Who Are the Stakeholders and How do You Find Them?
Identifying the main stakeholders in the criminal justice field is relatively simple. One only has to look around and see the everyday contributions of the local police and fire-rescue departments, hospitals, and federal law enforcement and emergency management agencies to get an understanding of the stakeholder community. However, some key stakeholders are not as readily known. Agencies such as the Department of Energy Radiological Assistance Program and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also may play a vital role in prevention, as well as response and mitigation.

One valuable way of identifying key stakeholders is by attending regional meetings that are attended by many of these organizations. The Regional Domestic Security Task Force (RDSTF) forums are a prime example of a meeting place where many of the stakeholder groups in the community come to exchange ideas and lobby for funding. In Florida, the RDSTF is divided into seven geographical regions and is coordinated by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE).
The RDSTF is important for several reasons. First, it is a place where one can get an idea of the breadth and depth of the system by merely taking into account the people who attend the meetings and the organizations that they represent. Because most of the counter-terrorism funding streams are now routed through the RDSTFs or Urban Area Security Initiatives (UASI), everyone seems to show up to these meetings. Indeed, the RDSTF seems to have become a watering hole in the desert, where all types of animals come to drink.

Not only are the RDSTFs important for identifying who the stakeholders are, but they are also an excellent means of exchanging information as to what each of the organizations do. It is here that we get an idea of the many overlapping jurisdictions and functional responsibilities. There are many redundancies, and sometimes these redundancies can be inefficient and counterproductive. However, in some cases, the redundancies may not always be a negative attribute.

Perhaps the most important benefit of attending the RDSTF regional (as well as statewide) meetings is getting to know the people who represent the various stakeholders by putting faces to organizations. This is an invaluable
benefit that greatly enhances operational response to real-life situations. I cannot begin to tell you how valuable it has been to know the names and the faces (and phone numbers) of my many counterparts in law enforcement and other disciplines during critical incidents.
Another important way of establishing key relationships such as the ones described above occurs during the planning of multi-jurisdictional, large-scale special events such as the Super Bowl in 2007, and the Free Area of the Americas (FTAA) conference in 2003. While the many meetings related to these special events can be time consuming and laborious, the secondary benefit of meeting your counterparts from other agencies are invaluable. These relationships are critical and must be continuously nurtured.