Improving the Public's Awareness and Reporting of Suspicious Activity

Key Research Findings from Literature Review, Household Surveys, Focus Groups and Interviews

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2011, three cleanup workers notified law enforcement of a suspicious backpack they found on a bench along the route of a parade honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Spokane, Washington. The backpack contained a live radio-controlled pipe bomb. Thanks to the timely report, law enforcement officers and bomb specialists were able to reroute the parade and neutralize the bomb before anyone was injured. This is just one of many examples that demonstrate the importance of the public's awareness and willingness to report suspicious activity.

Members of the public have long served as the "eyes and ears" of the communities in which they reside and work. Community members have a vested interest in keeping their neighborhoods safe and are critical to support law enforcement's duty to prevent and investigate crime and terrorism. Many law enforcement agencies are already implementing local programs to enhance their community's awareness of reporting suspicious activity, yet there is little guidance or research regarding best practices to improve citizen reporting. *Improving the Public's Awareness and Reporting of Suspicious Activity: Key Research Findings* presents research-based findings that can inform local officials in developing education and awareness campaigns.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Individual and Community Preparedness Division partnered with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) on a project to research and develop a strategy to improve the public's awareness and reporting of suspicious activity. In early 2010, IACP conducted research of contemporary and historical practices intended to improve the public's reporting of suspicious activity. The literature review showed that little research existed on the motivations and barriers that affect whether or not individuals report

information to law enforcement. To close this gap in data, IACP developed a three phase primary research strategy. This report provides an overview of key research findings and provides insights and recommendations that support national and local campaigns.

This research effort complements other national efforts like the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's "If You See Something, Say Something™" public awareness campaign. The "If You See Something, Say Something™" campaign was originally used by New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which has licensed the use of the slogan to DHS for anti-terrorism and anti-crime efforts. As part of the campaign, DHS has partnered with multiple private sector partners, sporting teams, transportation agencies, states, cities, colleges and universities. Great strides have been made within the last few years to improve information sharing amongst law enforcement agencies and fusion centers via initiatives like the NSI; yet, more can be done to improve the quantity and quality of information that law enforcement receives from the public.

Residents know their communities best and are often the first to notice when something out of the ordinary occurs. With the onset of decreased resources and increased responsibilities, law enforcement is more reliant than ever on community members to provide accurate, reliable, and timely information regarding suspicious activities that may be indicators of terrorism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Preventing terrorism is a responsibility of every American, and requires an alert and informed citizenry that is ready to report suspicious activity that may be indicative of a terrorist act or terrorism planning. With this core understanding, IACP began reviewing contemporary and historical research, literature, trends, and practices related to community-based terrorism prevention efforts in the spring of 2010. The goal of this effort was to identify successful strategies for implementing and maintaining state, territorial, tribal, and local initiatives that improve the public's awareness and reporting of suspicious activity related to terrorism. Initial findings suggested that more information was needed to understand the psychological and social inhibitors and motivators of the public's awareness of and willingness to report suspicious activity. To narrow this gap in data, the project team conducted and analyzed research in the summer of 2010.

Under contract with IACP, ICF Macro joined the project team and supported the design, data collection, and reporting of the research. The first phase involved a series of six focus groups conducted by telephone conference call with members of the public. This phase allowed the project team to obtain qualitative data in order to identify the predominant reasons people gave for reporting or not reporting suspicious activity. The second phase entailed a quantitative telephone survey of more than 800 randomly selected individuals. The final stage of the research involved gathering qualitative feedback from law enforcement and community experts via telephone conference calls.

Phase One: Focus Groups with the Public

For this phase of research, focus groups were conducted among the general population. Each group consisted of six to eight participants. Focus group sessions lasted 60 to 75 minutes and were conducted via conference call.

To enroll individuals to participate in the phone-based focus groups, ICF Macro contracted with a recruiting firm. The firm conducted individual screening interviews with potential participants to determine their eligibility for participation. To qualify for the focus groups, potential participants had to meet the following criteria: Be at least 18 years of age, had not participated in a focus group in the past 6 months, and the participant or anyone in the participant's household did not work in the advertising/market research or emergency response/preparedness fields. A screening instrument was used to recruit participants from diverse demographics backgrounds. Screening tool demographic results for the focus groups are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1: FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS				
Gender		**Education**	
Male	41%	High School Graduate	12%
Female	59%	Some College	38%
		College Graduate	31%
Average Age	48	Post Graduate	19%
Ethnicity		**Region**	
Caucasian	79%	Northeast	38%
Black/African American	19%	Midwest	21%
Asian	2%	South	29%
		West	12%
Income			
Less than $25K	7%	**Area Type***	
$25K to less than $50K	29%	Urban	40%
$50K to less than $75K	21%	Suburban	36%
$75K+	43%	Rural	24%

* Area type was self-reported by participants. No specific range was used.

