NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS FUSION CENTER (NCTFC)

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Overview

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a fusion center is defined as a collaborative effort of two or more agencies that provide resources, expertise, and/or information to the center with the goal of maximizing the ability to detect, prevent, apprehend, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity. Fusion centers are critical to the efficient and effective sharing of intelligence information among state, local, federal, and tribal agencies. The intelligence component of a fusion center focuses on the intelligence process, where information is collected, integrated, evaluated, analyzed, and disseminated. Non-traditional collectors of intelligence, such as public safety entities and private sector organizations, possess important information that can be "fused" with law enforcement data to provide meaningful information and intelligence about threats and criminal activity. The fusion center concept is integral to the Department of Homeland Security strategic initiative for information sharing.

Introduction

The North Central Texas Fusion Center (NCTFC) is regionally oriented and uses cross-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary partnerships between local, state, federal, and tribal agencies, to include private sector participants.

Applications of the NCTFC include:

- Improved natural disaster/accident mitigation and response
- Terrorism prevention
- Emerging health threat detection
- Supporting law enforcement

The operational stakeholders of the NCTFC include law enforcement, public health, emergency management, fire and rescue, transportation, emergency operations centers, and private corporations. Other supporting and benefiting stakeholders include city and county administration, academia, information technology, state and federal agencies, and elected officials. The NCTFC communicates with many external organizations, including, but not limited to, the Texas Fusion Center (TxFC) located in Austin, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Dallas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), the Dallas Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Headquarters, and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Texas.

The North Central Texas Fusion Center is integrated into the national network of state and regional fusion centers, which have the ability to share information with partners at the local, state, federal, and tribal levels.

Mission Statement

To protect the citizens of North Texas by creating a synergistic environment among governmental and corporate stakeholders. The NCTFC takes an all-crimes, all-hazards approach to the intelligence cycle in an overall effort to mitigate threats or hazards to the North Central Texas Region, while protecting the constitutional rights of all citizens.

Vision Statement

The vision of the North Central Texas Fusion Center is to achieve the mission through a cross-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary approach. Goals and objectives are focused on the prediction and prevention of any actions that may cause harm to the citizens of the 16 counties within the North Central Texas region. These goals rely on effective information sharing strategies.

The NCTFC provides a centralized, comprehensive, multi-agency, information and intelligence sharing network. The actionable intelligence is used to enhance the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the all-hazards organizations dealing with public safety and first responder agencies throughout the North Central Texas region.

Authority

The Collin County Commissioners' Court provides the authority under which the North Central Texas Fusion Center operates. The Commissioners' Court also governs the NCTFC operations. **Texas House Bill 3324** provides guidelines relating to the operation and monitoring of fusion centers in the state, including the North Central Texas Fusion Center.

Texas' Strategic Direction

The Texas Homeland Security Strategic Plan (2010-2015) serves as the foundation for the homeland security strategic planning process in Texas. Texas has adopted a statewide capabilities-based homeland security strategic planning process, consisting of four basic steps: assessing risk and identifying gaps, developing strategies, implementation, and synchronizing funding streams with homeland security outcomes.

Texas has developed three goals within this plan that are aligned with the President's highest-priority goals of prevention, protection, response and recovery. The Texas strategy also encompasses the seven national priorities for preparedness identified by the Department of Homeland Security, but has tailored them to meet the unique homeland security needs of Texas, given its size, geographic features, lengthy land and sea borders, and diversity.

