



Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General

Information Sharing With Fusion Centers Has Improved, but Information System Challenges Remain





Homeland Security

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Preface

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Public Law 107-296) by amendment to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*. This is one of a series of audit, inspection, and special reports prepared as part of our oversight responsibilities to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within the department.

This report addresses the strengths and weaknesses of DHS' information sharing with state and local fusion centers and the implementation of information technology to support these activities. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observations, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations herein have been developed to the best knowledge available to our office, and have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. We trust this report will result in more effective, efficient, and economical operations. We express our appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Deffer".

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Abbreviations

CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOJ	Department of Justice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GAO	Government Accountability Office
HIR	Homeland Intelligence Report
HSDN	Homeland Secure Data Network
HSIN	Homeland Security Information Network
HSIN-LE	Homeland Security Information Network-Law Enforcement
HS SLIC	Homeland Security State and Local Intelligence Community of Interest
I&A	Office of Intelligence and Analysis
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IT	Information Technology
NOC	National Operations Center
OCIO	Office of the Chief Information Officer
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPS	Office of Operations Coordination and Planning
SBU	Sensitive But Unclassified
TSA	Transportation Security Administration

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OIG

Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General
Executive Summary

We reviewed the department's approach to information sharing with state and local fusion centers. Our objectives were to determine (1) the effectiveness of DHS' strategy, processes, and activities for facilitating information sharing with fusion centers; and (2) the extent to which information technology systems support information sharing between the department and these centers.

DHS has made progress in its efforts to improve information sharing with fusion centers. Fusion center personnel indicated that information sharing had improved over time and the information received from the department met their needs primarily due to the deployment of DHS intelligence officers to the centers. As a result of improved information sharing, fusion centers have successfully collaborated with the department during numerous large-scale events and maintained situational awareness after attempted terrorist attacks or other incidents. However, DHS component collaboration in the information sharing process needs improvement, and some intelligence products could better meet state and local needs.

In addition, information technology systems do not fully support information sharing between DHS and state and local fusion centers. Specifically, fusion center personnel make limited use of information sharing systems and instead rely on emails for situational awareness and intelligence sharing. Personnel from fusion centers identified challenges with limited system content and usability, as well as the existence of too many federal systems and no ability to conduct comprehensive or simultaneous searches across multiple systems or department databases.

We are making recommendations to the Office of Intelligence and Analysis to improve information sharing and system capabilities. In addition, we are making recommendations to the Homeland Security Information Network Program Manager to address challenges identified with this system.

Background

According to *The 9/11 Commission Report*, a breakdown in information sharing contributed to the collective failure to prevent the attacks.¹ To promote greater information sharing and collaboration among federal, state, and local intelligence and law enforcement entities, states and some major urban areas have established a network of fusion centers throughout the country. A fusion center is a collaborative effort of two or more agencies that provide resources, expertise, and information to maximize their ability to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity. These centers vary based on state and local needs and involve a range of federal, state, and local entities that collect and analyze terrorism, law enforcement, and other homeland security information. As of May 2010, there were 50 state and 22 major urban area fusion centers.

Over time, fusion centers have become an integral part of the federal government's approach to information sharing with state and local partners. DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have worked with fusion centers since their inception. In August 2006, DHS and DOJ, in collaboration with state and local partners, published the *Fusion Center Guidelines*.² These guidelines provide assistance to developing fusion centers and were intended to improve consistency among the state and local fusion centers, enhance coordination, strengthen regional and national partnerships, and improve fusion center capabilities. Further, in October 2007, President George W. Bush issued the first *National Strategy for Information Sharing*, which designated fusion centers as the primary state and local entities for sharing terrorism-related information.³

DHS' Role With Fusion Centers

The *Homeland Security Act of 2002* assigned DHS the mission to coordinate and share homeland security information across all levels of government, including federal, state, local, and tribal governments and the private sector.⁴ Since 2004, when states began creating fusion centers, DHS has taken steps to partner with

¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 2004.

² *Fusion Center Guidelines: Developing and Sharing Information and Intelligence in a New Era*, August 2006.

³ *National Strategy for Information Sharing: Successes and Challenges in Improving Terrorism-Related Information Sharing*, October 2007.

⁴ Public Law 107-296, *Homeland Security Act of 2002*.

these centers to accomplish its information sharing mandate. In addition, Congress mandated that DHS support fusion centers in the *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007*.⁵ These same laws also require DHS to implement systems to support information sharing within the department and between federal, state, and local partners. This report addresses the role of two DHS components, the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) and the Office of Operations Coordination and Planning (OPS), that support fusion center development, share information with those centers, and provide information technology to facilitate information exchange.

I&A

I&A is the department's lead component for coordination with fusion centers. The *DHS Support Implementation Plan for State and Local Fusion Centers*, implemented in June 2006, designated I&A as the executive agent for managing the department's role in the nationwide fusion center initiative. I&A's mission is to strengthen the department's and its partners' ability to perform their homeland security functions by accessing, integrating, analyzing, and sharing timely and relevant intelligence and information, while protecting the privacy and civil liberties of the people it serves. I&A's strategic plan contains goals that include strengthening the Nation's network of fusion centers and building support for and integrating a robust information sharing capability among state, local, territorial, and tribal authorities and the private sector.

Within I&A, the State and Local Program Office was directing fusion center activities at the time of our audit. Among its activities to support fusion centers, the State and Local Program Office led the initiative to deploy intelligence officers to fusion centers to facilitate and coordinate information sharing between the centers and DHS. I&A deployed intelligence officers to 53 fusion centers, and also established six regional representatives at fusion centers in the National Capital Region, Northeast, West, Central, Southeast, and Great Lakes. Its goal is to deploy intelligence officers at all 72 fusion centers and establish ten regional representatives by the end of FY 2010. The State and Local Program Office also coordinated the deployment of classified and unclassified systems to support information sharing with fusion

⁵ Public Law 110-53, *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007*.

centers. Figure 1 shows a simplified version of the organizational structure of I&A.⁶

