



# SENATOR MATT BARTLE

**District 8** – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101

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## **Missouri's Office of Homeland Security: Protecting the Heartland in an Age of Terrorism**

As we continue this week in our series featuring some of Missouri's state departments it is fitting to finish up the month of September (a month that has come to be associated with the ongoing war on terrorism and efforts to protect the homeland) with one more column discussing our emergency response preparations. This week we'll look at Missouri's Office of Homeland Security.

The genesis of this office was in the smoke and rubble of the terrible acts of terrorism that came to our shores back on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Started on the federal level, homeland security now encompasses regional, state, and local responses to all kinds of disasters—from natural to manmade. There are several ways Missouri's Homeland Security helps accomplish that.

As the dust settled from the terrorist strikes, this country sprang into action, mobilizing resources to help those who were hurting and preventing another strike from happening again. Similarly, here in Missouri, we took steps to minimize the risks of a terrorist strike at home. A state homeland security department was established and is now part of a coordinated effort between all the agencies of the Department of Public Safety, as well as the Departments of Health and Senior Services, Mental Health, Transportation, Agriculture, Natural Resources, Economic Development, Elementary and Secondary Education, the Public Service Commission, and of course, the State Emergency Management Agency. County and local law enforcement agencies and first responders are part of the mix as well.

It might have gotten its start because of a terrorist act, but Missouri's Office of Homeland Security is responsible for much more. While it helps stay on the lookout for any suspicious activity, Homeland Security is also responsible for helping pick up the pieces in case of a natural disaster. In 2006, it responded to no less than five major natural disasters in Missouri, including tornadoes and floods. The department also is preparing in case a major earthquake hits along the New Madrid fault in Southeast Missouri. While it might be a long way from Eastern Jackson County, there is no doubt we would feel the effects of such an event here.

Missouri's Office of Homeland Security is always on the lookout for new threats, such as the threat to our schools. The tragic shootings at Virginia Tech and more recently in Delaware underscore that we need to take the steps necessary to protect our students from elementary school age through college. In partnership with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education,

Homeland Security officials meet twice a month to come up with a unified, seamless approach to school safety.

None of this happens without funding and support from the state legislature and from federal funding provided by Congress. I'm proud to say that in the latest budget we were able to raise the Department of Public Safety's budget by raising state revenues to that agency by 16.7 percent. Add to that, increases from the federal government, and we are well on the way to giving our law enforcement and homeland security office the resources they need to protect citizens of the Show-Me State.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at [matt\\_bartle@senate.mo.gov](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.