same drone in Hampden County, and would share it as needed.

In response to a question about prioritizing requests, Sgt. Greene replied that the crisis phone and push-to-talk for headsets are top priorities, followed by the equipment for new team members so that everyone has the same gear for deployment. The drone is mid-priority and the distraction device is lowest priority.

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Alan Sirois asked about drone operation policies and whether the team has 107 certified operators to meet compliance for outside use. Sgt. Green replied affirmatively. They also would send tactical team members to a Lemur training for interior work. Raine noted that getting drones approved using Homeland Security funds is a very long detailed process that takes a lot of work and a lot of justification. She would need the Franklin County SRT to help with that, as the information needed is outside the bounds of her skill set.

3. Springfield Arson & Bomb Squad Robot – Sean Walker presented the request. They are the only regional bomb squad in Western Mass. They are looking to get a new robot because the current one is old and presently not working, and would have to be sent to Canada for repairs with no guarantee that it could be fixed. The bomb squad is accredited with the FBI, which requires having a robot for accreditation. They are looking at one from a Massachusetts company, PackBot. The State Police have one and suggested getting a second set of flippers so it can climb stairs better. The total would be \$197,224.96.

Discussion followed. Jon Davine asked how many times they have responded outside of the city. Sean replied that they have not done so much lately other than to Chicopee, though they have in the past. It is up to communities to call them. The State Police have improved their response time, but the Springfield squad is still usually faster for local calls. Additional discussion concerned why they would not send the existing robot to be fixed, what the expected lifespan of the robots is, and possible alternative sources of funding from the City of Springfield. Alan Sirois asked whether there is any precedent by the Council of splitting funding with a host community. Raine replied that we have never have split costs with an agency, but it is do-able.

4. WMFCA Foam Trailers – John Dearborn presented the request. In 2009, WRHSAC supported a joint initiative with WMFCA to purchase four foam trailers. They have been deployed multiple times and are critical firefighting equipment in the region. An issue has emerged in the past few years concerning the foam, which contains carcinogenic groundwater contaminants, PFAS and PFOS. This issue impacts almost every fire department in the state and country. Two trailers were used and do not currently have foam. New foam is available without PFAS. WMFCA is requesting that WRHSAC set aside \$100,000 for this while the foam subcommittee comes up with the best mitigation steps for the problem. The request does not cover the entire expense because they are also looking at other funding sources.

Raine shared a caution from EOPSS that any proposed PFAS project would be closely reviewed to ensure that they demonstrate need, and that PFAS foam remediation may fall under other sources. They will likely ask us for additional documentation. John noted that the Fire Chiefs Association has a working group making recommendations to EOPSS. They have an advisory out and have requested special funding. Several states have already abandoned this foam, and in the future it will likely become illegal to use, and/or will leave environmental liability.

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5. Regional Hazmat Team Training – CJ Bartone presented a request from Hazmat D4 and D5, seeking \$30,000 for training throughout the fiscal year. Exact trainings have yet to be identified.

6. WMTRT – Alan Sirois presented two requests on behalf of the Tech Rescue Team. Detailed proposals from Daryl Springman are still in progress. The first request is for about \$22,000 for replacement of software (e.g. ropes and webbing), which is used in almost every incident and is approaching non-compliance. John Dearborn asked about the status of the sustainability of the team. Alan replied that at the State level, a Mass Technical Rescue Commission has been established. Governance is in place and the funding piece in progress. The ultimate goal is to get away from funding it through this committee. Alan also noted that the team now has most of the supplies they need thanks to prior funding from the Council, WMFCA, and local municipalities.

The second request is for WMTRT training funds. The team is seeking about \$50,000 for backfill, overtime, and logistics for multi-operational period exercises, bringing in IMAT teams and other teams from across the Commonwealth. Raine asked if this request took into consideration the discussion about adjusting the amount of backfill and overtime to better reflect what is actually used, as in the past the team generally only uses half of what is requested. Alan replied that they have discussed it and are trying to get the requests more on target. He is not sure if the \$50,000 request incorporated that, as the training details have not been fully developed yet.