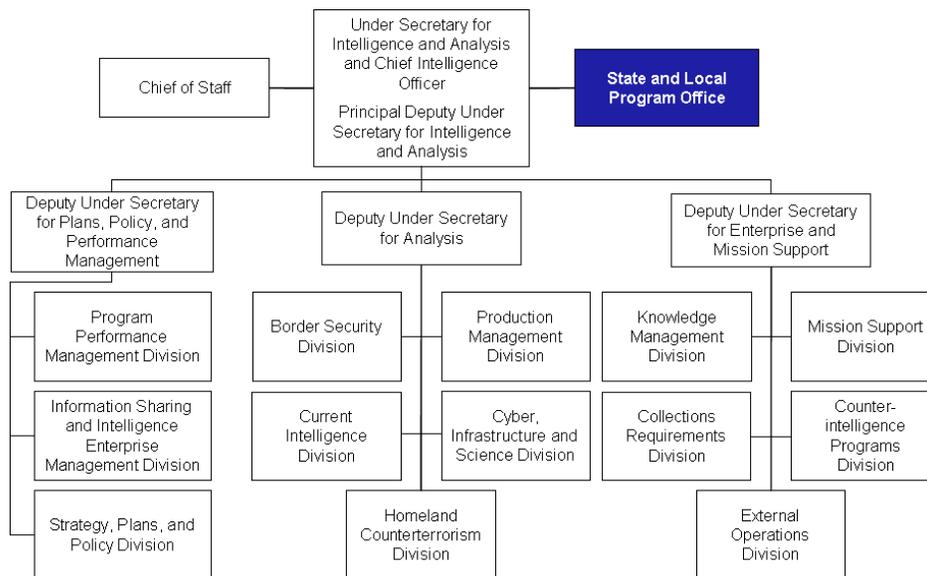


Figure 1: I&A Organization Chart

During our fieldwork, I&A was reorganizing the State and Local Program Office to address the need for a department-wide approach to support and interface with state and major urban area fusion centers. Several I&A working groups, with representatives from other DHS components, created an implementation plan for a new program management office. The plan was approved by Secretary Janet Napolitano in March 2010, and the State and Local Program Office was maintained to lead the department-wide fusion center initiative.

OPS

Along with I&A, OPS has a primary role in sharing information with fusion centers. OPS’ mission is to integrate DHS and interagency planning and operations coordination in order to prevent, protect, respond to, and recover from terrorist threats or attacks and other manmade or national disasters. OPS is responsible for the National Operations Center (NOC), which serves as the primary national-level hub for domestic situational awareness, information sharing, communications, and operations coordination pertaining to the prevention of terrorist attacks and domestic incident management. Further, the NOC serves as the National Fusion Center to collect and immediately fuse all-source

⁶ I&A’s organization chart was in draft during our fieldwork.

information to quickly determine if there is a terrorism nexus. The NOC brings together state fusion center, law enforcement, national intelligence, emergency response, and private sector reporting. It also disseminates homeland security information to appropriate intelligence and law enforcement agencies, other homeland security partners, the DHS leadership, and the White House. Situated within the NOC and staffed by I&A personnel, Intelligence Watch and Warning has the mission to ensure a constant flow of information to homeland security partners at all levels using current, relevant, and actionable intelligence, and to share threat indications and warnings. Figure 2 shows a simplified version of the current OPS organizational structure.

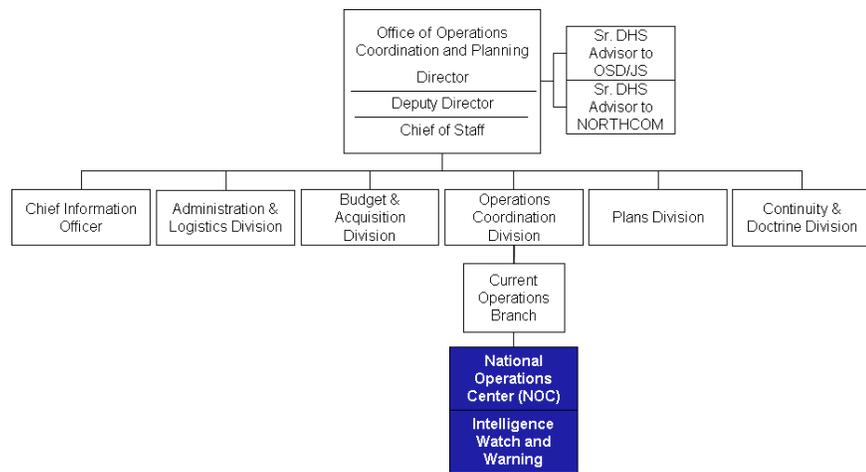


Figure 2: OPS Organization Chart

Information Sharing Systems

DHS has implemented several information technology (IT) systems to support information sharing with fusion centers. Specifically, I&A and OPS use the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) and the Homeland Security State and Local Intelligence Community of Interest (HS SLIC) for Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) information. In addition, the Homeland Secure Data Network (HSDN) provides secret-level classified information to fusion centers that have access. Figure 3 provides current information on these major systems and networks.

DHS IT Systems and Networks for Fusion Center Information Sharing					
Information Level	System Name	System Description	System Owner	Cost to Date (mil)	Number of Accounts
SBU	HSIN	The department's primary sensitive but unclassified level, internet-based, information sharing portal	OPS*	\$154	50,000 accounts; 23,000 active**
	HS SLIC	A nationwide, virtual community of intelligence analysts that contains collaborative tools such as discussion thread, chat tool, and secure messaging	I&A	\$6	1,844 (state & local)
Secret	HSDN	The department's network for collateral secret-level terrorism-related information	I&A and DHS OCIO	\$273	611 (state & local)

* HSIN ownership is transitioning from OPS to the DHS OCIO.

** Number of accounts for all HSIN portals.

Figure 3: Major DHS Information Sharing Systems

HSIN

HSIN was implemented in 2004 and designated as the official system for operational SBU information sharing within the department and with its partners in 2006. The mission of HSIN is to provide a secure and trusted national platform for SBU information sharing and collaboration among federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, private sector, and international partners. HSIN contains several distinct portals for various communities such as emergency management, the private sector, and law enforcement. In addition, several states have implemented HSIN portals to share information within their jurisdictions. This report focuses on the HSIN Law Enforcement (HSIN-LE) portal.⁷ HSIN-LE had a total of 642 users as of May 2010. As of June 2010, HSIN in its entirety had 50,000 registered users, 23,000 of which were considered active. Since its inception in 2004, DHS has spent \$154 million on HSIN. The HSIN program is transitioning from OPS to the DHS Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO).

HS SLIC

I&A began a pilot information sharing portal for intelligence analysts in 2006, which was named HS SLIC in 2007.⁸ HS SLIC provides a secure information sharing and collaboration portal for federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial users engaged in intelligence analysis. According to the HS SLIC charter, it is a

⁷ The scope of our audit was limited to law enforcement and intelligence information sharing.

⁸ HS SLIC is a community of interest hosted on I&A's secure web portal.

