Technology: Who Do You Call?

By NIJ and NLECTC Staff

Evolving at what seems to be the speed of light, technology is becoming more and more a part of our lives. Although technology may offer us effective and cost-efficient ways to improve our lives, its rapid growth also presents significant challenges: How do we stay on top of what's new and who do we call for honest product assessment or feedback?

For those in the corrections field, the answer to both questions is the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) system, a program of the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Office of Science and Technology (OS&T).

Established in 1968 to be the research and development arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, NIJ was founded to assist in the reduction and prevention of crime and the improvement of the criminal justice system. To help accomplish its mission, NIJ formed OS&T to identify, develop and introduce new technologies for the correctional and law enforcement professions. OS&T is charged with providing both law enforcement and correctional agencies access to the best technologies available and with facilitating the transfer of "dual use" technologies from the military. NIJ also matches useful technologies to agency-identified needs to promote the efficient and effective application of technologies.

One of the primary mechanisms through which OS&T accomplishes its mission is a network of regional and specialty technology centers — the NLECTC system. This system was created by OS&T in 1994 to become the "honest broker," or clearinghouse of information and technology assistance for state and local law enforcement, corrections and forensics professionals. It also serves as a liaison between the criminal justice community, NIJ and private industry. The NLECTC system also focuses on special needs, such as commercializing products for law enforcement and corrections; developing standards and guidelines for equipment; and managing a voluntary compliance program for testing equipment, including body armor (ballistic and stab/puncture-resistant), slash-proof gloves, handguns, handcuffs, helmets, and patrol vehicles and vehicle equipment.

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In short, NLECTC's mission is to provide technology information, assistance and expertise to the nation's law enforcement, correctional and forensics communities by:

- Identifying equipment and technology requirements;
- Introducing promising new technologies to the field;
- Bringing affordable technologies to the criminal justice marketplace; and
- Ensuring that the equipment correctional agencies rely on to protect the public and themselves is adequate.

In addition, specific corrections-related NLECTC initiatives include:

- **1033 or Federal Surplus Property Program:** Provides assistance in transferring excess military property, such as vehicles, communication towers, riot helmets, clothing and gas masks.
- **Smart Card Project:** Assists with the development of smart card technology, which

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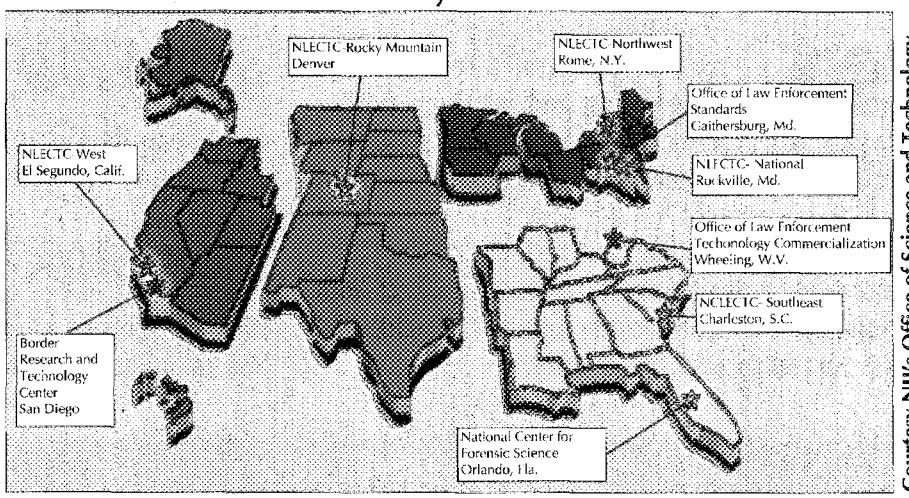
NLECTC System Facilities



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would store pertinent information about an inmate on his or her identification card.

- **Telemedicine Project:** Involves the evaluation of telemedicine technology applications to produce an affordable health care system for corrections.
- **Online Training Courses:** In cooperation with the American Correctional Association, NLECTC provides education and training on topics such as riots, disturbances and the use of pepper spray.
- **Mock Prison Riots:** Provides a showcase for emerging corrections-related technologies as well as hands-on training scenarios for correctional tactical teams.

NLECTC was created to become the "honest broker" of information and technology assistance for state and local law enforcement.

NLECTC-Southeast, in Charleston, S.C., has been designated the lead center for all corrections-related work. Additionally, in response to recommendations from the Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Advisory Council, a group made up of law enforcement, corrections and forensics practitioners from across the country, a corrections technology subcommittee has been created to provide current information on correctional needs throughout the country. The subcommittee, chaired by Steve Morrison of NLECTC-Southeast, includes members from each of the NLECTC system regions. The main goal of the subcommittee is to identify practitioner needs and better coordinate efforts of the regional centers so that resources are best utilized. The regional map included here shows where the centers are located and the region that each serves.

NIJ, OS&T and NLECTC are tools for correctional agencies to identify technologies that will meet their operational needs, research technology-related questions and discuss technology-related problems.

Regional centers can help agencies select, test, evaluate and implement new, low-cost technologies. The NLECTC system is a free resource that can add value to a facility's technology selections.

For assistance with technology questions and issues, visit the NLECTC system Web site, JUST-NET, at www.nlectc.org. ◈

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