Analysis of Focus Group Data

Researchers conducted a notes-based analysis of the focus group data. Reflecting on the purpose of the study and the segmentation plan for the focus groups, the strategy for reviewing, examining, and categorizing data was to identify:

- General themes across all of the focus groups;
- Similarities and differences between participants from different demographic settings (e.g., urban versus rural); and
- Gaps in individual's understanding/awareness of suspicious activity.

TABLE 2: TELEPHONE SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender		Education	
Male	49%	High School Graduate	12%
Female	51%	Some College	38%
		College Graduate	31%
Age		Post Graduate	19%
18-34	31%		
35-44	19%	**Region**	
45-54	19%	Northeast	19%
55-64	14%	Midwest	22%
65 +	17%	South	36%
		West	23%
Ethnicity			
Non-Hispanic White	69%	**Area Type***	
Non-Hispanic Black	11%	Urban	25%
Hispanic	13%	Suburban	42%
Non-Hispanic Other	7%	Rural	30%
		Don't Know/Refused	3%

* Area type was self-reported by participants. No specific range was used.

Phase Two: Telephone Survey

Quantitative interviewing of the general public—in this case, a telephone survey—enabled the project team to collect the answers from individuals via random digit dialing. Using the qualitative data from the focus groups, the project team tailored "closed" response options, which resulted in faster interviews, better sample respondent selection, and more focused, consistent data organization. During the telephone survey data collection period, interviewers made contact until the desired sample size was reached and used a computer-assisted telephone interview. In order to be eligible to participate in the survey, respondents had to be 18 years old or older and the telephone number had to be linked to a private residence. This report summarizes responses from 813 individuals.

Respondent Demographics

The survey administrators requested demographic information from respondents. Those demographic results are summarized in Table 2. The sample was slightly skewed by age and location

of residence, perhaps as a result of excluding those without landlines.[1] The research team weighted the data by gender, age, race/ethnicity, and education to ensure it was representative of the national average taken from the U.S. Census.

Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, were calculated based on the quantitative data. For this report, the research team is only reporting on the "top box," or highest scoring responses. For a 4-point scale question, the "top box" response would be the highest response possible. ICF Macro developed and employed a code sheet to use when analyzing open-ended responses to the questions "Name one example that comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'suspicious activity'" and "What would make the reporting of suspicious activity easier for you and your neighbors?"

Phase Three: Subject Matter Expert (SME) Panels

For this research, the project team hosted two conference calls: one with experts from community organizations and another with law enforcement experts. Telephone calls lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Recruitment and Screening

To enroll individuals to participate in the SME conference calls, IACP mailed letters, sent emails, and made follow-up calls to pre-selected groups of community stakeholders and law enforcement executives. SMEs were selected to represent a variety of state, territorial, tribal, and local agencies and community organizations serving a broad base of U.S. residents.

Analysis of Meeting Information

The ICF Macro team conducted a notes-based analysis of the focus group data identifying general themes, similarities and differences between participants from different stakeholder groups, and gaps in awareness of suspicious activity and related initiatives.

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1 As with any research methodology, the use of telephone surveys for gathering data has limitations that were carefully considered when designing and implementing this study. In this study, only people with land line telephones were surveyed, and research shows that many households are moving towards using cell phones instead of land lines. Steps were taken to weigh the data to minimize the impact of this limitation.

RESEARCH KEY FINDINGS

Understanding of Suspicious Activity

In order to better tailor messaging and programs on suspicious activity reporting, better understanding was needed on how the general population defined suspicious activity. Overall, participants tended to define suspicious activity as something out of the ordinary or out of place considering the location. In many cases, people gave their everyday environment as a normal setting where any deviation would set off an internal trigger—e.g., unknown people or cars loitering in their neighborhood or near their workplaces, particularly late at night. More than one in three survey respondents (36 percent) described traditional criminal activity, such as someone brandishing a gun or breaking into a car. Only a small portion (5 percent) described activities that may be indicative of terrorism. Urban and suburban respondents were more likely than rural respondents to mention an activity that may lead to a terrorist act.

Motivators to Report

Focus group participants often referred to "their gut instinct" that was triggered when something in their everyday environment is out of the ordinary. Many participants indicated that it was conditional, based on the time and place. For example, one participant noted that if he saw a backpack left in a park where children play, he would not consider it suspicious because many children have backpacks. However, if a backpack was left in a more crowded area where fewer children were expected, this would trigger that "gut instinct" that something was not right. As one focus group participant said, "In your gut you think about what the consequence would be if I didn't [report suspicious activity]. If I was really fearful I might be more apt to report. I wouldn't care if I felt foolish."