“virtual community” of intelligence officers and analysts from the law enforcement, homeland security, and intelligence community who analyze crimes and threats that have a nexus to homeland security. As of May 2010, HS SLIC had a total of 3,409 account holders, 1,844 of which were state and local users. In addition, HS SLIC was used at 56 fusion centers. DHS program management estimated that the total cost of HS SLIC since its inception has been approximately \$6 million.

HSDN

In 2004, DHS created HSDN to be the secret-level classified communications network for the department’s components and partners to share information and collaborate. HSDN provides state and local governments with the ability to access secret-level threat information and to communicate at the secret level with federal law enforcement and intelligence community partners. HSDN is owned and managed jointly by I&A and the DHS OCIO. I&A has prioritized the deployment of HSDN to state and local fusion centers. As of May 2010, HSDN had been deployed to 39 fusion centers and had 611 state and local account holders. DHS’ goal is to deploy HSDN to all 72 fusion centers by the end of 2011.

Prior Reports

Prior audit reports have identified challenges pertaining to information sharing with fusion centers and the supporting technology. Specifically, in 2006 we identified challenges with the implementation of HSIN due to, among other things, the need for a clearly defined relationship with existing collaboration systems, inadequate user requirements, and limited system use.⁹ In 2008, we identified continued challenges with requirements gathering and inadequate metrics to evaluate system use and performance.¹⁰ Further, in 2008 we reported on DHS’ evolving role with fusion centers and identified challenges providing fusion centers with timely and accurate information.¹¹ Similarly, in 2007 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported on fusion center challenges accessing and managing multiple federal information sharing systems.¹² Appendix C contains a list of prior

⁹ *Homeland Security Information Network Could Support Information Sharing More Effectively*, OIG-06-38, June 2006.

¹⁰ *DHS’ Efforts to Improve the Homeland Security Information Network*, OIG-09-07, October 2008.

¹¹ *DHS’ Role in State and Local Fusion Centers Is Evolving*, OIG-09-12, December 2008.

¹² *Homeland Security: Federal Efforts Are Helping to Alleviate Some Challenges Encountered by State and Local Information Fusion Centers*, GAO-08-35, October 2007.

OIG and GAO reports on information sharing with fusion centers and supporting federal IT systems.

Results of Audit

DHS' Approach to Information Sharing With Fusion Centers

DHS has made progress in its efforts to improve information sharing with fusion centers. Specifically, personnel from the fusion centers we contacted said that information sharing had improved, the process was effective overall, and the information received from DHS met their needs. Fusion center personnel attributed the improvement primarily to the deployment of I&A intelligence officers to the centers. As a result of improved information sharing, fusion centers have successfully collaborated with DHS during numerous large-scale events and maintained situational awareness after attempted terrorist attacks or other incidents.

Despite progress toward more effective information sharing, several challenges remain. Specifically, DHS component collaboration in the information sharing process needs improvement, certain unfinished intelligence products could be timelier, and fusion centers could be offered more opportunities to contribute to finished intelligence products.

Information Sharing Has Improved

The *Homeland Security Act of 2002* requires DHS to share information with state and local partners, and the *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007* requires DHS to support fusion centers in fulfilling this mission.¹³ In addition, the *National Strategy for Information Sharing* designates fusion centers as the focal point to ensure that state and local governments have access to timely and actionable information and intelligence.¹⁴

We interviewed fusion center personnel, including fusion center directors and other leadership, I&A representatives, and state and local analysts at 15 fusion centers. The majority of those interviewed said that information sharing had improved. For example, personnel at several fusion centers said that in the past, information was not always timely and relevant. Personnel at one fusion center, however, said that they now receive NOC updates every few minutes when incidents of national significance occur.

¹³ Public Law 107-296, *Homeland Security Act of 2002*. Public Law 110-53, *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007*.

¹⁴ *National Strategy for Information Sharing: Successes and Challenges in Improving Terrorism-Related Information Sharing*, October 2007.

Fusion center personnel also said that information sharing was currently effective. For example, personnel at one fusion center said that information was shared effectively when a plane that had possibly been hijacked was heading toward that fusion center's state. The NOC called the fusion center to inform them of the situation, and the fusion center was able to work with state partners to manage the situation, which turned out to be a false alarm.

In addition, fusion center personnel generally felt that the information they received from DHS met their needs. For example, personnel at one fusion center said that DHS previously took a long time to produce lengthy reports that did not provide a lot of value. For instance, when major incidents occurred, such as the London bombings in July 2005, it could take several months for DHS to issue a report on the incidents. Personnel at this center said that information is now much timelier.

DHS has improved information sharing by deploying I&A intelligence officers to fusion centers. Fusion center personnel said that the I&A intelligence officers provided a critical point of contact to facilitate communication with DHS, and the intelligence officers also filled prior information sharing gaps. For example, personnel at one fusion center said that its I&A intelligence officer provided timely and accurate information after the attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on December 25, 2009, which they otherwise would not have received. Personnel at another fusion center said that its I&A intelligence officer was particularly helpful when the Guardians of the Free Republic began sending threatening letters to governors across the country. In this case, the I&A intelligence officer provided the fusion center with information on the experiences of other states, which allowed the fusion center to alert state officials early on what to expect and to seek assistance from the proper authorities. As of the end of our fieldwork, I&A intelligence officers had been deployed to 53 of the 72 fusion centers. The remaining 19 fusion centers relied on one of the six I&A regional directors.

In addition to the deployment of I&A intelligence officers, several other DHS initiatives have contributed to information sharing improvements. Specifically, in 2009 I&A developed and provided the fusion centers an extensive list that identified the enduring intelligence and information needs of the department and its components. Fusion center personnel said that this list improved their understanding of the types of information that they should provide to DHS. To further improve the process, I&A is obtaining

information requirements from all state and local fusion centers to enable DHS to better understand each center's information needs.

I&A and the NOC have also implemented a state and local support request process. Using this process, fusion centers can submit all requests for information directly to the NOC, which then forwards them to the office or component best suited to respond to the requests. Although personnel at some fusion centers said that the response time for some requests has been slow, they believe that the process provides accountability and has been effective. They also said that DHS provided them with adequate responses to their information requests.

As a result of improved information sharing, fusion centers have successfully collaborated with DHS during large-scale events. For example, fusion centers coordinated information sharing for both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions in 2008. In addition, the Washington, DC, and other area fusion centers provided timely and relevant information during the 2009 presidential inauguration, and they worked successfully with DHS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to coordinate operational intelligence activities and update threat information.