Allocation and Prioritization of Funds

The committee considered each request.

Franklin County Fire Chiefs Ground Crew Shelters

Motion: Jon Davine moved to allocate \$18,698 for the purchase of 30 fire shelters and 10 practice shelters. Dan Dupre seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. Jon Davine, John Dearborn, Alan Sirois, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. The motion was approved.

Franklin County SRT Equipment

Motion: John Dearborn moved to allocate up to \$48,584 for the requested Franklin County SRT equipment, working down their priority list. Jon Davine seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. Jon Davine, John Dearborn, Alan Sirois, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. The motion was approved.

Springfield Arson & Bomb Squad Robot – No motion was brought forth. Concerns cited by subcommittee members included the fact that the existing robot might be able to be repaired; that the team is not truly operating as a regional team; a desire not to duplicate resources, as the State Police also have this robot; and the significant amount of money requested. However, there was agreement that the Council might consider support at some level if there were a cost sharing option. Sean Walker will look into it more with Commissioner Calvi.

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WMFCA Foam Trailers – Discussion centered on whether this project could be funded by another stream. John Dearborn explained that they have asked for other sources of funding but are not seeing movement yet, so this request is to have a contingency plan to get the two empty trailers back into service. The proposal would only fund the decontamination part. They are waiting on insurance funding for the refill, as replacement foam is not the responsibility of the Council. When foam is expended, they usually bill the responsible party, with a few exceptions.

Motion: Jon Davine moved to allocate \$100,000 for the WMFCA foam trailers. Alan Sirois seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. Jon Davine, Alan Sirois, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. John Dearborn abstained. The motion was approved.

WMTRT Ropes and Webbing Replacement

Motion: Jon Davine moved to allocate \$22,000 for the WMTRT ropes and webbing replacement. Tom Grady seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. Jon Davine, John Dearborn, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. Alan Sirois abstained. The motion was approved.

WMTRT Large Exercise

Motion: Tom Grady moved to allocate \$50,000 for a WMTRT large exercise. Sean Walker seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. John Dearborn, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. Jon Davine voted against the motion. Alan Sirois abstained. The motion was approved.

Regional Hazmat Team Training

Motion: Tom Grady moved to allocate \$30,000 for Hazmat D4 and D5 training. John Dearborn seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. John Dearborn, Alan Sirois, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. Jon Davine abstained. The motion was approved.

Subcommittee members agreed on the following priorities:

- 1) WMTRT ropes and webbing
- 1) Regional Hazmat teams training
- 2) Franklin County Fire Chiefs Ground Crew Shelters
- 3) Franklin County SRT equipment
- 4) WMFCA Foam trailers
- 5) WMTRT large exercise

Business Unforeseen by the Chair

None.

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Adjourn the Meeting

Motion: Jon Davine moved to adjourn the meeting. Sean Walker seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was held. Jon Davine, John Dearborn, Alan Sirois, Sean Walker, Tim Nelson, Dan Dupre, and Tom Grady voted in favor. The motion was approved.

The meeting adjourned at 3:47 pm.

List of Documents Reviewed at the Meeting

- CBRNE Subcommittee Meeting Agenda for April 7, 2022
- CBRNE Subcommittee Meeting Minutes from March 11, 2021 (draft)
- WRHSAC CBRNE FFY2022 Investment Plan Information
- Proposal from Chief Philip Wonkka / Franklin County Fire Chiefs Association
- Proposal from Sgt. Christopher Greene / Franklin County SRT
- Proposal from Sean Walker / Springfield Fire Department – Arson & Bomb Squad
- Proposal from Western Mass Fire Chiefs Association
- Proposal from C.J. Bartone, District 4 Hazmat Team

Respectfully submitted by:

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Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council
Franklin Regional Council of Governments