Telephone survey respondents were asked what specific factors affect his or her decision to report suspicious activity (See Table 3). People tended to place the greatest reliance on possible future outcomes rather than what they were thinking or feeling at the time. According to respondents, the potential for harm (77 percent) and the belief that the information could be useful to police (74 percent) have the greatest influence on whether they will report suspicious activity. Personal observations (65 percent), others nearby agree (63 percent), and the respondent's instincts (58 percent) were also rated highly by the majority of respondents when determining whether or not to report suspicious activity. More than half of respondents reported that they would be very likely to rely on a combination of all of these factors.

TABLE 3: FACTORS RELIED ON WHEN REPORTING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

	Total	Urban	Suburb	Rural
The potential for harm	77%	81%*	81%*	69%
The information could be useful to police	74%	77%*	79%*	65%
Your personal observations	65%	72%*	64%	59%
Others nearby agree	63%	72%*	61%	59%
Your instinct	58%	62%*	61%*	51%

Percentages represent top box scores or those answering 4 (Very Likely) on a 4 point scale with 4 being "very likely," 3 being "somewhat likely," 2 being "not very likely," and 1 being "not at all likely." Respondents were asked "How likely would you be to rely on the following when deciding on whether to report a suspicious activity to the authorities?"
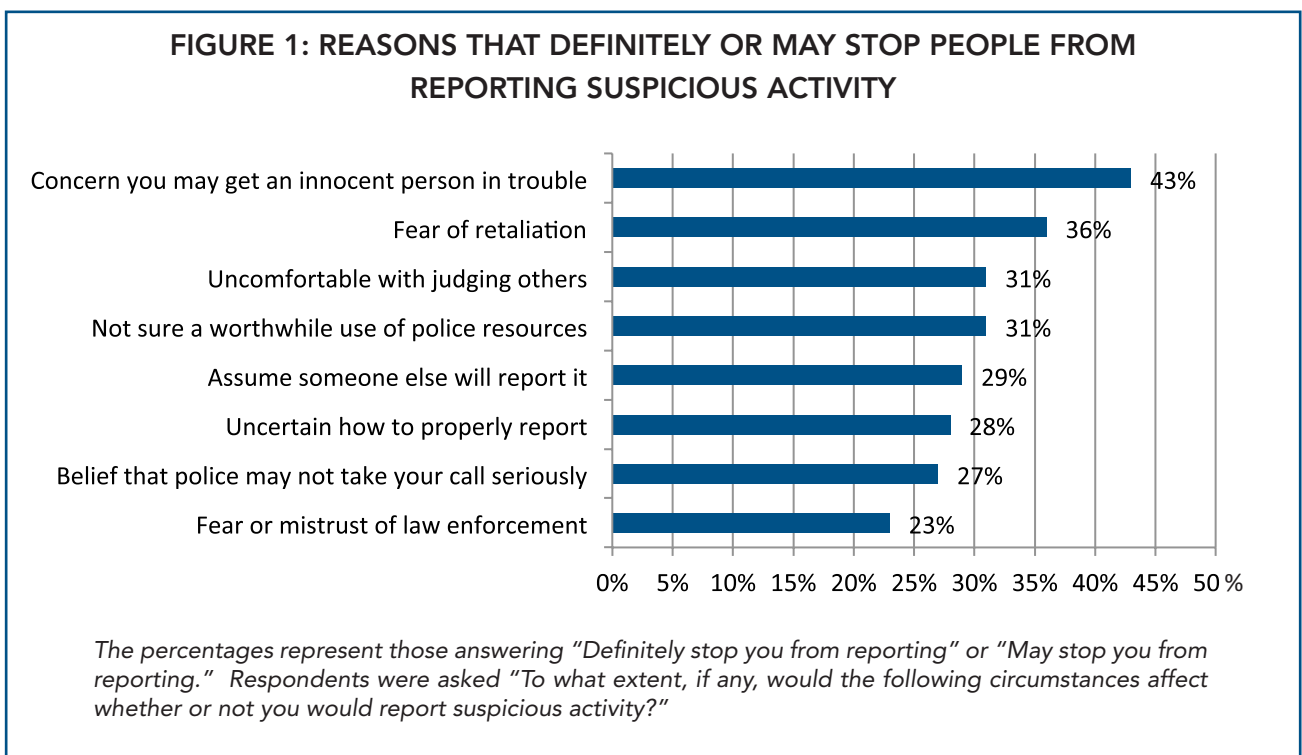
*Indicates the percentage is significantly higher than one or both of compared categories.