In addition, improved information sharing has helped maintain situational awareness after attempted terrorist attacks or other incidents. Specifically, one fusion center director said that if the attempted bombing in Times Square had occurred 3 years ago, personnel at the fusion center would have had to make calls to obtain information. Now, fusion centers no longer have to pull information, as DHS is proactive in pushing information to them. Similarly, personnel at several fusion centers said that DHS provided helpful information after an individual crashed a plane into an Internal Revenue Service building in Austin, TX. I&A developed an unclassified intelligence product called a "Snapshot" quickly after the incident to provide key facts about the incident to fusion centers.

DHS' improved ability to share information with fusion centers has not only kept state and local officials better informed during times of crisis, it has also assisted investigations. For example, officials at one fusion center said that they were informed of a suspicious shipment of chemical processing equipment from a private business in the United States to a buyer in the United Kingdom. Fusion center analysts passed this information to DHS, which then alerted the appropriate officials in the United Kingdom, leading to an investigation. Officials at another fusion center

informed DHS about a string of propane thefts, which led DHS to produce a national intelligence product to alert every state to this potential threat.

Information Sharing Challenges

Despite the overall improvements, DHS continues to face several information sharing challenges. Specifically, DHS component collaboration in the information sharing process needs improvement. In addition, unfinished intelligence products have not always been timely, and the production process for finished intelligence products should allow for more fusion center collaboration.

Component Collaboration

DHS component collaboration in the information sharing process needs improvement. Specifically, although fusion center access to intelligence and situational awareness through I&A and the NOC has improved, access to information held by other operational components of the department was varied. Representatives from all of the operational components within DHS are assigned to the NOC to act as a single point of contact; however, many fusion center officials did not rely on this process. Several fusion center officials said that component representatives were reluctant to share information with state and local personnel.

Instead of going through the NOC, fusion center personnel said that they rely on their own local points of contact at DHS component field offices. Reliance on personal contacts rather than the NOC has led to varying degrees of effectiveness for fusion centers attempting to obtain information from components. Fusion center officials were able to acquire information from components where they had strong local points of contact, but obtaining information from components where no contacts existed was difficult. For example, officials at one fusion center were able to effectively share information with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), with which they had strong liaisons; however, this center did not have effective sharing with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Conversely, personnel at another center had good information sharing with liaisons at ICE, but had difficulty obtaining information from TSA.

DHS is working to improve information sharing between fusion centers and DHS components. Specifically, DHS is deploying

CBP and ICE representatives to some fusion centers. Additionally, the State and Local Program Office has undertaken an initiative to improve coordination among the different DHS entities and fusion centers. One fusion center official we spoke with called this initiative an important improvement to get all the DHS components working together. The official added that the department-wide approach will help improve relations between fusion centers and components that do not completely understand the role of fusion centers.

Improvements to Intelligence Products

Unfinished intelligence products are not always timely. I&A analysts produce unfinished intelligence reports, called Homeland Intelligence Reports (HIRs), that contain information that has not yet been fully evaluated. For example, HIRs are used to share information quickly with state and local personnel on suspicious activities prior to being fully vetted. However, an I&A quarterly performance report on the fusion center support request process shows that 144 HIRs were overdue as of March 2010. Of the 144 overdue reports, 93 were more than 90 days behind schedule. Fusion center personnel identified the lengthy DHS headquarters review process required prior to dissemination as the main cause of delays.

As a result, the information contained in the HIRs may no longer be relevant by the time it reaches the fusion centers. For example, one fusion center official said that its center received an HIR with information about a suspicious individual that was 6 months old. Another fusion center official said that it can take 9 to 10 months for the HIRs it produces to be disseminated, resulting in delayed access to this information for other fusion centers. Such delays have led some officials to avoid the DHS process and rely on the FBI to share unfinished intelligence information.

In addition, I&A did not always provide fusion centers adequate opportunity to contribute to finished intelligence products. I&A analysts produce numerous intelligence products that are fully evaluated before distribution and are considered finished. For example, I&A analysts produce Homeland Security Assessments that provide in-depth analysis on a specific topic or threat, which are then provided to state and local personnel. However, officials at several fusion centers said that I&A did not allot enough time for fusion center analysts to contribute to these intelligence products. For example, one fusion center analyst said that the fusion center was given only 1 or 2 days to contribute to DHS' intelligence

products. Another fusion center official said that its fusion center was only given the opportunity to contribute to finished intelligence products if the center generated the product. Additionally, one fusion center official said that even though the center had information to contribute, DHS produced a finished intelligence product without providing the center the opportunity to include its information. An I&A official said that although a formal process to involve state and local analysts was not in place, one was being initiated. Without such a process in place, information that could have been provided by state and local officials may have been excluded.

Information Sharing Systems

IT systems do not fully support information sharing between DHS and state and local fusion centers. Although DHS has implemented HSIN-LE and HS SLIC to share SBU information with fusion centers, and HSDN to share secret-level information, fusion center personnel make limited use of these systems. Instead, fusion center personnel rely on email for situational awareness and intelligence sharing. Fusion center personnel indicated that HS SLIC was difficult to navigate and search, and HSDN and HSIN-LE had limited useful content. In addition, fusion center personnel indicated that there were too many federal systems, and no ability to conduct comprehensive or simultaneous searches across multiple systems or DHS databases. Email may meet fusion centers' need for situational awareness; however, collaboration across state, local, and federal partners to "connect the dots" to prevent and deter threats remains a challenge without effective information sharing IT systems.

Limited System Use

The *Homeland Security Act of 2002* requires DHS to establish a secure communications and IT infrastructure that allows federal, state, and local governments and other specified groups to access, receive, and analyze data, and to disseminate information acquired by DHS as appropriate.¹⁵ In addition, the *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007* requires the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis to establish a comprehensive IT network architecture to promote information sharing among intelligence and other personnel within the department.¹⁶

Despite DHS' efforts to implement IT systems, email and phone calls remain the primary methods for sharing information with fusion centers. NOC officials said that when an event of national significance occurs, it sends information to fusion centers and other stakeholders using email distribution lists. Personnel said that no one system functions as a "dashboard" that fusion centers can continuously monitor to receive real-time, constant notices and information. According to NOC officials, email is the one tool that stakeholders reliably monitor. Consequently, if information is not sent out via email, it may not reach all intended recipients. Further, email is available to personnel who are away from a computer and have access to only a handheld device, such as a

¹⁵ Public Law 107-296, *Homeland Security Act of 2002*.

¹⁶ Public Law 110-53, *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007*.

BlackBerry. Fusion center personnel confirmed that email was the main tool for sharing information with DHS.

