

Security Quest 2004 - ASIS Australia Conference, Melbourne

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The conference was held at the Park Hyatt Hotel, Melbourne on 16 & 17 February 2004. The theme for the conference was "Private Business Public Interest: Collaborative partnerships in the Quest for Security" and was primarily concerned with relationships between the police and private security.

The 60 delegates were welcomed by the Hon. Philip Ruddock, Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Australia and the Hon. Andre Haermeyer, Minister for Police and Emergency Services for the State of Victoria, who both set the scene for the conference. It was noteworthy that the terrorist threat is being given the highest priority with considerable sums being expended on protecting critical infrastructure and providing police and emergency services with new equipment. The view is that terrorists will not just attack government targets; rather they will seek to create fear in the general population. Since much of Australia's (and Victoria's) critical infrastructure is in private ownership and is guarded by private security, both state and national governments recognise the need for public and private sector cooperation. Legislation governing the private security sector in Victoria is over 40 years old and there is a perceived need for improving public confidence in the industry. Greater regulation is being proposed and it is expected that a bill will be introduced this autumn with a view to enactment during the current parliamentary session.

The conference programme consisted of a number of plenary sessions interspersed with educational streams, forum discussions and a crisis management exercise. The plenary speakers dealt with such topics as the development of the Canadian Aviation Transport Security Authority (CATSA), a police perspective on the role of private security, an academic view of "quasi-policing", security industry training, sharing criminal intelligence and aviation security as a model for collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Educational sessions covered three streams: Intelligence and Strategy; Governance; and, Stakeholders. The author attended sessions in the first two streams. The first session was an update on international terrorism from Neil Fergus. Many will remember Neil from his presentation at last year's NZSA conference in Christchurch. His comments on poor training standards, particularly regarding risk management, were not lost on the audience. Second, there was a case study of the New Zealand Post response to the anthrax scares we faced a couple of years ago. Finally, the Deputy Registrar of Private Security Agents (a Victoria police inspector) presented his views on the state of training within the security industry. He noted, for example, that even though national (Australian) agreement has now been reached on entry-level training for security guards, less than 10% of current crowd controllers would meet the necessary training requirement. The training standard is due to be published in mid-March and implemented in June 2004. This may sound rather familiar to readers in New Zealand. It is noteworthy that in most Australian states, minimum qualifications must now be achieved before individuals are granted a

licence. He gave a strong indication that in future anyone coming into Victoria to undertake security work at a major event, for example, would only be granted a licence for that particular event subject to the requisite training provisions being met. Whilst having the utmost sympathy and respect for poorly paid security staff who are regularly placed in harm's way without having had sufficient or proper training, he added a personal view that:

- those employed in security should be qualified to Certificate 3 level (roughly NZQA level 2/3 depending upon the electives chosen)
- those owning or managing a security company should be qualified to Certificate 4 level (roughly NZQA level 5 depending upon the electives chosen)
- unless the relevant minimum qualifications are met, the licence holder should not be permitted to obtain or retain a licence, and that this should be retrospective.

This effectively concluded Day 1 of the conference. An excellent dinner was held that evening, and those who wished to, could dance the night away to music provided by the Victoria Police Showband. For some of us however, it was an early start the next day.

Day 2 commenced with an early CPP breakfast meeting at which our own Shayne Bates CPP, the current Regional Vice President of ASIS International, provided details of the new Professional Certified Investigator (PCI) and Physical Security Professional (PSP) certifications. It is hoped that the first local PSP review programme will be held in New Zealand during June 2004, followed by examinations in early November. The PCI programme may be another year away.

Plenary sessions continued throughout the morning with a somewhat smaller audience. No doubt some had fallen by the wayside after the previous evening's activities. These sessions were followed by concurrent industry panel forums, covering similar themes to the educational streams held on the previous day. The author attended the forum on "Professionalising the Private Security Industry". The debate was lively and attracted some strong comment from industry members and police representatives as well as the users of security services. Issues discussed included training (or the lack of it in many cases), what it is that constitutes professionalism in a security context, ethical standards, membership of professional associations, customer expectations and the poor rates of pay within the industry.

There was one very notable question. "Why does the industry accept that its staff should be poorly paid?" It was generally accepted that competition in the marketplace is fierce and investment in training is expensive, however, it was suggested that industry is its own worst enemy by continuing to tolerate sub-contracting to the lowest cost operators, as well as poor standards of dress, behaviour and training. There was a novel suggestion that some proportion of the licence fee should be returned to industry in the form of a training subsidy.

The conference concluded with a crisis management exercise. Delegates were divided into two groups comprising of those interested in community emergency management and those concerned with commercial crisis management. Interestingly

the exercise scenario was based on the total and potentially long term loss of greater Melbourne's electricity supply. This will strike a chord with those affected by Auckland's lengthy power interruption few years ago. The scale of the scenario was such that the main problems for most businesses were the lack of useable alternate sites and their inability to deliver services. It was also notable that once the state government declared an emergency, it could and would seize generating capacity and fuel to maintain critical and emergency services. At the end, many were left wondering just how adequate their business continuity and recovery plans really are.

Finally, a well organised and well run conference. The overall message is that the security industry in Australia is facing problems with which we are all too familiar. There is however strong evidence that the tide is turning. As a result of the networking opportunities available, some delegates intend travelling to Wellington in June to attend our NZSA Conference. The idea has also been floated that, as closer ties are developed with the Australian ASIS Chapters, we may in the not too distant future see an annual Australian/New Zealand ASIS conference with each chapter hosting the event in turn. Any resulting cross-fertilisation of ideas can only be a good thing.