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Jesse White's Office and the Illinois Terrorism Task Force Partner to Demonstrate State-of-the-Art Equipment to Combat Bomb Threats

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, joined by the Illinois Terrorism Task Force (ITTF), Illinois Emergency Management Agency and the Illinois State Police, announced today his office's Hazardous Device Unit (HDU) demonstrated state-of-the-art equipment designed to inspect, defuse, detonate and defeat bombs and other improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The Secretary of State Police HDU conducted live demonstrations at the Illinois State Police Range in Pawnee to show how the bomb squad trucks, specialized bomb containment vessels and remote tech robots can be used to protect the public from the threats of IEDs as well as chemical and biological weapons. All of the equipment displayed today was made possible through grants from the Illinois Terrorism Task Force (ITTF) totaling nearly \$1 million.

"My office's Hazardous Device Unit is an integral component of the State's Weapons of Mass Destruction team," said White. "They have functioned for over 35 years to protect the public from any and all explosive-related incidents. Working closely with the Illinois Terrorism Task Force, my office continues to work to enhance Illinois' preparedness to respond swiftly to potential terrorism threats to the state."

There are three State Weapons of Mass Destruction Teams (SWMDTs) strategically located in northern, central and southern sections of the state to provide response to a chemical, biological or radiological incident within 60 to 90 minutes of notification. The ITTF has invested more than \$5.2 million in the SWMDTs, which in addition to the Secretary of State's HDU include staff from the Illinois State Police, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency's Division of Nuclear Safety, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

In October 2004, Illinois' SWMDT received the Mitretek Innovations Award in Homeland Security, the first-ever national award recognizing the most effective homeland security programs. The award is sponsored by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and Mitretek Systems.

"There is a major emphasis right now in the national homeland security strategy to develop and strengthen capabilities to assess and counter improvised explosive devices, or IEDs," said Andrew Velasquez III, Director of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Homeland Security Advisor to Governor Rod R. Blagojevich. "Illinois is on the leading edge of this movement by incorporating these pieces of equipment into our State Weapons of Mass Destruction Teams, and I thank Secretary White and his staff for working with the Illinois Terrorism Task Force to provide this critical capability."

The Secretary of State Police HDU is the only one of its kind statewide and is comprised of nine specially trained HDU technicians and one canine detection team. The HDU squads have been certified by the FBI through extensive, specialized training in Redstone Missile Arsenal in Huntsville, AL.

In 2007, the SOS Police HDU responded to 266 calls related to the presence of a potential IED. Through May of 2008, HDU has responded to 92 calls.

Founded in 1913, the Secretary of State Police is one of the oldest law enforcement agencies in Illinois. In addition to explosives recognition and disposal conducted by the Hazardous Device Unit, the Secretary of State Police regulates the automotive industry and enforces all laws and administrative regulations pertaining to the Secretary of State's office. This includes auto theft investigations, vehicle-related consumer fraud, fraudulent identification and traffic regulation enforcement. The SOS Police is also charged with providing security for the Capitol Complex in Springfield.