Rural respondents were less likely than urban and suburban respondents to rely on almost all factors when deciding on whether to report suspicious activity. Urban and suburban respondents tended to place greater reliance on the potential for harm, knowledge that the information could be useful to police, and their own instinct. Urban respondents were more likely to rely on their personal observations and the agreement of others than suburban and rural respondents.

Barriers that Prevent Reporting

Focus group participants identified several barriers that may prevent community members from reporting suspicious activity. The most frequently cited reason was fear of retaliation. One participant noted a concern that whenever police are called, "they respond with flashing lights and sirens blaring and everyone in the neighborhood would know [who reported the activity]." Women were more likely than men to list fear of retaliation as a barrier. When it came to suspicious activity that may not necessarily be classified as criminal activity, some participants reported not knowing exactly what qualified as "important enough" to report. They wanted to avoid being wrong or appearing "foolish" in the eyes of local law enforcement.

When telephone survey participants were presented with a list of circumstances that could prevent respondents from reporting suspicious activity, the majority said they would not be deterred from reporting. However, there were circumstances that would at least make people more hesitant to report suspicious activity (See Figure 1). Concern over getting an innocent person in trouble (43 percent) was mentioned as the circumstance that was most likely to cause respondents to reconsider reporting the suspicious activity. According to more than one in three (36 percent) respondents, fear of retaliation would make them reconsider reporting. Nearly a third of respondents (31 percent) felt that if they were not sure the information would be a worthwhile use of police resources, they might not report it. Being uncomfortable judging others and assuming someone else would report the activity were the next most frequently mentioned circumstances that would affect reporting of suspicious activity (31 percent and 29 percent).

FIGURE 1: REASONS THAT DEFINITELY OR MAY STOP PEOPLE FROM REPORTING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

Reason	Percentage
Concern you may get an innocent person in trouble	43%
Fear of retaliation	36%
Uncomfortable with judging others	31%
Not sure a worthwhile use of police resources	31%
Assume someone else will report it	29%
Uncertain how to properly report	28%
Belief that police may not take your call seriously	27%
Fear or mistrust of law enforcement	23%

The percentages represent those answering "Definitely stop you from reporting" or "May stop you from reporting." Respondents were asked "To what extent, if any, would the following circumstances affect whether or not you would report suspicious activity?"
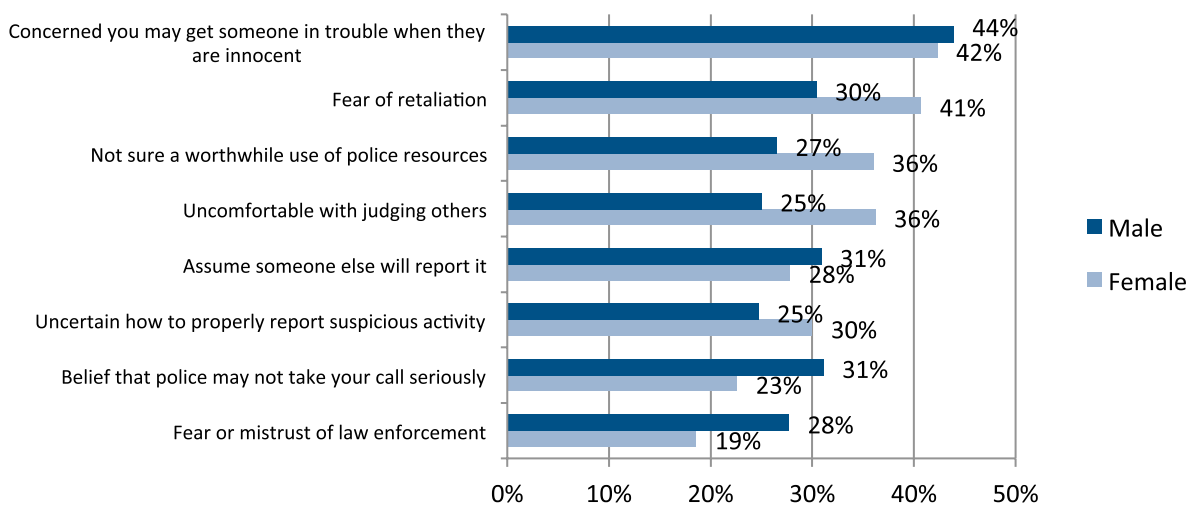
There appears to be a relationship between age and the circumstances mentioned for not reporting suspicious activity. Respondents who were 65 or older (54 percent) were more likely than younger respondents, 18-34 (41 percent) to state that they would hesitate to report because they were concerned they may get an innocent person in trouble. Older respondents (39 percent) mentioned being more uncomfortable judging others than younger respondents (29 percent). Older respondents (19 percent) were less likely than younger respondents (28 percent) to feel they would be deterred from reporting suspicious activity due to a belief that police may not take the call seriously. Younger respondents (45 percent of those aged 18-34) mentioned they were more likely to be deterred from reporting suspicious activity due to fear of retaliation. These younger respondents scored the highest of all age categories in the belief that police may not take the call seriously (32 percent)

