



*Charles H.  
Bronson*

***I would like to thank the Police Benevolent Association for inviting me to write a guest column for your fine organization. My roots in law enforcement extend back many years. I served as a Metro Dade County reserve deputy in the late 1970's and continued to support law enforcement issues as a state senator. Specifically, I supported bills increasing benefits for police officers such as the presumption bills and pay increases. I sponsored legislation allowing for a deputy sheriff to hold active their law enforcement certificate if they held elected office; co-sponsored legislation expanding the rights of officers during internal review investigations; sponsored legislation enhancing the penalty of using a police scanner to avoid detection during a crime or for impersonating an officer; and cosponsored legislation enhancing retirement benefits based on prior service.***

## **Wanted: Sky Divers**

*We want you if you are an LEO who is a licensed sky diver with USPA cards and are interested in being part of the 25-way formation skydive for the Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS) 25th anniversary celebration. The date and location of the event will be announced as soon as it has been confirmed.*

*Officers with a minimum of 200 jumps and the ability to raise \$1,000 for COPS should contact PO3 Greg Knott of the Montgomery County (MD) Police Dept. at [gkjumps4cops@comcast.net](mailto:gkjumps4cops@comcast.net). Please respond as soon as possible; we need your commitment to proceed.*

*You can find more information on COPS at [www.nationalcops.org](http://www.nationalcops.org)*

# *A Guest Article from Florida's* **Agriculture Commissioner**

I greatly appreciate being invited back to write another guest column for *Roll Call*. In my previous article, I told you about the many issues the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services tackles, from ensuring the safety and wholesomeness of food and other consumer products through inspection and testing programs to protecting consumers from unfair and deceptive business practices. But there is also much activity behind the scenes dealing with the potential for eco terrorist activities.

When the World Trade Center was attacked by terrorists on September 11, 2001 it was a startling wake up call to law enforcement and citizens alike that the United States could be and would be attacked on American soil. The tragic television and newspaper stories of car bombs and other explosions once seen as limited to foreign lands were now in our backyard. Every government agency in the nation began assessing their strengths and weaknesses and planning improvements.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' early involvement in federal homeland security efforts enabled us to secure a significant amount of funding for agriculture protection programs, nearly 26 million dollars since 2001. The funding sources have included the Department of Homeland Security, the Centers for Disease Control, and the state of Florida. The department has been able to establish stronger food supply protection programs and better safeguard the animal populations from terrorist attack.

The State Emergency Response Team, or SART is among the programs that have received funding for equipment and training. The SART is prepared to respond to any event, whether a natural disaster, disease outbreak or terrorist attack. Disasters can make strange bedfellows and dozens of different agencies make up the SART, from the Humane Society to the Florida Cattlemen's Association. The SART quickly mobilizes its forces, establishes its own Incident Command System on-site, and wastes no time in responding to the crisis at hand.

Fortunately, while equipped to handle a terrorist attack, the SART has not yet had to do so. However, the teams have had plenty of experience and training by responding during hurricanes. They rescue pets and livestock, mobilize food for animals, secure generators, mend fences, whatever needs to be done. Florida's SART teams were involved in initial set-up and response for animal rescue operations for the state of Mississippi immediately after Hurricane Katrina hit. Officials there were extremely thankful for the assistance since they had no power, water or even buildings to work out of. Our teams were able to respond in the recovery effort but also to help Mississippi set up its own disaster response operation. In Florida, SART teams were able to secure generators for dairy farmers who were in danger of losing entire herds because of their inability to milk the cows after hurricanes knocked out the power.

The SART is also trained to respond to any animal disease outbreak. We do not hear much about bird flu on a day to day basis, but the threat is real and we must be prepared to respond should the disease reach U.S. shores. The department has increased surveillance testing of commercial and backyard poultry four-fold in the past few years. We are also coordinating with the Fish and Wildlife Commission in their testing of wild birds, particularly migratory waterfowl. There are other diseases which could be harmful to people and the economy, including foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease. Behind the scenes, there has been a significant amount of multi agency training and exercises for serious disease outbreaks. Law

enforcement agencies need to be involved in these events. The mass hysteria that could arise in a bird flu pandemic, work force shortages due to illness, these are among the many issues law enforcement will face. If your agency has not been involved in training exercises, I urge you to contact your local emergency operations center to find out how you can get involved.

Because of extensive experience with hurricanes, I believe Florida has set an example for disaster preparedness for the rest of the nation. But we cannot get complacent. The possibility of terrorist attacks is always there and we must remain vigilant. And there are many scenarios for which we must be prepared. Recently, FDACS participated in a mock terrorist attack on Florida's school lunch program along with the departments of health and education, producers, private industry and the FBI. In the drill, the breading on chicken nuggets was contaminated with ricin. That is how subtle an attack might be. We learn important lessons in each exercise about where we need to

make improvements.

As a member of the Domestic Security Oversight Council, I and my staff meet quarterly with the heads of Florida's law enforcement agencies, fire services, emergency services and public health agencies to make recommendations to the Governor and legislature regarding homeland security policies and funding. As each year passes with no major attacks, federal funds are dwindling and we are forced to make some tough choices about

which programs to fund.

The department also takes an active role in the Food Safety and Food Defense Advisory Council. This group of food industry and government leaders meets regularly to discuss high priority food safety issues. It's important that every link in the food supply chain is educated and trained in safety measures. From the farmers to the processors, transporters to the retail outlets, there are opportunities for natural bacteria that cause food born illnesses or purposeful introduction of pathogens by agro terrorists. When there is a disconnect anywhere in that chain, the ability to do a trace back and quickly identify and eliminate the problem diminishes.

As part of the Food Emergency Response Network, our department labs play an integral role in food safety efforts. We have several Biological Safety Level III (BSL III) labs that are capable of handling select agents identified as potential terrorism agents such as anthrax, ricin and cyanide. They routinely check food samples for these and other trace terrorism agents as well as look for high levels of pesticides and other chemical residues.

Of course, this would enable us to know immediately if the food supply has been tampered with, but it is important on a daily basis to ensure pesticides and other chemicals are within allowable levels. Daily monitoring is important for the safety of our food supply but also ensures the equipment will be calibrated and in service and lab technicians will be very experienced should an agro terrorist attack occur.

The many food born illness outbreaks that occurred during the past year are indicative of just how important food safety measures are from the farm to the family table. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is dedicated to protecting the food supply at the farm, on the road and at the retail level. But the general public plays a significant role as well. Many food related illnesses occur in the home due to improper handling, cooking and storage of food. There is a lot of information available about proper food safety measures but it's up to the public to not only learn the safety measures, but to practice them as well. That will help ensure that everyone has a safe and happy new year. ●

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