

# BUSINESS

Thursday, Sept. 25, 2003

THE WILTON BULLETIN

11C

*Ex-police commissioner*

## Many firms 'unprepared' for emergencies

by GREG BARTLETT

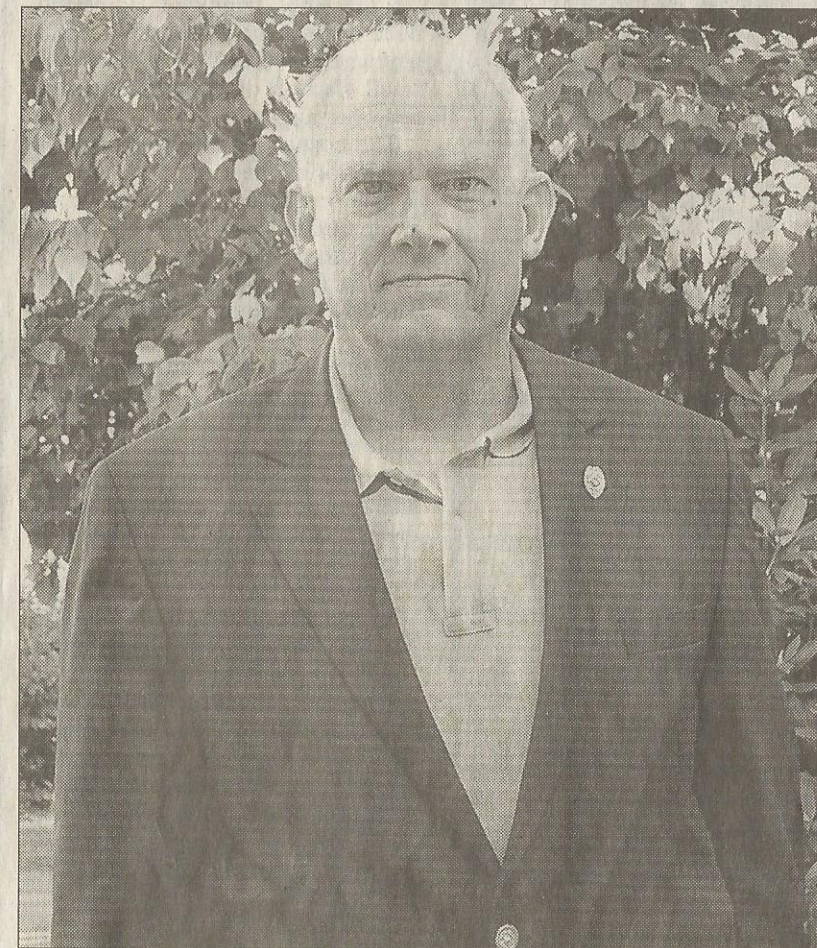
As his new business card documents, Richard "Bo" Mitchell of Indian Hill Road, a former longtime Wilton police commissioner who started his own corporate security and public safety agency advisory firm, 911 Consulting more than two and one-half years ago, is now certified in homeland security.

An institute called the American College of Forensic Examiners has certified him as an expert in the field. This college, based in Missouri, certifies medical and forensic examiners, crime scene investigators and expert witnesses all over the world.

Adding the homeland security certification reinforces his credentials. "I think a lot of people are looking for authority and credibility in this whole category of issues, and appropriately so," Mr. Mitchell said, "because it's a brand new area for everybody in the United States, anyway." Homeland security is not something new to governments, businesses and people in Europe, the Middle East, Japan and elsewhere who have been dealing with such issues for a long time, he noted.

Homeland security, directed primarily at large businesses in his case, is "about Osama, but it's also about domestic kinds of issues," Mr. Mitchell said. "It's also about corporations."

As part of his own research and education in homeland security, Mr. Mitchell visited congressional offices, including U.S. Rep.



Bo Mitchell of Wilton received certification in homeland security, level two, this past spring. —Devin Comiskey photo

Christopher Shays'. Mr. Shays, the Fourth District congressman, is chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations. When

Mr. Mitchell asked the congressman for insights and updates on homeland security strategies, "he looked up at me, as he was looking at my card, and said, 'We want to know

what you're doing because this isn't all going to happen because it's government.'"