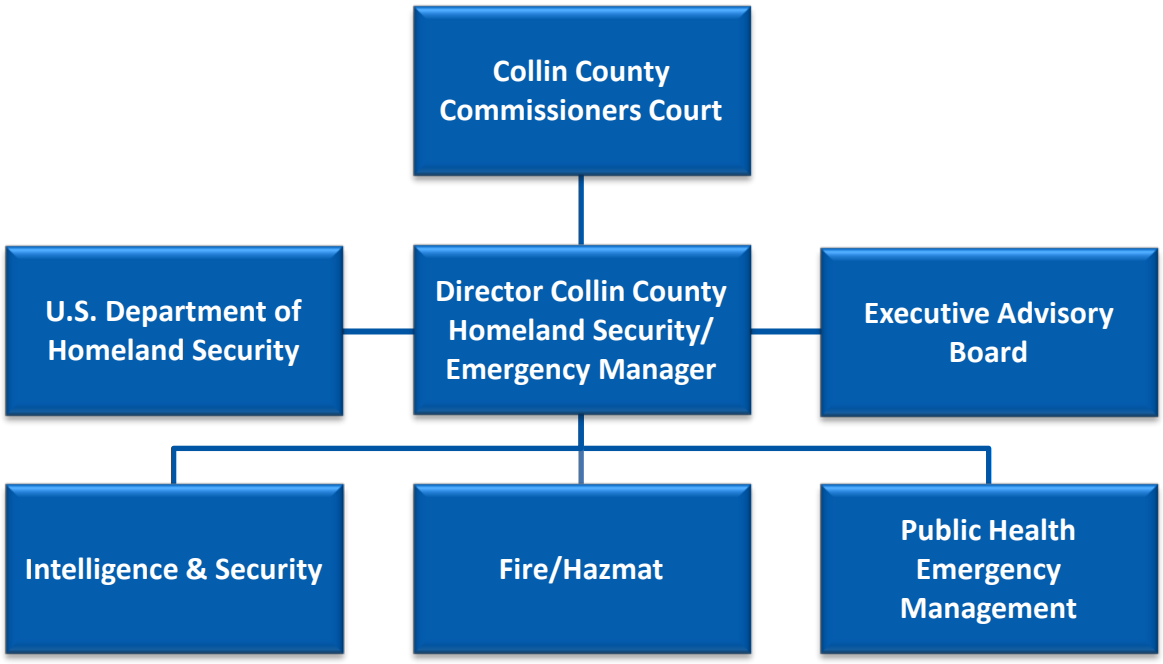
1. Prevent terrorist attacks within Texas
2. Reduce vulnerability to terrorist attacks and other disasters
3. Minimize damage and quickly recover from terrorist attacks and other disasters