and reported that a fear or mistrust of law enforcement could deter them from reporting suspicious activity (36 percent). Overall, fear of law enforcement was mentioned less as respondents' age increased.

There are several key gender differences regarding the circumstances for not reporting suspicious activity (See Figure 2). Females were significantly more likely to report that they would reconsider or not report suspicious activity due to fear of retaliation (41 percent), not be sure if reporting would be a worthwhile use of police resources (36 percent), and have discomfort with judging others (36 percent) compared to males (30 percent, 27 percent, and 25 percent, respectively). Males, on the other hand, were more likely to mention that they would reconsider reporting suspicious activity if they believed police may not take the call seriously (31 percent) or had a fear or mistrust of law enforcement (28 percent) compared to females (23 percent and 19 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 2: REASONS THAT DEFINITELY OR MAY STOP PEOPLE FROM REPORTING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY (BY GENDER)

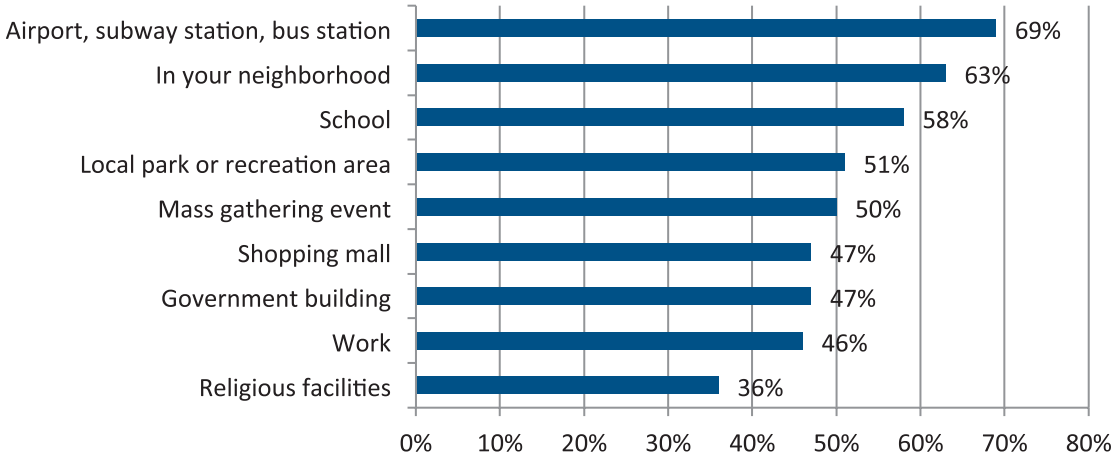| Reason	Male	Female
Concerned you may get someone in trouble when they are innocent	44%	42%
Fear of retaliation	30%	41%
Not sure a worthwhile use of police resources	27%	36%
Uncomfortable with judging others	25%	36%
Assume someone else will report it	31%	28%
Uncertain how to properly report suspicious activity	25%	30%
Belief that police may not take your call seriously	31%	23%
Fear or mistrust of law enforcement	28%	19%

The percentages represent those answering "Definitely stop you from reporting" or "May stop you from reporting." Respondents were asked "To what extent, if any, would the following circumstances affect whether or not you would report suspicious activity?"

Effect of Location on Awareness of Suspicious Activity

The project team sought to find out in which locations individuals were the most likely to be aware of and report suspicious activity. Many focus group participants said they would report suspicious activity that occurred closer to home, because they would feel more confident in being able to tell that the activity did not belong there. Most participants indicated that they would not hesitate to report suspicious activity in airports or mass transit systems.

FIGURE 3: LOCATIONS TO BE AWARE OF SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

Location	Percentage
Airport, subway station, bus station	69%
In your neighborhood	63%
School	58%
Local park or recreation area	51%
Mass gathering event	50%
Shopping mall	47%
Government building	47%
Work	46%
Religious facilities	36%

Percentages represent top box scores or those answering 4 (Very Likely) on a 4 point scale with 4 being "very likely," 3 being "somewhat likely," 2 being "not very likely," and 1 being "not at all likely." Respondents were asked "How likely are you to be on the lookout for suspicious activity in the following locations?"