Also, fusion center personnel make limited use of DHS IT systems for sharing information. Specifically, personnel from several fusion centers said that they logged into HS SLIC only occasionally for unclassified information sharing. Figure 4 provides data on HS SLIC use from January 2009 to May 2010.¹⁷

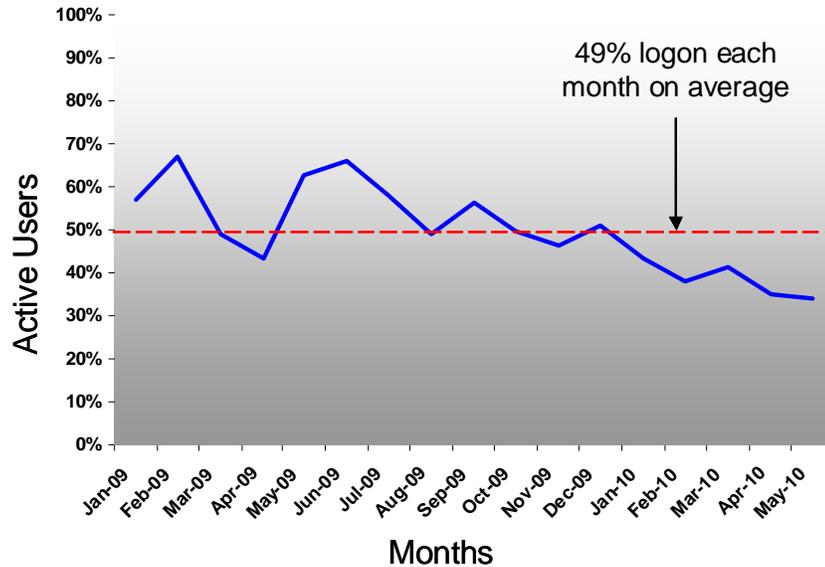


Figure 4: HS SLIC State and Local Usage

On average, from January 2009 to May 2010, only 49% of state and local account holders logged in each month. About a third of all inactive HS SLIC account holders, including headquarters and state and local accounts, have been so for 5 months or more. Users that logged in only did so an average of 4.5 times a month. In addition, usage is heavily skewed toward a small number of states that use the system much more than others. Specifically, in May 2010, five states accounted for 44% of state logons.

Although fusion center personnel who used HS SLIC said that some of the system’s functionality was beneficial, they said that it was difficult to search and find products and information. Specifically, personnel from several fusion centers said that the document library is difficult to navigate and the search tool is not effective. For example, fusion center personnel can set up alerts

¹⁷ The total number of state and local accounts listed in the chart range from 1,307 on January 31, 2009 to 1,844 on May 31, 2010.

on HS SLIC to receive email notifications when something is posted that meets defined alert criteria. However, personnel said that when they received the notifications they often could not locate the document due to the poor organization of the library and they could not search for the document because the search tool was ineffective. As a result, fusion center analysts said that they stopped logging into the system when they received an alert.

Similarly, personnel from fusion centers did not use HSIN-LE for sharing SBU law enforcement information regularly. According to HSIN program office data, only 15 of the 72 fusion centers use HSIN-LE. In addition, the number of active HSIN-LE account holders is limited. In July 2009, headquarters personnel conducted a user cleanup of HSIN-LE to close accounts that had been inactive for more than 180 days. The cleanup reduced the number of accounts from approximately 7,000 to 1,000. HSIN-LE had a total of 642 users as of May 2010. Personnel from most of the fusion centers we contacted said that they did not use HSIN-LE because of the limited content available via the system. Several fusion center analysts said that they stopped logging in because information was not posted regularly in the past. The HSIN program has since started working to understand the needs of the HSIN-LE community to increase system use. For example, program personnel conducted a survey to obtain user feedback on HSIN-LE user needs.

Fusion centers with access to HSDN for secret-level information also do not use their access often. As of May 2010, 39 of the 72 fusion centers had access to HSDN, with a total of 611 state and local account holders. Of the 611 account holders, 197 had never logged into the system. Those that did log in did so infrequently. On average, from January 2009 to May 2010, state and local account holders logged in only 1.5 times each month. Figure 5 shows the percentage of inactive account holders as of May 2010.

Active and Inactive Users as of
May 2010

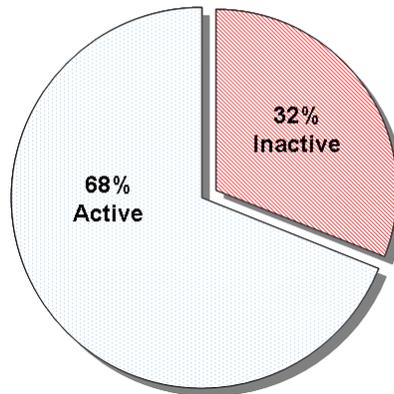


Figure 5: HSDN State and Local Usage

Although fusion center personnel who used HSDN said that it improved their access to secret information, many said that they did not log in often because of the limited content available. Fusion center personnel found the secure video teleconference, access to the National Counterterrorism Center’s classified web portal, and secure email useful. However, users said that many of the links to additional information sources did not work, and state and local personnel were not given enough access to classified websites. As a result, some fusion center personnel rely on other means, such as FBI systems, to access secret-level information.

Inadequate System Integration

In addition to limitations specific to the systems, personnel from 10 of the 15 fusion centers we contacted said that there were too many federal information sharing systems that are not integrated. GAO and OIG reports from as early as 2006 have identified the inadequate integration between HSIN and DOJ systems, including the Regional Information Sharing System and Law Enforcement Online.¹⁸ Fusion center personnel said that information was still not integrated and often redundant across systems, and users must maintain separate user names and passwords for each system.

Further, the two primary portals within DHS for sharing SBU information with fusion centers—HSIN and HS SLIC—are not integrated. The HS SLIC community used HSIN portal services

¹⁸ *Homeland Security Information Network Could Support Information Sharing More Effectively*, OIG-06-38, June 2006. *Information Technology: Numerous Federal Networks Used to Support Homeland Security Need to be Better Coordinated with Key State and Local Information-Sharing Initiatives*, GAO-07-455, April 2007.

from March to September 2006 but became concerned about the lack of critical capabilities and security within the HSIN portal environment. To address these concerns, I&A leadership developed a separate platform for HS SLIC to provide stronger security with two-factor authentication, as well as other functionalities such as secure messaging. As a result, users must maintain separate accounts, and information cannot easily be shared across systems. For example, if I&A personnel decide that a product from HS SLIC should be posted to HSIN, the product is typically emailed to the Senior Watch Officer at the NOC with a request that it be posted to the appropriate HSIN portals. DHS senior leadership has emphasized the need to consolidate unclassified information sharing portals within the department, and HS SLIC is scheduled to migrate to HSIN Next Generation, a DHS initiative to update HSIN, by the end of 2011.