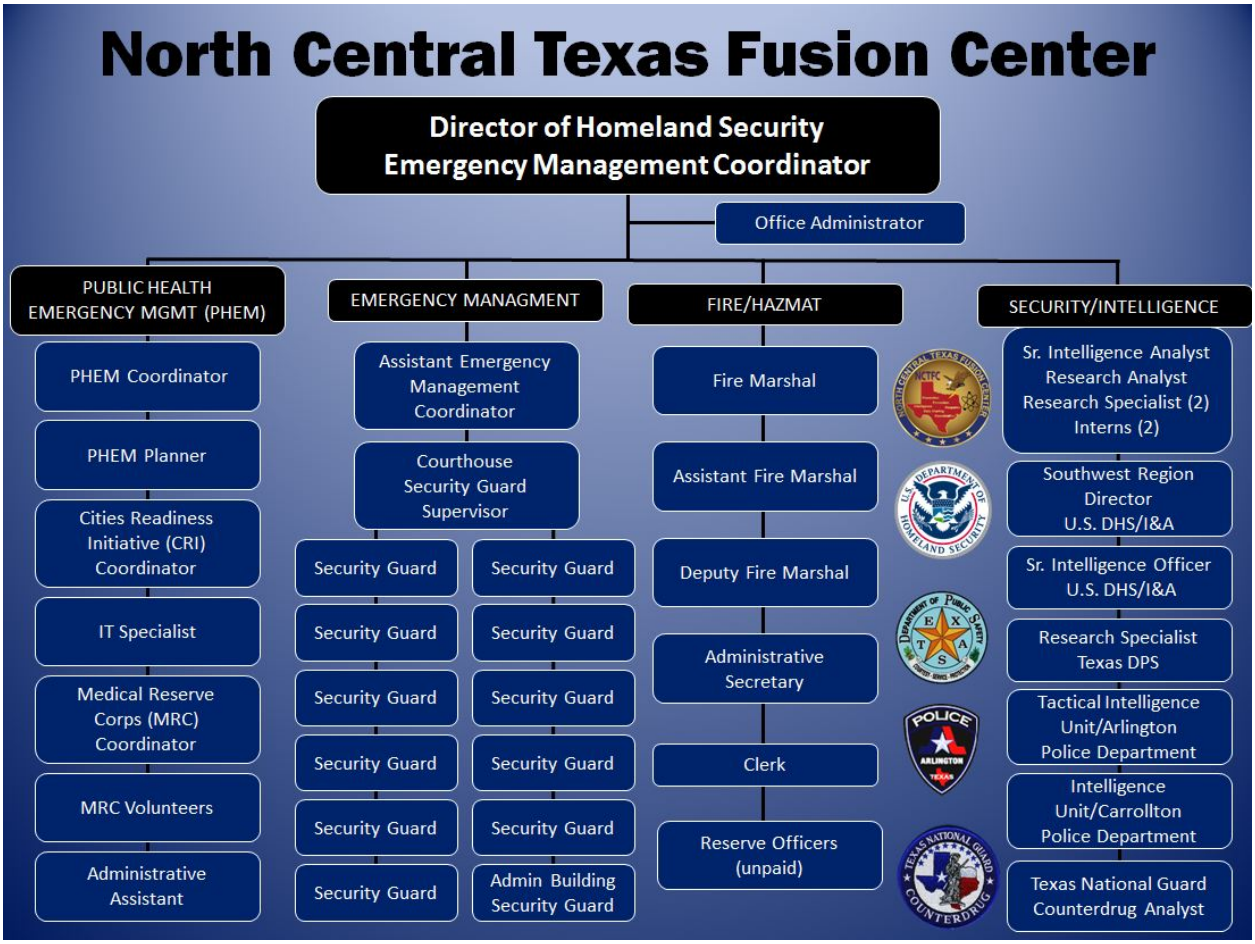
Organizational Structure

The homeland security efforts in Texas have been changing and adapting since the North Central Texas Fusion Center was established in 2006.

Following the attacks on 11 September 2001, the Collin County Commissioners' Court established the Collin County Homeland Security Department. Kelley Stone was appointed as the Director and Emergency Management Coordinator. The Fire Marshal's Office was then placed under the guidance of Director Stone. A separate grant assisted in the formation of a Public Health Emergency Management (PHEM) Team that was also placed under the direction of Director Stone.

Because of his background in law enforcement, the Collin County Commissioners' Court directed him to solve some of the major problems faced by law enforcement officials, most notably, information sharing. In order to do this, a multi-disciplinary information sharing system was proposed. Once there was enough interest in the project Director Stone applied for grants in order to get funding for a multi-disciplinary information sharing system. The North Central Texas Fusion Center became operational in February 2006.





Goals and Objectives

The North Central Texas Fusion Center develops new goals and objectives annually. These goals and objectives adhere to those outlined in The Texas Homeland Security Strategy and other guiding documents.

Executive Advisory Board

Although the North Central Texas Fusion Center gets its authority from the Commissioners' Court, it is a cross-jurisdictional collaboration between federal, state, local and tribal agencies, as well as members of the private sector. Policies of the NCTFC will be guided by an Executive Advisory Board, which will be made up of individuals who represent the Fusion Center stakeholders.

Funding

The North Central Texas Fusion Center operates on local tax money from Collin County and uses federal grant dollars from the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program and State Homeland Security Grant Programs. Money is also provided by the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI). Regular funding for Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) is provided by the CDC, through Bioterrorism, Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI) and Risk Based Funding grant programs.