These findings carried through in the quantitative research (See Figure 3). When asked in which locations they would most likely be aware of suspicious activity, 69 percent of individuals reported being very likely to be aware of suspicious activity in mass transit stations such as airports, subways, and bus stations. After that, at least half of all respondents tended to report being more aware of activity in areas close to home – in their neighborhoods (63 percent), at school (58 percent), and in local parks or recreational areas (51 percent).

Methods for Reporting

Respondents in both the focus group and the telephone survey were asked what procedures they would most likely use to report suspicious activity. The results were similar in the first two phases of research (See Table 4). Nearly three quarters (74 percent) of telephone survey respondents listed calling 9-1-1 as their most likely procedure for reporting suspicious activity. Calling 9-1-1 was followed distantly by calling a non-emergency police number (49 percent) and calling an anonymous tip line (37 percent). Several focus group participants felt that it was necessary to observe the activity or behavior for a period of time first before reporting it. A few said they would approach a person who was acting suspiciously if there was not a perceived threat of danger.

Law enforcement subject matter experts had mixed feelings on the best method to report suspicious activity. SMEs agreed that in an actual emergency, individuals should call 9-1-1, but that a separate non-emergency line should be used to relate suspicious activity if there was no immediate danger. There was some discussion as to whether this number should be an already existing local number

**TABLE 4: LIKELIHOOD OF USING CERTAIN PROCEDURES FOR
REPORTING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY**

	Total
Call 9-1-1	74%
Call a non-emergency police number	49%
Call an anonymous tip line	37%
Use a cell phone mobile app to submit a tip	34%
Use a cell phone to send a text message	30%
Submit information on a government approved website	25%

The percentages represent top box scores or those answering 4 (Very Likely) on a 4 point scale with 4 being "very likely" and 1 being "not at all likely." Respondents were asked "How likely are you to use each of the following procedures to report suspicious activity?"

or if another three-digit number should be set up nationally. It was suggested that the question of preferred suspicious activity reporting procedures should be posed to a larger, national audience.

Focus group and telephone survey participants showed some interest in using new technologies that do not require human interaction and allow for anonymity. More than a third (34 percent) of telephone survey respondents would use a cell phone application to submit a tip; 30 percent would use a cell phone to report via text message; and 25 percent would submit information through a government approved website.

Overall, there appears to be a connection between age and likelihood to use certain procedures to report suspicious activity. Younger respondents (18-34) reported the least likelihood of using 9-1-1 (70 percent) and any of the other procedures to report suspicious activity compared to older respondents. Likewise, those 65 or older were the most likely to mention calling 9-1-1 (82 percent), calling a non-emergency police number (57 percent), and calling an anonymous tip line (43 percent). In terms of gender differences, females (43 percent) were significantly more likely than males (32 percent) to state they would use an anonymous tip line.

Effective Sources of Information for Learning About Suspicious Activity

The importance of educating the public about suspicious activity reporting was emphasized throughout the research. To better understand how to most effectively deliver the message to the public, focus group and telephone survey participants were asked about their preferred sources of information.

Comparable to focus group participants, telephone survey respondents believed that public service announcements (56 percent) were the most effective way to learn about how to report suspicious activity (See Table 5). Some focus group participants noted the importance of including local elected officials or law enforcement leaders to gain local buy in. Nearly half (47 percent) rated presentations at school, work, or community meetings "very effective." Respondents ranked billboards (36 percent) and posters (32 percent) third and fourth. While "links on community or local government pages" was considered "very effective" by only 24 percent of individuals in the telephone survey, focus group participants of all age groups were somewhat more likely to mention using the internet to push information out through community websites and listservs.

To better understand how to work with national and local organizations on community engagement and education campaigns, the project team asked subject matter experts about their own successes with media and outreach campaigns. Consistent with our telephone survey data, television and radio ads and posters were among the top suggested ways to reach the public. One subject matter expert participant noted the importance of having a very clear, very simple message and keeping that message consistent over all forms of outreach. SMEs noted the importance of making the materials available in different formats and languages to accommodate different age groups and cultures.

TABLE 5: EFFECTIVENESS OF SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR LEARNING ABOUT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORTING

	Total	Urban	Suburb	Rural
Public service announcements (on TV or the radio)	56%	61%	56%	52%
Presentations at school, work, or community meetings	47%	56%*	44%	45%
Billboards	36%	43%*	36%	30%
Posters in mass transit stations	32%	40%*	30%	31%
Educational pamphlets	30%	29%	29%	35%
Ads in local newspapers	30%	33%	28%	28%
An email or text alert	28%	24%	30%	29%
Links on community or local government websites	24%	29%	23%	23%

The percentages represent top box scores or those answering 4 (Very Effective) on a 4 point scale with 4 being "very effective," 3 being "somewhat effective," 2 being "not very effective," and 1 being "not at all effective." Respondents were asked "How effective would the following sources be in learning how to report suspicious activity?"

