

# Data detonator

Dr Eric Wenger, Director of the Australian Federal Police's CBRN Data Centre, tells CBRNe World about the development of this new capability

**CW: Could you give a quick introduction to the centre?**

EW: The Australian CBRN Data Centre (CBRND) was created following a decision by The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in September 2005, and the Director was appointed in August 2006. After numerous "white powder" incidents, it was realised that there was no national repository for reporting of CBRN events. Such a repository already existed for bomb/explosive events in the Australian Bomb Data Centre (ABDC). Accordingly the CBRND has been developed along the lines of the ABDC model.

The Centre is currently being established and will provide technical advice and intelligence on prevention, preparedness and response issues related to CBRN. The CBRND will also support operational, investigative and intelligence activities for the Australian Federal Police (AFP), government and relevant parts of the private sector. In addition, it will provide occupational health and safety advice to first responders, emergency services and forensic investigators.

At present, the centre has 3 AFP staff and one Science and Technology Advisor seconded from Defence. New members have been recruited and will be joining the Centre shortly, which will grow to house approximately 18 staff. The centre will officially be operational on 2 July 2007. However the capability afforded by the opening of the centre will be greater than the centre alone. Relationships with other agencies will contribute to the whole of government effort in countering the CBRN threat; again, building on the cooperative model of the ABDC. The Centre is already involved in a number of key projects, including the establishment of the Chemical Warfare Agent Laboratory Network. This network is being built using the existing Defence Science Technology Organisation (or DSTO) capability in Melbourne to enable forensic laboratories in the States and

Territories to analyse chemical warfare agents in a timely manner.

**CW: AFP/National strategy is to fight terrorism at its source, off-shore from Australia. How does that work on CBRNE matters where neighbouring territories may not have the CBRN defence capability or even the EOD/IED defence? How do you manage to provide interdiction of these groups and capability without taking over national (CBRNE) policing.**

EW: The AFP is supporting neighbouring countries in developing their own counter-terrorism capabilities. For example, the Australian Bomb Data Centre is assisting regional police forces establish similar capabilities including the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. The key to developing this capacity is consultation with partner countries and developing specialist capacity that fits into the partner nation's overall law enforcement framework. One size does not fit all. Therefore, following on from the ABDC model, the CBRND will be consulting with potential CBRN partners in South East Asia over the next 12 months. With respect to managing interdiction, this is not a role for the Australian CBRND. South East Asian countries already have

interdiction capabilities within their national police agencies. A CBRN Data Centre will not interdict, but will provide technical advice and analysis to support the investigators.

The CBRND's primary mission is to assist the AFP, State and Territory police and emergency service first response teams with expert CBRN advice prevent and/or in case of an event. The centre will not be engaged in direct operations.

**CW: Equally the incident response - forensics, SIBCRA - are specialist activities that are crucial to the arrests of suspects post event. How do you respond to off-shore attacks in a timely manner?**

EW: The AFP has provided support to overseas nations, following an invitation from the country in which the incident occurred: cf. the Bali bombings. The AFP Forensic team maintains some equipment that can be rapidly deployed including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and detectors. It also has a mobile facility with analytical equipment that can be fielded if required. The AFP continues to develop its CBRN Investigative capability and hopes to soon be able to offer support to partner nations similar to that which has previously been provided for the

*Australian Federal Police try and assist in expanding safe areas in Australasia ©AFP*



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investigation of incidents involving the use of explosives.

Concurrent with the development of the CBRN Data Centre, the Counter Terrorism Forensic Team has been developing a mobile lab that is capable of handling contaminated evidence. Like the Data Centre, this mobile laboratory will also be available to support operations with effect 2 July 07. This mobile lab has the potential therefore to provide that important link between the forensic investigation and the intelligence cycle. This will be done by investigation forward at the crime scene with the technical intelligence analysis performed back in the CBRN Data Centre.