Staffing

Employees of the North Central Texas Fusion Center are a combination of civilian and law enforcement personnel. The NCTFC is fully operational from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

Currently there are seventeen full-time staff members assigned to the NCTFC, including two members from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, a Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Criminal Analyst, a Senior Intelligence Analyst, a Research Analyst, two Research Specialists, an Information Technology (IT) Specialist, the Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator, the Fire Marshal, and six Public Health Emergency Management team members.

NCTFC Operations

The North Central Texas Fusion Center is divided into three sections:

1. Threat Analysis
2. Emergency Management (including the Emergency Operations Center)
3. Requests for Information (RFIs)/Case Support

The NCTFC staff takes an all-crimes, all-hazards approach to the intelligence cycle and focuses on criminal interdiction, public health threats, agriculture threats, officer or public safety threats, and natural disasters.

Threat and Analysis: The NCTFC composes reports for dissemination to stakeholders and decision makers in the emergency services and critical infrastructure sectors. Sensitive information is distributed to the law enforcement community through “Law Enforcement Sensitive” (LES) reports sent via e-mail.

Emergency Management (Emergency Operations Center): In the event of an actual or suspected criminal or terrorist attack, or in the event of a natural disaster, the NCTFC coordinates with members of the affected critical infrastructure sectors, the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), local jurisdictions, the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure a coordinated intelligence exchange and to disseminate information and “best practices” in order to prevent or mitigate further attacks.

Requests for Information/Case Support: Agencies can utilize the NCTFC analysts for routine requests for information and case support. NCTFC analysts will assist agencies by providing the requesting agency with link analysis, database searches and through the coordination of information between local, state, federal and tribal agencies.

Fusion Liaison Officer (FLO) Network

The Fusion Liaison Officer (FLO) Network was created for law enforcement and first responder agencies throughout the North Central Texas region, in order to strengthen information sharing and enhance multi-jurisdictional partnerships. The network was developed in an effort to provide participants an effective means of sharing information related to local, regional, and global criminal threats, suspicious activity, and large-scale incidents. The FLO Network integrates participants into a large regional system of resources through a process of combining local fire, law enforcement, state, federal agencies, as well as key private sector partners into an effective and sustainable two-way flow of information.

Goals & Objectives: The FLO Network was established with the following objectives in mind:

- Create a regional network of personnel combining federal and state resources with local fire and law enforcement resources to provide a two-way flow of information
- Establish a link to current intelligence gathering groups and provide a platform to share and collect information related to local, state, and global threats
- Quickly evaluate and disseminate information to emergency response personnel, including site managers and private sector participants within the region
- Assist NCTFC with community outreach and threat and vulnerability assessments
- Help maintain a database of information regarding critical infrastructure sites and key resources throughout the region
- Provide support and advisory functions at critical incidents
- Use decision making and analytical tools to evaluate data gathered by participants
- Evaluate and apply emerging threat information to help develop prevention measures

Participating Agencies: The FLO Network will focus on bringing together individuals from law enforcement, fire service, emergency management, private sector, military, federal agencies, healthcare, education, as well as other key stakeholders. The goal is to build a large system of subject-matter experts focused on the information analysis process. By including a broad network of disciplines, the FLO Network seeks to increase the likelihood of identifying trends, precursors, and planning activities associated with significant incidents and criminal activity. Participants are most often line level individuals who interact with the community through calls for service and will be responsible for coordinating criminal intelligence information from his/her local agency to the NCTFC.

Fusion Liaison Officers may be selected from some of the following types of organizations:

- Agricultural Agencies
- Telecommunication Services
- Banking and Finance
- Military
- HazMat
- Postal Services
- Criminal Justice Agencies
- Private Security Services
- Education Community
- Public Works
- Emergency Medical Services
- Energy
- Retail Services
- Government Agencies
- Social Services
- Public Health
- Transportation Agencies
- Fire Departments
- Law Enforcement

Definition of a Fusion Liaison Officer (FLO): A Fusion Liaison Officer (FLO) is an identified person within a law enforcement, fire service, emergency management, or private agency who is responsible for coordinating all-crimes/all-hazards information sharing from their organization to the NCTFC and other regional partners.