Additionally, personnel from several fusion centers said that the inability to conduct a comprehensive search across systems and databases is a major challenge. Currently, users must log into each system separately when searching for information. Personnel at several fusion centers said that finding time to access multiple systems is a challenge. These analysts said that it would be ideal to have one system that would allow the user, based on his or her access rights, to search several systems at once.

According to system program officials, HSIN Next Generation contains plans to address some of these challenges. Specifically, there are plans to include a single sign-on capability to access both HSIN and other DHS systems, as well as other portals such as the DOJ's Law Enforcement Online and Regional Information Sharing System. In addition, HSIN program personnel said that HSIN Next Generation can provide comprehensive search capabilities across systems, and system program officials are working with the DHS CIO and components to expand the capability.

HSIN Next Generation development and deployment has encountered delays and faces challenges. Transition to HSIN Next Generation was initially scheduled for May 2009; however, as of the end of our fieldwork, the transition had been delayed until December 2010. Due to performance concerns, OMB halted development, modernization, and enhancement funding for HSIN beyond 2010, and identified several corrective actions. HSIN program officials plan to meet with OMB in October 2010 to review progress on the actions required to improve the program.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Director of the State and Local Program Office within the Office of Intelligence and Analysis:

Recommendation #1: Deploy I&A representatives to remaining fusion centers, as applicable.

Recommendation #2: Facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the deployment of component representatives to fusion centers as necessary.

We recommend that the Deputy Under Secretary for Analysis and the Deputy Under Secretary for Enterprise and Mission Support within the Office of Intelligence and Analysis:

Recommendation #3: Coordinate with the NOC to improve fusion center access to component information.

We recommend that the Deputy Under Secretary for Analysis within the Office of Intelligence and Analysis:

Recommendation #4: Streamline the review process for unfinished intelligence products.

We recommend that the Deputy Under Secretary for Enterprise and Mission Support within the Office of Intelligence and Analysis:

Recommendation #5: Implement a process to include fusion center input for finished intelligence products.

Recommendation #6: Coordinate with HSIN program management to integrate HS SLIC with HSIN Next Generation contingent on satisfaction of security and other user requirements to allow for single sign-on and the ability to share data across systems easily.

Recommendation #7: Improve the organization and search capability within those systems used by the state and local intelligence community and define a strategy to encourage system usage.

Recommendation #8: Complete installation of HSDN to all fusion centers and improve the availability of timely and relevant content through the system.

We recommend that the HSIN Program Manager:

Recommendation #9: Evaluate and validate the mission need for the HSIN-LE portal within the environment of existing federal law enforcement information sharing portals.

Recommendation #10: Pursue single sign-on and comprehensive search capabilities to improve integration of federal SBU systems and DHS databases available to fusion centers.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

We obtained written comments on a draft of this report from the Deputy Under Secretary for Plans, Policy, and Performance Management within I&A, and the Acting Director for OPS. We have included a copy of the comments in their entirety in Appendix B.

In their comments, the Deputy Under Secretary for Plans, Policy, and Performance Management within I&A, and the Acting Director for OPS concurred with our recommendations. Additionally, they provided details on steps being taken to address specific findings and recommendations in the report. We have reviewed management's comments and provided an evaluation of the issues outlined in the comments below.

In response to recommendation one, the Deputy Under Secretary concurred and stated that I&A continues to deploy intelligence officers and regional directors to fusion centers around the country, and is on track to have a deployed officer in every fusion center by the end of FY 2011. Once completed, this action will satisfy our recommendation.

Responding to recommendations two and three, the Deputy Under Secretary concurred and stated that I&A recognized the importance of the recommendations. The Deputy Under Secretary suggested directing recommendation two to OPS as well as the State and Local Program Office, and minor reformatting of the language. We agreed with the suggested change in language. We did not redirect the recommendation to OPS because OPS had already completed its review of our recommendations. Additionally, we agreed with the Deputy Under Secretary's request to assign recommendation three to both the Deputy Under Secretary for Analysis and the Deputy Under Secretary for Enterprise and Mission Support within I&A. We look forward to learning about progress toward addressing these recommendations.

In response to recommendations four and five, the Deputy Under Secretary concurred with the recommendations. We agreed with the Deputy Under Secretary's request to assign recommendation four to the Deputy Under Secretary for Analysis within I&A, and to assign recommendation five to the Deputy Under Secretary for Enterprise Mission Support for I&A. We look forward to learning about progress toward addressing these recommendations.

In response to recommendation six, the Deputy Under Secretary concurred and stated that the HSIN Program Management Office is working closely with the HS SLIC community to assess the ability of HSIN to meet the requirements of this community for a web portal, including two-factor authentication, single sign-on, and secure messaging. The Deputy Under Secretary, however, reported that a delay has occurred in meeting the objective of migration into HSIN due to the reassessment underway by the OCIO of the HSIN program, including an analysis of alternatives regarding a technology platform. The HS SLIC requirements will be incorporated into the set of requirements for the HSIN Next Generation platform. The Under Secretary stated that the HSIN Mission Operations Committee will review all the requirements, including those specific to HS SLIC users, and assist the program in prioritization of the requirements. Once the HS SLIC community requirements have been implemented, the migration to HSIN will begin. As requested, we assigned this recommendation to the Deputy Under Secretary for Enterprise Mission Support. We believe that such efforts are good steps toward addressing our recommendation and look forward to learning more about continued progress and improvements in the future.

The Deputy Under Secretary concurred with recommendations seven and eight. Responding to recommendation eight, the Deputy Under Secretary stated that I&A, through the National Security Systems Program, is working to deploy HSDN to all 72 recognized fusion centers. Additionally, the Deputy Under Secretary said that I&A is working with the Department of Defense to improve access to classified resources for State and Local users. We recognize this action as a positive step toward addressing recommendation eight.

Responding to recommendation nine (recommendation seven of the draft report), the Acting Director of OPS concurred and stated that HSIN-LE supports DHS' requirement to share Law Enforcement Sensitive information via a secure platform. In addition, the Acting Director said that HSIN-LE caters to a user base that is distinct from other law enforcement information sharing systems. However, the low numbers of active HSIN-LE user accounts and feedback from fusion center personnel showed that HSIN-LE had a limited number of users and useful content. We recognize the requirement for HSIN-LE and the steps that the HSIN program is taking to define and build the HSIN-LE user community. We look forward to learning more about continued progress and improvements in the future.

