D.C.-area security devices idled by cost

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Half of the bomb squads around Washington are letting special anti-terror computer kits sit idle because they can't afford the monthly wireless bills. About 400 of the "Cobra" systems were distributed by the FBI across the country in 2003 using a $25 million grant. The custom-designed kit is a wireless laptop computer filled with information on chemical and biological agents that also allowed the user to communicate directly with FBI experts, the Washington Post reported Monday. Each of the kits came with a prepaid three-year service agreement and a one-year wireless card. Now, however, numerous agencies around the U.S. Capitol have found they don't have a budget to renew the wireless subscriptions, the Post said. Local officials say wireless fees are about $60 a month per kit, which also need periodic updates which could run into the hundreds or thousands of dollars, the newspaper said. "It was quite expensive for the local jurisdictions to absorb the cost," said Jerry Swain, bomb-squad commander for Loudoun County in Virginia.

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