

Department of Energy National Labs: Partners with the States on Homeland Security

“Emergencies and disasters are local and regional events,” added Major General Timothy Lowenberg, the Adjutant General for Washington State. “Our first line emergency managers and responders know better than anyone what the challenges are, where the shortcomings exist, and what successful solutions must be embraced. By partnering and working with the national labs, the states and territories gain a louder voice with DHS to influence and accelerate impactful, sustainable solutions to homeland security issues.”

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At a summit meeting on May 28, 2008, key representatives from ten western states and the Territory of Guam embraced the idea of developing a concept to partner with U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) national laboratories, specifically the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and the Idaho National Laboratory, to help identify technology needs and requirements, establish priorities, and provide unbiased technical support and training. National labs can also serve as agents to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for the states and enable the states and region to be the early evaluator and adopter of technology.

The Need

Across the nation, state agencies face challenges in homeland security, from choosing the right instrument to detect chemicals and radiation to training staff in how to recognize biological agents and respond to threats from explosive devices. Some challenges are so complex they can only be met by developing new technology and pushing the bounds of science. The stakes, and public expectations, are high, yet state budgets grow ever tighter and DHS grants are becoming more competitive.

The Request

The western states want to work through the Northwest national laboratories (Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington, and Idaho National Laboratory in Idaho Falls) to explore and further advance the development of a partnership that may address technology needs and requirements, establish priorities, address operational challenges, and serve an advocacy role to DHS. They see that partnership as a way to improve relationships with DHS and increase the overall benefit to the individual states and territories, Urban Area Security



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Initiatives, the region, and the nation. States could work with national labs in such areas as the following:

- Developing sensors to detect multiple types of biological agents or deadly chemicals and creating scientifically defensible sampling plans to maximize efficiency and minimize cost
- Providing tools that allow analysts to make sense of the overwhelming amounts of data from technical information, press releases, criminal reports, and databases to support effective decision making during emergencies
- Testing cyber security and critical infrastructure to ensure it can withstand disruptions from natural disasters and terrorist attacks
- Evaluating radiation/nuclear instrumentation to ensure it will provide accurate results under specific field conditions
- Training first responders to recognize and respond effectively to potential biological, chemical, explosives, and nuclear threats using real-world facilities and materials.

The states have recommended that DHS provide the needed financial support to the northwest labs to begin the partnership and host a working meeting to develop the specific details of the partnering concept so that it can be fully implemented with the participating states. This financial support should be adequate to cover reasonable travel costs for state participants. The partnering concept could then become a model for other states and regions across the country.

The Requesters

The following states and territory endorsed development of the concept through their Adjutant Generals, State Emergency Management Directors, the State Directors of Health, or State Patrol Chiefs:

- Alaska
- Colorado
- Guam
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Montana
- North Dakota
- Oregon
- Utah
- Washington
- Wyoming

