

# Legislation Spotlight: Planning for the Future with NIAC

By Rachael Zimmermann

THE Y2K BUG, SEPTEMBER 11TH, AND THE RECENT TRAGEDY IN NEW Orleans have all brought to the forefront an issue that is growing ever more important: the need for disaster preparedness and coordination not only between local and federal government, but also between the public and private sector. The Y2K bug was a non-event largely because private industry and government worked in coordination to prevent it. The fiasco in New Orleans required not only the coordination of various levels of government, but also communication and planning between the government and private industry. For ideal disaster preparedness, power companies, transportation companies, financial services organizations, and public health organizations would work in coordination to plan strategies and action plans for when disaster occurs. One organization that is working to realize this goal is the National Infrastructure Advisory Council, or NIAC.

NIAC was created in October of 2001, through the Department of Homeland Security Secretary, and has the stated purpose of:

- ▼ Advising the President on critical infrastructure security of physical and cyber sectors of the economy.
- ▼ Directly advising other agency heads with shared responsibility for critical infrastructure protection.
- ▼ Improving public and private sector cooperation and partnership to secure critical infrastructures.

NIAC is made up of 30 members, appointed by the President, (see sidebar) who meet quarterly to discuss progress on studies and projects designed to provide information that can lead to actionable recommendations. NIAC is currently focused on sector partnership model implementation, public-private sector intelligence coordination, aligning public-private sector risk management approaches to protection, and education, workforce preparation and research to develop the nation's human capital for security.

NIAC is strictly concerned with policy issues, not operational ones, and has the power only to advise the President and appropriate agencies about

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how to act to build public-private relationships. Currently, NIAC's research is primarily focused on the appropriate level of government involvement in different critical infrastructures. The financial services sector, for example, already has in place well developed security systems, so may not need a high level of involvement with the government. The chemicals sector, however, does not have as sophisticated of a security system built in, and could thus benefit from working with the government. The underlying goal is to have all critical infrastructure sectors have some level of coordination with the government in the event of a disaster.

In the Information Technology sector, NIAC has recommended the use of a Common Vulnerability Scoring System (CVSS), a uniform system for rating the severity of vulnerabilities across the information technology field that would promote understanding between specialties. This recommendation is made with the understanding that the threats that the Information Technology sector faces are varied, and to promote coordination in the field, a common definition and rating system for vulnerability should be used.

A select group of public organizations representing membership in the various critical infrastructures, including NaSPA, was invited to attend the October 2005 NIAC meeting to be briefed on NIAC's mission and observe their quarterly meeting. According to Nancy Wong, the Designated Federal Officer from the Department of Homeland Security who is assigned to NIAC, the lion's share of disaster preparedness is a local responsibility. The membership organizations' role in NIAC is to keep members informed and aware of how they can work in their own communities to promote disaster preparedness and coordination with other critical infrastructures.

To say NIAC's goal is lofty would be an understatement, and because the organization has only existed for four years, there are still many unknowns as to how effective the policies recommended by NIAC will be. Encouraging the cooperation of public and private sectors, however, seems to be an essential factor in disaster preparedness, as our world becomes ever more interdependent and interlinked. 🌐

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