*Indicates the percentage is significantly higher than one or both of compared categories.

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SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on specific findings from the 2010 Improving the Public's Awareness and Reporting of Suspicious Activity primary research and are intended to assist national and local efforts to improve the public's awareness and reporting of suspicious activity reporting.

- **Local law enforcement and community organizations should promote public involvement in identifying and reporting suspicious activities through outreach efforts and campaigns.** Individuals are aware of suspicious activity, particularly in their home communities, and willing to report information they feel may help law enforcement or pose a threat to the community.

  Community members are most aware of what is out of place, particularly in their own neighborhoods. Research shows that people are invested in their communities and want to help law enforcement keep their communities safe. More than half of the participants indicated that they were aware of activity in the areas close to their home – in their neighborhoods (63 percent), at school (58 percent), and in local parks or recreational areas (51 percent). When asked about motivators for reporting suspicious activity, 77 percent answered that they would report if they felt the activity could lead to harm to the community and 74 percent stated that they would report if they believed the information would be useful to law enforcement.

  Outreach campaigns to the public should emphasize how important residents' daily observations can be to keeping communities safe. By promoting the shared responsibility of suspicious activity reporting, law enforcement can benefit from the

extra eyes and ears on the neighborhood, and the public will feel more trusting toward law enforcement and more invested in community safety.

It is important to take a community-wide approach to outreach. Law enforcement, local leaders, community organizations, and residents all have a role to play in promoting safe communities. Resources from the federal level, such as the Department of Homeland Security's "If You See Something, Say Something™" public awareness campaign (www.dhs.gov) can be a model for how local agencies get started with a suspicious activity reporting campaign. Formalized law enforcement volunteer programs such as Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) and USAonWatch (UOW) can be leveraged to help with outreach campaigns. Existing VIPS and Neighborhood Watch programs in local communities are good outlets through which to educate residents about suspicious activity reporting. Volunteer groups may also be able to provide support for campaign outreach, translation of materials, completion of paperwork, and follow-up calls on tip status. Resources from VIPS (www.policevolunteers.org) and UOW (www.usaonwatch.org) are available to help set up new volunteer programs.

- **Public education efforts should provide community members with a better understanding of what suspicious activity entails.** Often vague or based on traditional crimes, the public's definition of suspicious activity sometimes differs from that of law enforcement, particularly as it relates to behaviors that may be precursors to terrorist activity.

  The Nationwide SAR Initiative defines suspicious activity as "observed behavior reasonably indicative of pre-operational planning related to terrorism or other criminal activity."[2] When telephone survey respondents were asked to define suspicious activity, nearly a quarter of individuals (24 percent) said "something out of the ordinary."More than one in three (36 percent) described traditional criminal activity (general crime, 10 percent; burglary or break-in, nine percent; and robbery or mugging, seven percent). Only five percent of survey respondents described potential pre-operational terrorist activity. This indicates that members of the public do not typically perceive suspicious activity as it may relate to potential terrorism related operations.

  Communication must encourage the public to expand its idea of suspicious activity to include behaviors that in and of themselves may not be criminal but may be precursors to or indicative of a terrorist act.

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2 Information Sharing Environment. "Functional Standard Suspicious Activity Reporting: Version 1.5." May 21, 2009. Page 2. Downloaded on June 6, 2011 from http://nsi.ncirc.gov/documents/ISE-FS-200_ISE-SAR_Functional_Standard_V1_5_Issued_2009.pdf.

- **Educating the public about what behaviors to be aware of is essential to effective reporting.** Concerns about getting innocent people in trouble and lack of knowledge about what types of activity to report are significant barriers to suspicious activity reporting. Educational messaging about behavior-based reporting not only helps prevent these barriers, but also prevents reports that may be based on racial, religious, or cultural bias.

  Greater emphasis is needed on identifying the types of activities that can be considered suspicious. Community members and businesses should be made aware of what to look for in their particular areas of concern, such as local critical infrastructure and mass transit. Industry-specific trainings are also important to alert people about what types of suspicious activity they should be aware of in their workplace.

  Additionally, the community should be educated on law enforcement's method for processing reports of suspicious activity so they understand the value of the information they provide, as well as the privacy and civil liberties protections and policies. With this knowledge, individuals can feel more secure in their own and their neighbors' privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties when submitting reports.