Roles and Responsibilities: The FLO Network promotes the involvement of selected individuals working together with every first responder and participating private sector representatives in a comprehensive prevention program. This network provides a platform to share information in regards to local, regional, and global threats. Information sharing will be facilitated through a clearly defined framework. This structure will help eliminate roadblocks to timely distribution of information that has been identified as critical to the stakeholders of the region's prevention, preparedness, and security efforts.

The Fusion Liaison Officer will be a direct point of contact at the local level and serve as a key point of reference for all stakeholders in the North Central Texas region. Each FLO may participate in this information sharing network by assisting with some of the following:

- Reporting relevant field information from his/her local area
- Disseminate information to field officers during roll call or team meetings
- Disseminate information to field units
- Provide intelligence briefings to agency executive staff
- Information gathering and product dissemination

Participation Level: Each participant's level of involvement will vary depending on his/her area of responsibility and agency. Evaluations will occur throughout the year in order to provide the appropriate level of support from both a program standpoint, and the involvement that is required from each participant in the FLO Network. Participation levels will vary, due in large part to the diverse nature of the North Central Texas region and the geographic makeup of all contributing jurisdictions. Individuals with the ability to contribute at all levels of involvement are encouraged to participate as their organization requires/permits.

Flow of Information: The NCTFC has developed defined categories of standing information needs (SINs). A standing information need is any subject, general or specific, for which there is a continuing need for intelligence. FLO participants will assist the NCTFC and its stakeholders by gathering information within their region or area of expertise and communicating that data for further analysis.

Information gathering will be determined through a process facilitated by executive level stakeholders within the North Central Texas region. As information needs are identified the role of each Fusion Liaison Officer and his/her agency will be to support this process. As requests are made all participants will be asked to forward any pertinent information to the NCTFC in a timely manner and be available for follow-up should the need arise.

Requests for information and product dissemination will depend on an individual's need to know. Information will be sent out in two forms: Law Enforcement Sensitive (LES) and For Official Use Only (FOUO). Fusion Liaison Officers will receive information in the form most appropriate for his/her level of involvement. The NCTFC and regional stakeholders produce documents in both FOUO and LES versions to accommodate the diversity of all participants. The FLO training course will provide more in-depth instructions on how to properly disseminate these types of products.

Participants may feel that information they receive is pertinent to individuals and/or organizations outside of their agency. The NCTFC requests each participant seek approval prior to disseminating any documents and/or products produced by the NCTFC or its stakeholders. This process will allow all partners to adequately comply with the security requirements of the producing agency.

Training and Meetings: The NCTFC will provide ongoing educational opportunities for FLO participants. This will be accomplished through a combination of conference calls, meetings and seminars to be held throughout the year. Information regarding these training opportunities will be distributed to all participants as dates, times, and locations are determined.

The FLO Network training program is designed for line level personnel who have the ability, background, and desire to share and receive pertinent information regarding criminal threats at the local, state and national level. This training will allow each participant to have access to all relevant resources available through the information sharing network.

Each participant will receive twenty-four hours of training delivered over three days. This initial block of instruction will include guidelines regarding the process and type of information that should be sent to the NCTFC. This includes suspicious activity reported in the participant's jurisdiction, requested case support (information/expertise) and critical incident information. Examples of information that should be sent to the NCTFC include, but are not limited to the following:

- Bomb Threats
- Suspicious Activity
- Stolen Agricultural Equipment
- Fertilizer/Bomb-making Items
- Crime Information (LE/Fire Thefts)
- Surveillance of Critical Infrastructure Key Resources
- Threats to Schools
- Terrorist Watch List Hits
- Significant Cyber Incidents
- Police/Fire Impersonators

Specific Information Requests: The North Central Texas FLO Network includes a large number of subject-matter experts who may be utilized in the event of a situation or incident that requires his/her specific skillset. Each participant's contact information will be included in the Fusion Liaison Officer phone book. This document will be distributed to the entire network. Its purpose is to provide participants with access to a broad range of information resources. These subject-matter experts may be contacted in order to provide support relative to specific threats and/or critical incidents in the region. Each individual may be called on by the NCTFC, as well as other FLO participants and their agencies, in order to provide information relative to their area of expertise.

