

Government Updates

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ASHRAE and Homeland Security

By **Chuck Miró**, Director of Government Affairs

Washington often seems like it is under siege. Based on a recent terror alert for financial institutions, several streets were closed and security checkpoints and roadblocks were installed at key locations close to the main Federal Reserve and Treasury buildings, the World Bank headquarters and the International Monetary Fund building.

Existing security around the Capitol and the White House also has been beefed up, with plans being made for more security at other Washington, D.C., buildings. According to the federal planning body for the capital region, more than 20 federal agencies are seeking to set up barrier walls, fences, concrete bollards, hydraulic gates, guard booths or other hardened perimeters. The curtailed access to major roads around key symbolic and functional centers in Washington marked a dramatic acceleration of the encroachment of security measures in the nation's capital in recent years.

Despite the added security, life in the nation's capital goes on. The vehicle checkpoints at the beginning of the Orange Alert slowed traffic, particularly during the morning rush hour, but the blockades seemed to function smoothly, generating more weariness than complaints.

Soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, ASHRAE mobilized its resources to address concerns by the public and the government that ventilation systems could be used as a means of introducing chemical, biological or radiological contaminants into buildings.

Since then, ASHRAE has been involved in a number of projects that have brought the Society recognition as a leader in the field. The most recent of these was the Satellite Broadcast on Homeland Security, available from the ASHRAE Bookstore on DVD. Much of the broadcast's success is owed to the outstanding Society volunteers on the ASHRAE Presidential Ad Hoc Committee on Homeland Security, which includes President Ronald P. Vallort, P.E., Fellow ASHRAE; William J. Coad, P.E., Fellow/Presidential/Life Member ASHRAE; and Barney Burroughs, Fellow/Presidential/Life Member ASHRAE.

Through the ASHRAE Washington office, the Society is involved in a number of important national efforts in homeland security. Among these is The Infrastructure Security Partnership (TISP). ASHRAE is a member of the steering committee and chairs its Standards Subcommittee. TISP is a coalition of technical associations and government agencies working together on issues related to the security of the built environment. TISP will hold its annual conference on Infrastructure Security for the Built Environment Nov. 7–10 in St. Louis. A related group is the Homeland Security Standards Panel of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI-HSSP). ASHRAE also sits

on the steering committee of this group, which is working to coordinate national standards related to homeland security and to enhance the process by which the standards are developed and incorporated into local codes.

Engineering groups such as ASHRAE and others have been meeting in Washington for the past couple of years, often in association with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the State Department, to discuss ways to help rebuild the engineering infrastructure in Iraq. At one time, the “educational system in Iraq was one of the best in the region...and the scientific and technological institutions were of an international standard,” according to a 2003 U.N. report. However, wars, international sanctions, and political tyranny led to serious degradation of the country's academic and technical capabilities. Most technical materials in Iraq are at least 20 years out-of-date.

As part of the effort to rebuild the country's technical infrastructure, several video teleconferences have been held between U.S. engineers and members of the Iraqi Engineers Union (IEU). The IEU is a professional organization that certifies engineers. Its members represent a variety of disciplines including civil, mechanical and electrical engineers. Most are also affiliated with the 11 universities in Iraq and serve as consulting engineers.

The ASHRAE Presidential Ad Hoc Committee on Homeland Security has explored ways that the Society can assist with this reconstruction. Among the options is distributing ASHRAE Handbooks, Standards and other technical materials, including ASHRAE educational courses in Iraq. These plans are contingent on securing U.S. government assistance with the cost of providing materials, and in exporting those materials to the right people—not a small feat with the situation as it exists in Iraq today. One project discussed by the Ad Hoc Committee is to create a program in which ASHRAE members can mentor an Iraqi engineer.

For further information on these or other issues related to homeland security, see www.ashrae.org/homelandsecurity or contact me at the Washington Office, cmiro@ashrae.org.

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