

1st Assistant Chief Charles R. Doyle, Islip, New York

Assistant Chief, 1998 - present

Former Hook & Ladder Captain for seven years

Member of Central Islip Fire Department Technical Rescue Team

Member of Central Islip Fire Department for 21 years

CHIEF CHARLES DOYLE, CENTRAL ISLIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPT.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this hearing on Homeland Security.

First responders are crucial to any plan to defend the homeland. The effort to secure the homeland is being carried out and financed increasingly by levels of government least able to pay for it: states and local governments. Central Islip Fire District has already absorbed the cost of 4 new trucks, additional training and is in the process of finding and installing a communication system that will enable our personnel to communicate from floor to floor. We are also looking into Haz-mat equipment to help us to chemical, biological or radiological emergencies.

I am concerned about our domestic responding agencies to talk to with one another. Advanced technology is available, but we continue to handicap first responders and ourselves needlessly. Interoperability is the ability for different jurisdictions to communicate with each other. There are not only different systems for different agencies within each community, but different jurisdictions maintain their own systems, as well. In fact, the larger the incident, the greater the probability that different branches of the emergency services cannot communicate with each other.

At the same time, it is important to note that increased funding is not the only answer. We have to look at how we respond to emergencies. As some of you might know, Central Islip Fire Department provides fire protection for a new 12-story Federal Court Building in small Long Island town. How we would respond to an emergency at this building is topic of much concern for many of us.

I believe our first responders need more and better-coordinated training to ensure the country is prepared for a terrorist attack using chemical, biological or radiological weapons. The Sept. 11 attacks proved that local authorities have as big a role in fighting terrorism as the armed forces or the FBI. Had biological or chemical weapons been used in the attacks, the firefighters likely would have been unprepared.

First responders on Long Island recognize the importance of time and intervention when dealing with terrorism, but there is confusion about our roles. The first hour is the real crucial time when lives will be saved. If the first responders can use their respiratory gear properly and protect themselves, then they will be able to help others. We cannot afford to wait for the federal authorities to arrive.

It is critical that we get the police department, fire department, and EMS all on the same page. We need to know who has what equipment and who is responding to what call. We need to know what our state and local governments have and all this information into some sort of game plan.

The next step would be to train all the different agencies together and after that have the funding to purchase any additional equipment needed. Our resources in this country are astounding but ineffective if we have to wait 24 hours or longer for help. We need the resources to be local and for the help to be immediate.

There is another issue that I feel needs to be addressed - protecting the volunteer Fire

Service. These men and women spend 40 hours per week at their place of employment, another 20-30 hours training, attending meetings and answering alarms. There needs to be some sort of job protection for our volunteer fire service while they are serving and protecting our community with great pride and teaching our youth, by example, the importance of volunteering.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address this task force.