Based upon their position or role within a specific agency, participants may be on scene during incident response. The Fusion Liaison Officer position does not authorize an individual to be part of the incident command structure unless otherwise required by his/her role or position. The FLO may serve as a contact between the incident command center and the NCTFC if appropriate and needed.

Public Health and Emergency Management Team

Bioterrorism and Public Health Emergency Preparedness: The Collin County Public Health Emergency Management Team is responsible for the preparation, response and recovery from disease outbreaks. Specifically, the PHEM Team works to develop enhanced preparedness and planning efforts for natural and man-made public health emergencies through the composition and development of plans and training of Homeland Security and Health Care Services Staff. The goal of the team is to distribute medical countermeasures, such as medication or vaccines, during a large-scale public health emergency within 48 hours.

The Public Health Emergency Management Team also aims to improve inter-agency and inter-jurisdictional coordination through the development of agreements and routine participation with hospitals, schools, city emergency managers, adjacent county departments, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), the North Central Texas Trauma Regional Advisory Council (NCTTRAC), as well as other non-profit, faith-based and community organizations.

Other PHEM team activities include:

- Organizing and conducting training and exercises for pandemic influenza, Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) deployments, redundant communications, and other response activities
- Providing mass care for sheltering operations
- Educating residents regarding disease prevention and control

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC): The Medical Reserve Corps mission is to improve the health and safety of communities by organizing and utilizing local volunteers, both medical and non-medical. They enhance their response through pre-identifying, credentialing, and training locally recruited volunteers who supplement existing health and emergency response infrastructure during a public health disaster/crisis. MRC members assist with mass prophylaxis dispensing, health education, sheltering operations, and other health and disaster preparedness activities.

Information Sources

Information is collected from an ever-evolving list of federal, state and local resources within both the public and private sectors to include: federal agencies, state agencies, all current local and state fusion centers, open sources, local jurisdictions (local law enforcement agencies, fire departments and county emergency managers), critical infrastructure sector representatives, and private citizens.

NCTFC Products and Services

The NCTFC provides the following products and services:

- Threat assessments (high profile events)
- Case support and database searches
- Early warning alerts and recommended response protocols
- Requests for Information
- Exercise or intelligence support in an actual event

Law Enforcement Sensitive reports and For Official Use Only (FOUO) reports will be developed and distributed on an "as-needed" basis in the future.

Guiding Documents

The North Central Texas Fusion Center follows federal fusion center and information sharing policies. The NCTFC policies, procedures and operations follow the Bureau of Justice Operating Policies for 28 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) Part 23, Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative Fusion Center Guidelines and the Bureau of Justice National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan as guiding documents.

Privacy Policy

The North Central Texas Fusion Center is currently revising its privacy policy regarding the center's operations in order to protect the civil rights and liberties of all Texas citizens.

Conclusion

The Department of Homeland Security is leading the way in innovative security approaches, and Texas has decided to face the new security challenges head on by following the DHS lead. The NCTFC has embraced interagency cooperation among federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial agencies through information sharing in the effort to protect the North Central Texas region. This information sharing is utilized to improve natural disaster/accident mitigation and response, terrorism prevention, emerging health threat detection, and law enforcement investigation support. Texas is determined to prevent and/or prepare for emergency responses for any incident that may occur.

Sources

Colorado Information Analysis Center (CIAC) Business Plan and CONOPS, 1 August 2007.

Colorado Information Analysis Center (CIAC), CONOPS, 2011, v2.

The Texas Homeland Security Strategic Plan 2010-2015, 11 May 2010.