In response to recommendation ten (recommendation eight of the draft report), the Acting Director concurred and said that the HSIN Next Generation platform, scheduled for release beginning in FY 2011, will incorporate a federated search capability and follow the Global Federated Identity and Privilege Management (GFIPM) standards. These standards will apply to the HSIN-LE Community of Interest, giving it the capability to conduct searches on Law Enforcement Online, Regional Information Sharing Systems, and other law enforcement information sharing portals. The HSIN program conducted a pilot test to integrate with the Department of Justice's Regional Information Sharing Systems. The initial phase of HSIN Next Generation GFIPM implementation has been completed. We believe that such efforts are good steps toward addressing our recommendation and look forward to learning more about continued progress and improvements in the future.

We conducted an audit of DHS' approach to information sharing with state and local fusion centers. Our objectives were to determine (1) the effectiveness of DHS' strategy, processes, and activities for facilitating information sharing with state and local fusion centers; and (2) the extent to which IT systems support information sharing between DHS and these centers. Our audit focused on law enforcement and intelligence information sharing and did not address the requirements of the emergency management and private sector.

We researched and reviewed federal laws and executive guidance related to DHS' support of information sharing with fusion centers. We reviewed recent GAO and OIG reports to identify prior findings and recommendations. Using this information, we designed a data collection approach for our review, consisting of focused interviews and document analysis.

We conducted interviews at DHS headquarters with both I&A and OPS personnel. At headquarters, we interviewed senior I&A and OPS leaders, including system owners and division directors, to discuss their roles and responsibilities related to DHS' support of state and local fusion centers. We interviewed NOC personnel to learn about the current processes for sharing information with fusion centers. We also collected numerous documents from these offices about DHS accomplishments, current initiatives, and future plans to support fusion centers.

We selected 15 fusion centers to contact based on a number of factors, including risk prioritization, geographic location, and inclusion of both state and major urban area centers. We visited seven fusion centers and conducted telephone conferences at the remaining eight centers. We interviewed a range of fusion center personnel, including the centers' leadership, I&A representatives, and state and local analysts, to obtain feedback on information sharing with DHS and the supporting technology. We sought to evaluate existing practices for information sharing in the field and the extent to which headquarters provides tools for field users. Where possible, we obtained reports and other materials to support the information provided during the interviews. Additionally, we visited the Battle Lab in Herndon, VA, which was working on a federated single query search system.

We conducted our audit from March to June 2010 at DHS headquarters in Washington, DC, and at the following fusion center field locations:

- Atlanta, GA
- Austin, TX
- Los Angeles, CA
- Phoenix, AZ
- Richmond, VA
- Sacramento, CA
- Washington, DC

We conducted telephone conferences with the following fusion center locations:

- Columbus, OH
- East Lansing, MI
- Fairfax, VA
- Latham, NY
- Maynard, MA
- Minneapolis, MN
- Providence, RI
- Tallahassee, FL

We performed our work pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions, based on our audit objectives.

The principal OIG points of contact for this audit are Frank Deffer, Assistant Inspector General for Information Technology Audits, and Richard Harsche, Director of Information Management. Major OIG contributors to the audit are identified in Appendix D.

**Appendix B
Management Comments on the Draft Report**

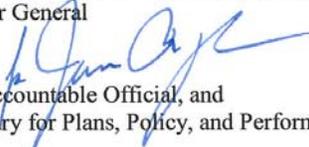


U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

**Homeland
Security**

October 5, 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR: Frank Deffer
Assistant Inspector for Information Technology Audits
Office of the Inspector General

FROM: Todd M. Rosenblum 
Senior Component Accountable Official, and
Deputy Under Secretary for Plans, Policy, and Performance
Management (PPPM)

SUBJECT: Comments to Draft Report for DHS OIG Audit 10-037-ITA-OPS,
“Information Sharing with Fusion Centers has Improved, but
Information System Challenges Remain”

The Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report. In response to OIG’s recommendations for action by I&A, we provide the following:

Recommendation #1: “Deploy I&A representatives to remaining fusion centers, as applicable.”

I&A Response: I&A concurs with this recommendation. I&A continues to deploy officers and regional directors to fusion centers around the country and is on track to have a deployed officer in every fusion center by the end of FY 2011.

Corresponds to
recommendations
#2 and #3 of the
final report

Recommendation #2: “Coordinate with the NOC to improve fusion center access to component information, and facilitate deployment of component representatives to fusion centers as necessary.”

I&A Response: I&A concurs with this recommendation. I&A recognizes the importance of this recommendation; however, the recommendation spans two separate tasks which impact several different organizations in DHS. For the sake of clarity and accuracy, I&A requests that the recommendation be directed to the State and Local Program Office in I&A as well as DHS OPS, and reformatted in the following manner:

“Facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the deployment of component representatives to fusion centers as necessary.”

I&A believes that the first half of this recommendation should be given its own independent recommendation, as suggested in the following recommendation, and directed to two offices within I&A.

Corresponds to recommendations #4 and #5 of the final report

Recommendation #3: “Streamline the review process for unfinished intelligence products, and implement a process to include fusion center input for finished intelligence products.”

I&A Response: I&A concurs with this recommendation. Due to the various tasks within this recommendation and the preceding one, we request that they be reordered and reorganized into the following recommendations:

For I&A Deputy Undersecretary for Analysis:

Recommendation #3: Coordinate with the NOC to improve fusion center access to component information.

Recommendation #4: Streamline the review process for unfinished intelligence products.

For I&A Deputy Undersecretary for Enterprise and Mission Support:

Recommendation #5: Coordinate with the NOC to improve fusion center access to component information.

Recommendation #6: Implement a process to include fusion center input for finished intelligence products.

Corresponds to recommendation #6 of the final report

Recommendation #4: “Coordinate with HSIN program management to integrate HS SLIC with HSIN Next Generation contingent on satisfaction of security and other user requirements to allow for single sign-on and the ability to share data across systems easily.”

I&A Response: I&A concurs with this recommendation. The HSIN Program Management Office is working closely with the HS SLIC program management team to assess the ability of HSIN to meet the requirements of the HS SLIC community for a web portal, including two-factor authentication, single sign-on, and secure messaging (in-portal email). There has been a delay in meeting the objective of migration into HSIN due to the current reassessment underway by OCIO of the HSIN program, including an analysis of alternatives regarding a technology platform. The HS SLIC requirements will be incorporated into the set of requirements for the HSIN Next Generation platform. The HSIN Mission Operators Committee (MOC) will review all requirements including those specific to HSIN SLIC users and assist the program in prioritization of the requirements. Once approved through the MOC and subsequently through the Information Sharing Governance Board (ISGB), the requirements will be scheduled for implementation in accordance with the HSIN requirements management and release management plans. When the HS SLIC requirements have been implemented, the migration to HSIN will begin.