- **Law enforcement should advertise clear and concise methods by which people can report suspicious activity.** Some individuals may not report information because they do not know the proper procedure. Multiple outreach methods, such as television, radio, posters, and community presentations, should be used to get the message out to the entire community.

  Twenty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they would not report suspicious activity because they were uncertain of the proper reporting procedure. Nearly three quarters (74 percent) of participants responded that they would use 9-1-1 to report, while 49 percent would call a non-emergency law enforcement number. It is up to individual jurisdictions to decide what method of reporting is best for their agencies, but subject matter experts emphasize the importance of keeping promotional messaging consistent, simple, and directive. As one subject matter expert said, "the more complicated the message, the less [the public] will act."

  Through all phases of the research, it was found that television and radio public service announcements were described as the top ways to share information about suspicious activity reporting. Other effective methods mentioned included: presentations at school, work, or community meetings; posters in mass transit stations; and community websites and email listservs. When possible, materials should be provided in a variety of formats and in the languages spoken by community residents.

- **Public messaging about the importance of suspicious activity should come from local leaders.** Trust issues between communities and law enforcement or government can hinder suspicious activity reporting. Local leaders can help reinforce that responding to suspicious activity reports is a worthwhile and important use of law enforcement's time.

  Focus group participants and subject matter experts agreed that public awareness campaigns should be led by local government leaders like police chiefs, sheriffs, troopers, officers, or elected government leaders. It is important that messaging comes from local sources to encourage the public that responding to suspicious activity reports is a worthwhile use of law enforcement resources, a concern of 31 percent of research respondents.

  Personal communication between law enforcement and the communities they serve can build more trusting relationships and help overcome the fear and distrust that participants indicated can be a barrier to suspicious activity reporting (23 percent).

- **Communities should leverage new technologies to promote anonymous and easily accessible methods of reporting.** Many community members fear retaliation and value anonymity when contacting law enforcement. Website portals, text messaging, and mobile phone applications can be used to allow for convenient, anonymous reporting.

  Forty-one percent of females and 30 percent of males listed fear of retaliation as a barrier when deciding whether or not to report an observation of suspicious behavior. Many agencies are turning to text messages and web-based reporting programs that allow residents to remain anonymous while submitting reports, reducing concerns over intimidation and negative consequences.

  Across age groups, research participants were receptive to the use of these new technologies in the reporting of suspicious activity. Thirty-four percent stated they were likely to report by phone mobile application, 30 percent by cell phone text message, and 25 percent on a government approved website. However, it is important to provide a variety of reporting options, as some community members may not have access to these forms of technology.

  Public education should explain the dispatch process, so community members better understand when, how, and if an officer will respond. For individuals such as the focus group member who worried about police "responding with flashing lights and sirens," this may help relieve some of the anxiety about remaining anonymous when calling law enforcement.

- **Law enforcement should respond to reports quickly and follow up with the reporter.** Individuals are motivated to report when they feel that their report will be taken seriously.

  An overwhelming majority of participants said they would not seek any type of monetary or physical reward for reporting. They would report simply because "it is the right thing to do." However, 27 percent of people were concerned that their calls would not be taken seriously by law enforcement. By training dispatchers and officers in how to respond to suspicious activity reports, agencies can ensure that community members' reports are handled professionally and are taken seriously.

  Some participants responded that they would like to follow up on their reports. Agencies should consider follow-up phone calls or interactive text message or web-based tools that allow community members to receive notification about the status of their reports. The ability to follow up could further motivate the individual to feel engaged in the safety of his or her community.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research add new insights into the motivators and barriers of why individuals do or do not report suspicious activity, as well as the technology and resources that can be used to help encourage suspicious activity reporting. With this information, law enforcement and community partners can better develop and adapt strategies to improve community outreach and education efforts that enhance the public's awareness and reporting of suspicious activity.

Based on data and insights from this research, IACP and FEMA created A *Resource Guide to Improve Your Community's Awareness and Reporting of Suspicious Activity: For Law Enforcement and Community Partners*. The resource guide offers recommendations for local outreach campaigns, explains how to effectively develop and disseminate messages in order to help the public better understand their role in reporting suspicious activity, and helps law enforcement agencies and community partners to understand, navigate, and use the many resources available to help build and sustain local initiatives. A copy of the resource guide can be downloaded from www.theiacp.org or www.ready.gov/terrorism.

Community members have long been one of law enforcement's best sources of information on what is out of place or suspicious in their communities. Through effective motivation and education, community members can become even more active partners with law enforcement, ultimately keeping our communities stronger and safer from the threats of terrorism.

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