

Oral Testimony of Sean Dennis, President and CEO of the United States Bomb Technician Association

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Good morning Chairman Loudermilk, Ranking Member Torres, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity today to provide some background on the response to Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in the United States. My name is Sean Dennis, and I am a retired Sheriff's Sargeant and Bomb Squad Commander from the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office outside of Denver Colorado. After retirement, I worked for the Transportation Security Administration as an Explosives Specialist at the Denver International Airport. It was during that time that I, along with a small group of military and public safety Bomb Technicians with similar backgrounds, recognized the need for an organization to support the Bomb Technician community. We felt underrepresented despite the critical role we were playing to keep our homeland safe. In 2016, we formed the United States Bomb Technician Association (known as USBTA) and today represent over 5,000 active military and public safety Bomb Technicians by educating those in positions of leadership on the desperate needs of this community. USBTA also conducts Technology Training Exercises to identify technology and training gaps that exist within the bomb technician community. In addition, USBTA conducts research involving counter-IED tools and equipment along with research characterizing hazardous Home Made Explosives (HMEs). The lessons learned from our training and research are used to give the EOD warfighter and public safety Bomb Technician the capabilities to render safe IEDs in a safe, efficient, and affective manner.

Some of the critical areas in the Bomb Technician community that we would like to highlight today include:

- Training and Certifications. Public safety Bomb Technicians receive basic training and certification at the FBI Hazardous Devices School (HDS) in Huntsville Alabama consisting of a 6-week curriculum. Bomb Technicians then receive a variety of continued education and training from various U.S. government entities such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the FBI, and the DHS Office for Bombing Prevention. The National Bomb Squad Commanders Advisory Board provides national guidelines for bomb technicians to conduct 24-hours of monthly training in addition to the required recertification with the FBI every 3-years to ensure competency. Furthermore, bomb squads and their technicians seek out professional organizations and industry events to increase their knowledge and strengthen their skill sets.
- Incident Response. Bomb Technicians face several challenges when called to an incident in which a suspect package or hazardous material has been identified. First and foremost, they are facing the unknown. Only the person responsible for construction and placement knows how the device functions, who the target is

and what the motive is behind their malicious actions. Bomb squads may only have minutes to determine those factors for the preservation of life.

— Challenges upon Arrival. Some of the life-threatening challenges faced by the bomb technicians may include:

- Initial intelligence – first responders assessment provided to the responding Bomb Technicians may only provide a portion of the information required
- Determination of environment (permissive or hostile)
- Identification of single or multiple devices
- Potential for secondary devices on scene targeting First Responders
- Location of device placement by bomb maker
- Stand-Off Area densely populated with bystanders and civilians
- Inability to evacuate civilians in a timely manner
- Having the appropriate equipment available to handle the call
- Poor weather conditions
- Adequate personnel to perform appropriate render-safe operations
- Possibility of remote detonation by the bomb maker
- Limited render safe options based on surrounding critical infrastructure
- Inability to remain remote (remember if you can see the device, the device can see you)
- Communications amongst team members and command staff

Although not present during the events that took place on January 6th, 2021, I am aware of some of the challenges the Bomb Technicians might have faced as I have experienced similar challenges during my time as the Bomb Squad Commander at the Sheriff's Office. The job of a Bomb Technician is inherently dangerous and stressful. When we are called upon, the situation has already risen to a level that most don't have to face in their normal lives. The decisions you make in a very short period of time have

consequences that can cost your life and the lives of the innocent around you. There is no opportunity for do-overs or time for tabling the options for further discussion. There is a term in our community that is posted outside the doors of our training classrooms to remind us, "Initial Success or Total Failure".

The challenges faced by the Capitol Police Bomb Squad on that January 6th event were extraordinary, as they were required to navigate the render safe of multiple devices in and around critical infrastructures, buildings, and general population in addition to thousands actively protesting within their scene. By all accounts, it is my opinion the bomb squad dealt with these challenges professionally and rendered the devices safe, avoiding harm or injury to themselves or others, and were able to collect forensic evidence to assist in determining who was responsible. I am proud of the bomb squad community that we represent and will continue to advocate for their needs to ensure they have the appropriate resources, personnel, training, and technology for when they are faced with the extraordinary challenges in keeping our communities safe.