In an effort to apply this recommendation to the relevant offices and components, I&A requests that this recommendation be directed to the I&A Deputy Undersecretary for Enterprise and Mission Support and DHS OCIO. It should also be renumbered as #7 to appropriately follow the preceding recommendations.

Corresponds to recommendation #7 of the final report

Recommendation #5: “Improve the organization and search capability within those systems used by the state and local intelligence community and define strategy to encourage system usage.”

Corresponds to recommendation #8 of the final report

I&A Response: I&A concurs with this recommendation and requests that it be renumbered as #8 to appropriately follow the preceding recommendations.

Recommendation #6: “Complete installation of HSDN to all fusion centers and improve the availability of timely and relevant content through the system.”

I&A Response: I&A concurs with this recommendation. I&A, through the NSS Program, is working to deploy HSDN to all 72 recognized Fusion Centers. In addition, I&A is working with the Department of Defense to improve access to classified resources for State & Local users.

I&A also requests that this recommendation be renumbered as #9 to appropriately follow the preceding recommendations.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Keith Jones, Component Audit Liaison, at 202-282-9553, or his assistant, Peter Weinert, at 202-447-4140.



Homeland Security

SEP 28 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR: Richard Skinner
Inspector General

FROM: Richard Chavez 
Acting Director, Office of Operations Coordination and Planning

SUBJECT: Response to the Office of Inspector General's Report
"Information Sharing With Fusion Centers Has Improved, but
Information System Challenges Remain"

The Office of Operations Coordination and Planning (OPS) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the DHS Office of Inspector General's (IG) report entitled "Information Sharing With Fusion Centers Has Improved, but Information System Challenges Remain." This inspection and the subsequent report provided a catalyst for us to review and assess processes and procedures for sharing information with fusion centers. The following is our response to the two IG recommendations addressed to OPS.

Corresponds to
recommendation
#9 of the final
report

Recommendation #7: Evaluate and validate the mission need for the HSIN-LE portal within the environment of existing federal law enforcement information sharing portals.

OPS concurs with the recommendation to evaluate and validate the mission need for HSIN-LE. The Department of Homeland Security has a requirement to share Law Enforcement Sensitive information via a secure platform and HSIN-LE does provide the Federal, State, Local and Tribal law enforcement communities a viable means by which to share such information.

Each of the major Federal information sharing systems (i.e., Law Enforcement Online, Regional Information Sharing Systems, Homeland Security Information Network, Intelink-UnclassifiedNet) offers unique information to a select set of users. In the current operating environment, each system caters to its distinct user base by informing through diversified sources, enabling access to various resources, and facilitating communication among law enforcement communities.

The Program Manager-Information Sharing Environment (PM-ISE) recognizes the need for separate systems to meet the unique needs of different Federal departments and agencies. The PM-ISE is now focusing on interoperability with the major information sharing systems rather than a consolidation of the four major systems. Complying with PM-ISE issued Federal interoperability standards will provide a federated identity management capability that will enable a single sign-on from any of the four systems with access to the other three. This will

also alleviate the need for maintaining multiple sets of system credentials to logon to each system.

The following attributes distinguish the HSIN-Law Enforcement (LE) portal from other Federal information sharing platforms:

- HSIN is the only information sharing and collaboration platform that allows for the sharing of information across all DHS mission areas (i.e., Law Enforcement; Emergency Management; Intelligence; and Critical Sectors) used by Federal, State, local, tribal, territorial, private sector, and international partners.
- HSIN-LE provides the ability for users to collaborate across the government by posting agency-specific documents, engaging in discussion threads, and receiving Be On the Lookout, Requests for Information, For Your Information, and Officer Safety alerts from law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. These capabilities further homeland security efforts to prevent, protect, respond to, and recover from potential criminal threats, critical incidents, and natural or manmade disasters.
- HSIN-LE offers users real-time situational awareness alerts resulting in increased operational coordination and the identification of similar trends and patterns regardless of geographical boundaries.
- HSIN-LE allows users to communicate in a sensitive but unclassified environment that is restricted to sworn law enforcement officers and those engaged in direct support of the criminal justice system.
- HSIN-LE does not focus on case management.
- With the deployment of HSIN NextGen technology, users will have the ability to access the Law Enforcement Information Sharing Initiative, which is the Department's initiative to facilitate sharing DHS law enforcement information with other Federal, State, local, tribal, and international law enforcement agencies.

Engaging partners from diverse cross sections of the law enforcement community is an ongoing process and a top priority for HSIN-LE administrators. Content, usability, and operational relevancy are essential to attracting users, retaining them, and sustaining their use of the platform. Success in this venture will allow for more efficient operational coordination and a more complete OneDHS approach.

Corresponds to recommendation #10 of the final report

Recommendation #8: Pursue single sign-on and comprehensive search capabilities to improve integration of federal SBU systems and DHS databases available to fusion centers.

OPS concurs with this recommendation.

The HSIN Next Generation platform, scheduled for release beginning in FY11, will incorporate federated search and interoperability following the Global Federated Identity and Privilege Management (GFIPM) standards. This will apply to the HSIN-LE Community of Interest, giving it the capability to conduct federated searches on Law Enforcement Online, Regional Information Sharing Systems, and other law enforcement information sharing portals. In July, the HSIN Program conducted a successful pilot integration with the Department of Justice's Regional Information Sharing Systems. The initial phase of HSIN Next Generation GFIPM implementation was completed in August.

DHS OIG Reports

DHS' Efforts to Develop the Homeland Secure Data Network, OIG-05-19, April 2005.

Homeland Security Information Network Could Support Information Sharing More Efficiently, OIG-06-38, June 2006.

DHS' Efforts to Improve the Homeland Security Information Network, OIG-09-07, October 2008.

DHS' Role in State and Local Fusion Centers Is Evolving, OIG-09-12, December 2008.

Information Sharing at the National Operations Center, (Redacted) OIG-10-15, November 2009.

GAO Reports

Information Technology: Numerous Federal Networks Used to Support Homeland Security Need to Be Better Coordinated with Key State and Local Information-Sharing Initiatives, GAO-07-455, April 2007.

Homeland Security: Federal Efforts Are Helping to Alleviate Some Challenges Encountered by State and Local Information Fusion Centers, GAO-08-35, October 2007.

Information Sharing Environment: Definition of the Results to Be Achieved in Improving Terrorism-Related Information Sharing Is Needed to Guide Implementation and Assess Progress, GAO-08-492, June 2008.

Information Sharing: Federal Agencies Are Sharing Border and Terrorism Information with Local and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies, but Additional Efforts Are Needed, GAO-10-41, December 2009.

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