**CW: Much of today's terrorism has links to organised crime as a methods of raising capital - kidnapping, prostitution and drugs. These are all part of the AFP's remit, what advantages do you gain from having them all under one 'roof'? How do you liaise with the other police forces that might have this information at a local level?**

EW: The AFP is responsible at a national level for transnational crimes and counter-terrorism. As it is often not possible at an early stage to ascertain whether a crime has links with terrorism, however, it is essential that the AFP maintains strong links with our state and territory counterparts. One of the primary tasks of the CBRNDC is to establish those links and remain informed of any incidents that could be CBRN-related - for example suspicious chemicals found in a clandestine laboratory initially thought to be drugs related.

**CW: What specialised CBRN assets do you have? What is the AFP relationship with the IRR?**

EW: The AFP has PPE and detectors to support forensic work in a hazardous environment, and mobile laboratory equipment that can be deployed to assist analytical work in the field. ACT Policing also has a bomb response capability which includes protective CBRN equipment. We have an excellent working relationship with the Incident Response Regiment (IRR) and may call upon the IRR to assist if required. Alternatively the AFP may be called upon to provide forensic and

investigative support to an operation involving the IRR.

**CW: What are the AFP roles in a CBRN incident? How do you increase your response time? Is your DIM capability detect to warn or detect to treat?**

EW: The Fire Brigade Hazmat team are often the first to respond to a CBRN incident with local State or Territory Police administering and controlling the hot zone and the crime scene. The CBRNDC may be called on to provide technical advice. The AFP would only deploy a CBRN crime scene capability on request from the State/Territory Police or on confirmation of a terrorist event. The CBRNDC would issue a warning in the case of a potential attack but the local jurisdictions (with the possible assistance of the Australian Defence Force in some instances) would be responsible for the detection in the field. The AFP would be on alert or even pre-deployed to assist in case of a CBRN event. This assistance is both forensic and technical advice. The AFP is operationally experienced in responding within Australia and overseas at short notice to conduct or support investigations.

It perhaps is important to note that in regard to biological incidents, the CBRN Data Centre will conduct analysis and advise on biological threats as they pertain to the malicious use of biological materials or the deliberate spread of disease. It will not advise on epidemics such as SARS or avian influenza pandemics as these are public health issues and there are appropriate structures and procedures in place for such events.

**CW: What level of interoperability with other agencies is there - especially when the scale of Australia's geography is considered (where being inter-dependent might not always be a good idea)?**

EW: Under the guidance of EMA, the State/Territory first responders and the AFP have agreed to purchase common equipment. This allows, in case of an event too large to be handled locally, for support from other jurisdictions to be deployed rapidly with identical equipment. A similar interoperability is

being considered, where appropriate, with the Australian Defence Force. For biological threats, the centre will establish linkages with the Public Health Laboratory Network as well as Health Departments and Agencies at the Commonwealth and State level. From a Radiological and Nuclear Perspective the Centre is developing links with the Australian Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (ARPANSA); and, the Australian Nuclear Scientific and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). As the industry regulator ARPANSA will act as a conduit for the reporting of incidents involving radiological and nuclear materials whilst ANSTO will be a source of scientific and technical advice as well as having the ability to provide highly specialist support in the investigation of nuclear materials or contaminated evidence.

The CBRNDC has also provided advice to the National Security Science and Technology unit of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for the award of research grants in the area of new CBR detectors, decontamination of CBR agents and the modelling of CBR events.

**CW: With the benefit of hindsight what lessons were taken from the Commonwealth Games that you would like to pass onto other agencies?**

EW: Inter-agency coordination during the Commonwealth Games was successful. This was mainly due to the establishment of a joint operations command with representatives of all agencies involved. The CBRNDC did not exist at the time, and therefore did not contribute to the security of the Commonwealth Games. Australia, however, gained valuable experience with the Sydney 2000 Olympics and has applied the same principles of early planning, vertical engagement between the national, state and local levels of government and horizontal engagement across all departments and agencies. Subsequent evaluation of policy and procedures confirms the effectiveness of these arrangements - a good expression, borrowed from North America, is that it is too late to exchange business cards in the hot zone! The CBRNDC will be a conduit for this engagement.