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Kerik to pols: Let FBI, cops share info

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WASHINGTON — Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik urged a Senate panel yesterday to change federal law so the FBI can share intelligence with police.

"Oftentimes, federal law enforcement officials may have vital information regarding public safety," Kerik told a hearing of the administrative subcommittee of the Judiciary panel.

Current law restricts the FBI's ability to give police information obtained through wiretaps and grand jury proceedings.

City officials also have criticized the federal security clearance system, which grants clearances to some cops, while denying them to the cops' superiors.

"Continuing to maintain walls between federal and state authorities ... represents the worst kind of dysfunctional thinking in government," Kerik said yesterday.

Yesterday's hearing was led by Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), who is among the sponsors of a bill that would remove restrictions to permit — but not force — the FBI to share information with law enforcement agencies.

"This problem was never clearer and never more threatening than when anthrax was discovered at the NBC studios in New York City," Schumer said. "The FBI knew about it for days, but they failed to alert the NYPD."

NBC letter

Schumer said Kerik and Mayor Giuliani "were quite upset" when they phoned him upon discovering the FBI knew of a possible anthrax letter at NBC well before the confirmed discovery of an anthrax infection there.

The letter in question turned out to be a false alarm, but it became a symbol of a need for change. Kerik said that since the incident FBI officials in New York have been very helpful.

In addition to the data-sharing rules, the Police Department has had problems with barriers created by security clearances.

For example, detectives on the FBI-NYPD Joint Terrorist Task Force have top-secret clearances that sometimes mean they can't share classified information with their superiors.

Kerik now is briefed by the department's chief of detectives and the commander of the special investigations division about cases that the task force is handling.

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