

# Technology no match for cop on the beat

By HARLYN AIZLEY  
CORRESPONDENT

In community policing, technology is only as good as the police department using it. And for area police departments, combination of resources is what connects the most officers to the best technology.

Pooling of resources is nothing new to the 43 Middlesex and Essex county police departments that comprise the North Eastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council (NEMLEC). Formed in the 1990s, NEMLEC is widely considered to be ahead of its time — when only since 9/11 have others begun to see the benefits of regional communication.

The goal of NEMLEC is to allow individual police departments to

maintain local control while providing them, through a regional consortium, with the highest level of support and supplemental public safety services.

"It makes no sense for every police department to have a SWAT team or a computer lab or a fatal accidents motor vehicle unit," said North Andover Police Chief and past NEMLEC president Richard Stanley. "But if does make sense for areas to have these things, so we can work together."

Through the NEMLEC command post, a mobile unit worth nearly \$1 million, communication and viewing capabilities are possible with any member city or town via radio and satellite. Downlinks can also be received from Massachusetts police helicopters.

In addition to the post-9/11 impetus toward regionalization of policing, Chief Stanley and police departments nationwide are pursuing an increasing focus on terrorism.

In fact, the fight against terrorism has revitalized the role of technology in all aspects of policing. Thanks to NEMLEC, each participating department can benefit from the wealth of technology available to the entire consortium. Tools such as electronic fingerprint gathering and transmission, night vision and remote viewing equipment, self-contained breathing apparatuses, mobile unit computers, and DNA testing mechanisms not only go far in the controlling of terrorism but also in fighting regular crime as well, especially when used throughout the region.

"NEMLEC is a force multiplier," Stanley explained. "It's an added layer of security, a blanket of safety for individual police departments in which police chiefs never have to relinquish control."

Chief Stanley cites the proper use of technology — coupled with education, training, public awareness, and partnerships created via community policing — as responsible for the dramatic reduction in the U.S. crime rate.

Stanley warns, "We can't become over-reliant on technology. It has to be viewed as a tool. It's still the good cop on the street, who develops relationships, has the trust of the community and can gather information, that's the best weapon we have to stop terrorism and deal with crime and disorder."



FRANK LEONE/Special to The Eagle-Tribune

North Andover police chief Richard M. Stanley, standing, is control chief of the regional response and SWAT team, called NEMLEC. Seated is tactical dispatcher Richard Boettcher. Boettcher works on a laptop computer in the NEMLEC mobile incident control center.