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Georgia Group a Model for Nation

By Julia Malone

WASHINGTON — In pockets across the country, businesses are forming a 21st century-style civil defense effort that includes offering earthmovers, communication technology and volunteers should a terrorist attack occur.

Few of these efforts are as organized as the *Atlanta chapter of Business Executives for National Security*, a national organization that for years churned out critiques aimed at bringing business discipline to the Pentagon.

Now the group has formed an operational arm, the Business Force, which has been given a \$500,000 federal grant to recruit business leaders to look for gaps in security and help fill them. The effort has helped organize groups from New Jersey to California.

The Georgia branch has become a model for the effort, said *Ern Blackwelder*, vice president of the Northern Virginia-based organization. Business groups around the country have sought copies of the security primer for companies that the Georgia group produced, Blackwelder said.

On July 28, the group's metro Atlanta branch is scheduled to partner with Georgia state agencies for a large-scale test of ways to distribute medical antidotes that are stored by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Thousands of volunteers, including many from BENS companies, are expected to participate at eight undisclosed sites that will simulate a biological or chemical attack, said *Tod Rose*, spokesman for the Georgia Division of Public Health.

The exercise is planned to "try to break the process" to demonstrate what doesn't work, said *Chris Melton*, a member of BENS and managing director of the White Oak Group, a private equity firm based in Atlanta.

"We're not in a think tank mode," Melton said of the Georgia group. "We've been able to put together an

operational, tactical partnership between companies in Georgia and government agencies."

Melton, who also works for the defense contractor Datapath Inc., said that with most of the state's critical assets in private ownership, "there really is no other option than the private and public sectors working together."

The effort is aimed at protecting the state from all kinds of hazards, he said, adding that members are prepared to roll in heavy equipment, volunteers or, in his case, secure communications capabilities.

Conrad Busch Jr., Atlanta executive director for BENS, said the credo for his group is: "Homeland and national security is everybody's business."

He credits the backing of Georgia officials, starting with Gov. Sonny Perdue, for the successful partnership with the government.

Charlie Latham, vice president for security at BellSouth, heads a BENS committee that is working with the state on drafting a system to assess the vulnerabilities of critical facilities and operations.

The telephone company has long had to deal with ice storms and hurricanes. After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, he said, BellSouth saw that "we have a national security interest" in keeping communications systems operating.

His company has since trained a 19-person team of volunteer employees to work in protective suits in contaminated facilities to bring computer systems back into service.

Latham said the BellSouth team was ready to go into the firm's office in Graniteville, S.C., soon after a train accident leaked chlorine into the community in January, but emergency authorities kept them out for days, since they didn't know about their capabilities.

But with the growing partnership with government, Latham said, the U.S. Coast Guard has given his hazmat team the green light to enter "as soon as possible" after any future incidents.

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Private Sector Role a Challenge

By Julia Malone

Washington — *Ern Blackwelder's* cellphone rang at 7:15 on the morning the bombs exploded in the London subway. Although he was traveling on the West Coast, the Department of Homeland Security tracked him down and invited him to join an emergency conference call.

A few hours later, Blackwelder, vice president of the private group **Business Executives for National Security**, and representatives of top trade and industry associations were getting a heads up on the Bush administration decision to raise the threat level to "code orange," or high, for the nation's mass transit systems.

The outreach to business on July 7 was part of the growing recognition of the crucial security role of the private sector, which owns or controls 85 percent of America's assets.

"The mandate of the Department of Homeland Security does not end with government," the 9/11 Commission report on terrorism concluded last year, urging a close partnership with business to counter the threat of terrorism.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff echoed that view last week as he announced an overhaul of his department with a promise to build on "a network of systems that span all levels of government and the private sector."

This business-to-bureaucracy relationship has challenges, however.

"In the government, everything is difficult, nothing is easy," lamented Tom Noonan, chief executive of the Atlanta-based Internet Security Systems Inc.

Noonan, who is a member of the National Infrastructure Advisory Council, set up by President Bush after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to generate ideas for enhancing security, said much more should be done to protect the wide-open Internet, where "bad guys" tapping into vital information and control systems could disrupt the economy.

He cheered the announcement last week that the Homeland Security Department will add an assistant

secretary for cyber-security but added that this was only a small step.

"It's time to move now," Noonan said. He wants the government to begin by upgrading its own outdated and vulnerable computer systems to set an example for private companies.

Other security specialists argue that the government should set security standards for the most vulnerable industries, since companies are often reluctant to take on extra expenses unless their competitors do so as well.

"There is still a lot to be done," said Clark Kent Irwin, former inspector general for the Homeland Security Department, adding that nuclear energy, oil refineries, food supply operations and the chemical industry are among the areas that should have greater federal oversight.

At the same time, the government has begun to forge some successful alliances with business.

In Nogales, Ariz., shippers were looking for relief from the rolling backup of trucks from Mexico waiting to clear customs. U.S. border officials, on the other hand, were looking for new incentives to encourage tighter cargo security.

So the shippers, the state, and the federal government agreed to jointly finance construction for two new lanes. These designated lanes would give preference to trucks from companies that agree to take additional security measures.

Such port expansions typically take several years just to win a U.S. permit, but this one is expected to be completed in just 18 months.

"That's pretty quick for the government," said Colby Bower, an official with the Border Trade Alliance in Phoenix, which has pledged to collect about \$1 million in fees from member trucking companies to help pay for the \$3 million project.

The same concept is being applied to the northern border at crossings such as the Ambassador Bridge linking Detroit and Canada, said Alfonso Martinez-Fonz, the Department of Homeland Security's liaison to the business community.

Martinez-Fonz also insisted that local businesses be included last spring when the Department of Homeland Security ran a major exercise to test responses to simulated terrorist attacks in Connecticut and New Jersey.

And in other example of cooperation, Georgia officials and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will join with the *Atlanta* branch of **Business Executives for National Security** to test ways to distribute stockpiles of antidotes in the event of a biological attack.

Andrew P. Howell, who oversees homeland security policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said that he sees the "beginning of a trend" of greater cooperation in recent months.

But he cautioned that business wants "a true partnership of equals, which means that government and business sit down together, just as two companies would discuss a merger."

That condition does not always exist now, say some in the business community.

In one of the most contentious examples, truckers are currently feuding with the federal Transportation Security Administration over new requirements for background checks on all drivers who haul hazardous materials.

"The industry doesn't want its trucks to be used in a terrorist attack," said Prasad Sharma, assistant general counsel for the American Trucking Associations.

But, Sharma said, the security agency ignored the truckers' requests that the fees for the background checks be uniform across the states and that the offices for gathering data and fingerprints be easily accessible.

Instead, the fees vary from \$80 to \$150, and the government set up so few processing sites that truckers must sometimes drive 200 miles to have their fingerprints taken, Sharma said.

The dispute went public at a congressional hearing in May.

Martinez-Fonz defended the Transportation Security Administration's mandate to check out the 2.7 million drivers now licensed to drive hazmats.

"I think we're doing the right thing," he said. "You don't want bad people driving these hazardous materials around the country."

Martinez-Fonz added that, aside from the hazmat dispute, the trucking associations still have ties to his department. They are partners in "High Watch," a federally funded program to train truck and transit drivers on how to spot and report suspicious activities.