Later, Mr. Mitchell conferred with Congressman Shays' chief of staff and others, as well as the staff of U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman, ranking member of the Senate Government Affairs Committee, and the chief of staff for U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd.

"Basically what I learned down there (in Washington) is that there is no grand strategy, and there is no overall agreement as to what homeland security is and what it should be doing. And there really is no budget for that grand strategy," Mr. Mitchell said.

The White House and Congress are still "groping toward" the right homeland security directions, he said. "I did not get the feeling that this was so much about party politics as it was about institutional issues," said Mr. Mitchell. The grand reorganization of federal agencies into an effective new Department of Homeland Security is lacking enough precedents and big ideas, he said. "Giving a football team new uniforms and changing the titles of the staff doesn't win football games, and doesn't even get you on the field," Mr. Mitchell said.

The executive and legislative branches agree that the task is an enormous one. "But because it's so huge, no one really understands how to get their arms around it," Mr. Mitchell said. "So everybody is long

*See Security on page 12C*



# Security consultant: Firms 'unprepared'

*Continued from 11C*

on spirit and patriotism — a necessary element — but short on planning strategy in the budget. I don't think you can do homeland security on the cheap, and you can't do it without a grand strategy."

While important steps have been taken to better secure the country's air transportation systems, Mr. Mitchell said effectively improving ways to protect "land and sea" have been another, unsatisfactory story. "In the Holy Trinity of Homeland Security, which is security by air, land and sea, (air security) is a very small fraction of what has to happen," he said.

The country is still "very porous to a terrorist," he said.

"The vast bulk of cargo that docks at our 300 seaports is not checked," and neither is air cargo adequately checked for that matter, Mr. Mitchell said. "No one knows what's coming in."

"The truck and rail cargo that comes across the Canadian and Mexican borders is not checked," he said. "So, those are the places where we're going to have to pay a lot of attention if we're going to avoid these ugly scenarios that people talk about on a daily basis that can happen to us."

In late February 2001, when Mr. Mitchell first told *The Bulletin* about launching his new consulting firm, he began consulting work with police departments and municipalities on emergency preparedness, drawing upon his experiences as a veteran police commissioner. Since Sept. 11, 2001, his work has been predominantly consulting work with corporations.

"The reason for that is that they are the ones who are in the most need for emergency planning and crisis response," Mr. Mitchell said.

Eighty percent of corporations in U.S. do not have a written emergency preparedness plan, or evacuation plan, according to studies, he said.

And Mr. Mitchell has learned through his experience as a consultant in this region that what the remaining 20% have by way of a true emergency plan "is worthless."

"My experience is that corporations have done a pretty robust job of

protecting data," said Mr. Mitchell, who has been told by chief executive officers that they spend as much as

tens of thousands of dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars and millions over the years to safeguard

company research and development and their data. "Then I ask the question, how much have you spent to protect your people, and without fail there's a very long pause," he said.

"The place where there is just a big fog of response is in protecting the people," said Mr. Mitchell who has done consulting work for firms ranging in employees from 100 to 4,000.

"Fairfield County, if it were a city, would be the second largest city in the world for Fortune 500 corporate headquarters," said Mr. Mitchell, who has clients in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

While he acknowledges the necessity to protect company data and infrastructure, Mr. Mitchell has a message he imparts to clients and prospective clients about data versus employees: "If tomorrow morning, we were to lose all the data and save all the people in a crisis, that's a very good day. If we were to lose all the data and lose even one person, the company's had a very bad day."

Besides the risk of lawsuits against a company that isn't adequately prepared to protect its employees or visitors, there's the risk of loss in productivity, Mr. Mitchell said, as police authorities and fire marshals close down a firm for investigations, there is the risk of damage to a company's reputation in the public eye and the ensuing wrath of stockholders.

Mr. Mitchell's consulting work begins with attempting to get senior management at a corporation out of denial about emergency preparedness. "The biggest thing I fight is denial," he said.

He's developed his own analysis of that apathy and denial. "It won't happen to me; it won't happen here; it won't happen now; if it does happen, it won't be that bad; if it is that bad, my insurance company will take care of it," he said. And the final phase is "Oh my God, why didn't we plan for this?"

Once they face up to their denial and overcome it, Mr. Mitchell tests corporate officers on their readiness to respond to emergencies at their places of business. What, for example, would be their response in the event a visitor to their conference room collapses from a heart attack or encounters other medical problems in their building? What would be the company's liability exposure? How many employees are trained in life-saving techniques?

