



The Russians Are Coming!

A hands-across-the-water information exchange with the former Soviet Union just might keep American researchers and technologists from reinventing the wheel—or radiological monitor, explosive suppressor, or tunneling detector. Thanks in part to the efforts of the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)—Northwest in Anchorage, Alaska, public safety personnel have a new place to turn when they need new technologies and products—the Russian Law Enforcement Technical Devices Catalog, a recently translated compendium of information on Russian technological advances related to public safety.

Bob Griffiths, director of NLECTC–Northwest, explains, “This 300-plus page document can be used like an encyclopedia. Readers with special interests can look among hundreds of entries, broken down into 24 categories, for the technology they need. They may find that the Russians have already developed exactly what they are looking for. It’s designed to let folks know there are other technologies and products out there—that they can look beyond the traditional public safety markets in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Russia has a strong history of technology development. They have come up with some useful tools that we have not developed, partly because they’ve been dealing with the terrorism problem a lot longer.”

Griffiths cites a number of Russian innovations and their potential uses that are found in the catalog:

- Personal radiological monitors that first responders can carry into potential weapons-of-mass-destruction situations. Some of these devices resemble wristwatches; others fit in pockets and include calendar and alarm clock functions.
- Portable explosive suppression systems that fit in the trunk of a car. Patrol officers can deploy these to lessen the impact of an explosion (in case an improvised explosive device detonates before the bomb squad arrives). The catalog also suggests placing them in such public places as trash bins.
- Sophisticated equipment to detect explosive devices sent through the mail.

- Advanced forensic kits to examine documents and analyze handwriting and fingerprints.
- “Invisible ink” verification markings that come into view under specific conditions. These range from crayons for tagging cartons to clear ink cartridges for inkjet printers.
- Durable personal protective equipment, including shields, ballistic vests, and helmets made with materials not now in use in the United States.
- Ultrasensitive electronic surveillance devices for undercover operations and wiretapping.
- Tunneling detection devices to maintain secure perimeters.

Griffiths says an English version of the *Russian Law Enforcement Technical Devices Catalog* will be available on CD-ROM to public safety agencies. But, he notes, this is not the end of the initiative. Joint American-Russian testing and evaluation of the technologies is next; sharing the results with the U.S. public safety community will follow. Bomb suppression devices, personal radiological monitors, and ballistic vest fibers likely will head the evaluation list. “These popped out immediately as being especially valuable to public safety agencies in the U.S.,” he says. Griffiths anticipates that testing and evaluation will be carried out over the next few years, and the catalog will be updated periodically. As they have since summer 2002, the Russians will continue to provide NLECTC–Northwest with technological descriptions.

According to Griffiths, the technology exchange project started when G&H International, a Washington, D.C.-based company, helped bring NLECTC–Northwest staff together with officials from the Russian Ministry of Interior (the national police force). Because G&H has branch operations in Russia and works extensively with NIJ, the company saw a ready match between the two agencies.

“The Russians asked if we were interested in documentation on their technology, and we said give us some

samples,” Griffiths says. “We were absolutely fascinated by what we read and asked for more. They provided an immense amount of information in January 2003, and it grew into the catalog. While neither NIJ nor NLECTC–Northwest endorses any of the products in the catalog, we look forward to our own testing and evaluation to demonstrate their potential value to American public safety efforts.”

NLECTC–Northwest called on expert translators and NLECTC system engineers to develop the catalog and review the technologies. This translation and review process led to information exchanges between U.S. law enforcement representatives and officials from several Russian agencies, including the St. Petersburg police, the National Police Training Center, the National Laboratory for Equipment Development, and the Ministry of Emergency Situations (roughly equivalent to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security). In February 2004, 10 Russian officials traveled to Anchorage to meet with representatives from NIJ, NLECTC, and other public safety agencies in the first Joint American-Russian Police Technology Forum.

“American law enforcement and other public safety agencies cannot operate alone in protecting our citizens,” Griffiths says. “As demonstrated by bombings and acts of terrorism in Moscow and other areas of Russia, collaboration among public safety professionals across international borders is vital. We may be separated by great distances, different languages, and different alphabets, but we are colleagues with a common mission—a mission in which we speak the same language and face the same challenges.

“We know that on the ‘large scale,’ discussions and meetings are taking place between our countries. Unfortunately, at the operational level, collaboration and information exchange occur less often. Those who would most benefit from meetings and discussions—police, fire, medical, and emergency services—have not been involved. This is what prompted the first joint forum.”

The forum’s principal objectives were to—

- Initiate a series of working group meetings to share and discuss technologies that will support first

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responders (police, fire, medical, and search and rescue), especially in cold and remote areas.

- Identify successful technology and equipment developed for cold and remote areas.
- Determine what technology requirements exist for first responders who operate in cold and remote areas.
- Identify joint technology projects on which forum members from both countries could collaborate.

A report on the 4-day forum is available through NLECTC–Northwest. The next joint forum is tentatively planned for October 2004 in St. Petersburg, Russia. “The Russians have two motives in sharing their information with us: to find a new market for their technology and to establish strong relationships with their U.S. counterparts.”

The U.S.-Russian collaboration is not the first joint country exchange for NIJ. For many years, the Institute has maintained a close working relationship with counterparts in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Israel.

For a copy of the Russian Law Enforcement Technical Devices Catalog, submit a request on agency letterhead to the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center–Northwest, 3000 C Street, Suite 304, Anchorage, AK 99503-3975. For a copy of the Joint American-Russian Police Technology Forum Report, call 866-569-2969 or e-mail nlectc_nw@ctsc.net.



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