Many senior managers and chief executive officers, Mr. Mitchell said, probably assume their corporations have effective emergency plans in place, "but in just about every case, they are wrong."

To those who run corporations or who are senior or middle managers, Mr. Mitchell said he has some advice: "You go to your management, and ask them if you have a simple evacuation plan that's been trained and drilled and there won't be any of them."

A power failure, unlike the big blackout that affected the Northeast last month, or a fire or hurricane are more likely to happen than other bigger crises, he said. "You don't have to play 'what if' to see that they (corporations) are completely unprepared," he said.

## CONSULTANT SHARES EXPERIENCES OF A FEW CORPORATE CALAMITIES

Newly certified homeland security expert Bo Mitchell of Wilton shared a few of his experiences with corporations that had been unprepared for emergencies.

One company in Fairfield County with more than 800 employees at its international headquarters showed Mr. Mitchell its evacuation plan, which consisted of five paragraphs on one page, which basically said "get out, and dial 911."

"Eight hundred people is a battalion in the Army. The moving of 800 people is a huge operation; people train for years to get this right," he said.

A follow-up question he asks corporate executives and managers is whether the company trains anyone in emergency preparedness, evacuations and other techniques. "People respond as they are trained," Mr. Mitchell said. "Untrained people panic."

At another company, with 500 employees, an outsider who was visiting the firm passed out and fell to the floor during his presentation to senior executives in their conference room. The visitor was not known to this executives beyond his introduction and they certainly knew nothing about the visitor's medical conditions. Stunned by the turn of events, one of the executives finally dialed 911 but repeatedly got no response. The reason the executive couldn't get the 911 response was he didn't dial 9 first to get an outside line and in his panic neglected to.

He finally reached an international operator, Mr. Mitchell said, and thankfully, she spoke English. "He poured his heart out, explaining the situation — by the way, we're past the four minutes that everybody says you got to have somebody there. She figures out how to patch him to the local police department..."

But getting quick emergency help was further exacerbated by a surveillance screen showing the wrong location of the collapsed visitor in need of assistance. The screen mistakenly showed an accounting office instead of the conference room because decades ago when the phone company set up the 911 system it designated the place of emergency contact as the place where the phone company sends its invoices — the accounting office, which knew nothing about the emergency, Mr. Mitchell said.

In the end, it took 27 minutes before emergency medical technicians reached the victim, he said. Fortunately, there was a good ending to the episode as the visitor had had a diabetic seizure and some orange juice was enough to revitalize him.

"But the management was so upset at this series of events," Mr. Mitchell said, that the executives took steps to correct the 911 system, including the screen problem at police headquarters. Also, the entire staff was trained in how to respond to the situation that had just happened and other emergencies such fires, bomb threats and suspicious packages.

"This is basic blocking and tackling. It doesn't cost a lot of money," Mr. Mitchell said of correcting basic emergency preparedness problems and training employees in life-saving and security techniques.

"There are productivity issues because you're putting people through training, but isn't this important?"

The company where the visitor had the diabetic attack experienced another incident six months later, Mr. Mitchell said, when another outsider on the company's premise had a heart attack and dropped to the floor. This time, after the training and corrected preparedness problems, an employee dialed 911 and a police officer was on the scene with a defibrillator in three minutes, he said.

Meanwhile, the new U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the White House identified 14 industries in need of improved security as they assembled a policy early this year called "the national strategy for physical protection of critical infrastructure and key assets," Mr. Mitchell said.

Among those on the list are chemical plants, of which there are many, both large and small, in Connecticut, Mr. Mitchell said. He recently consulted with a firm that has a division where chemicals are used for rather innocuous containers for consumer products.

"This is hardly a key asset in the infrastructure regarding homeland security, but when you're standing next to a river, next to thousand-gallon tanks of sulfuric acid and other things that might be quickly, in the wrong hands, be turned into nitroglycerine..." he said. Despite open access via the river, there was no chain-link fence, no guard or any security measures protecting these tanks of chemicals, Mr. Mitchell said.

"This very small company, in the broad scheme of things, with a very small division, nevertheless, has standing out there the ingredients for what bad people might want by way of doing some awful thing," he said. "So, it's a huge, huge problem."

—GREG BARTLETT