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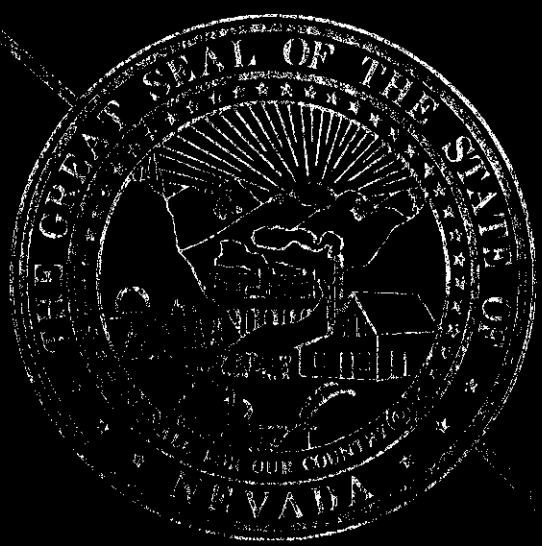

Audit Highlights

Highlights of Legislative Auditor report on the Security and Integrity of the State's Criminal History Repository, issued on May 8, 2002.
Report # LA02-24.

Purpose of Audit

The purpose of this audit was to determine the security and integrity of the state's criminal history repository. The repository is managed by the Records and Identification Bureau within the Nevada Highway Patrol Division of the Department of Public Safety. Our audit included a review of controls over the criminal history records database, and data stored in the database as of March 30, 2001.

Audit Recommendations

This report contained 14 recommendations to improve the security and integrity of the criminal history repository. The Bureau should test the accuracy of the criminal history records database, implement the re-key function for disposition information, and standardize and file disposition forms to allow more effective entering and efficient retrieval. The Bureau should also re-enter missing criminal records and determine how records were deleted. In addition, it should retain fees for services performed. To provide greater security over criminal history records, the Bureau must provide password controls, lock users out after a specified period of inactivity, and ensure only current employees have system access. In addition, the Bureau should capture information and report on user activities and limit physical access to authorized individuals. Furthermore, the Bureau should update its disaster recovery plan and provide offsite backup storage. Finally, it should ensure each local criminal justice agency is audited biennially.

The Agency accepted all 14 audit recommendations.

Status of Recommendations

The Department of Public Safety filed its 60-day plan for corrective action on July 25, 2002. The plan indicates that good progress is being made to implement the 14 audit recommendations.

The six-month report on the status of audit recommendations is due February 3, 2003.

Security and Integrity of The State's Criminal History Repository

Results in Brief

Errors and missing data in the criminal history records database reduce the reliability of programs that rely on this information. Such programs include background checks for employment and gun purchases. In addition, thousands of criminal fingerprint cards have not been fully processed and others were not processed timely. These weaknesses have resulted from a lack of controls in entering and testing data, and allocating resources to other activities.

Computer security weaknesses place the criminal history repository at risk of unauthorized access to the system and data. This could result in sensitive and confidential information being viewed, altered, or destroyed deliberately or accidentally. In addition, controls over physical access to source documents and computer equipment need strengthening. Furthermore, the lack of a complete disaster recovery plan leaves the system vulnerable in the event of a disaster or tampering with data. Sustained management commitment is needed to ensure these weaknesses are addressed.

Principal Findings

The criminal history database contained inaccurate information and some records were missing. In one test, 31 of 945 (3%) data elements in the database contained errors. In another test, 56 of 155 (36%) data elements contained errors. These errors were caused by data entry, lack of a re-key function, and system design problems. Furthermore, the entire criminal histories for 47 individuals were no longer present in the database. The cause of these missing records is unknown. Having errors in records of criminal history will impact the accuracy of background checks for gun purchases and work-related background checks.

Nearly 70,000 criminal fingerprint cards have not been fully processed by the Records and Identification Services Bureau. Specifically, information from the cards has been entered into the criminal history records database, but the fingerprints have not been matched to existing records. In addition, the re-key function has not been performed for 40% of these cards which could reduce the accuracy of the information entered into the database.

Adequate password controls, designed to prevent unauthorized access to computer data, have not been implemented. We found 4,381 of 4,757 (92%) passwords tested for one computer system did not meet the criteria for strong passwords. In addition, we found passwords that had been in use for an extended period of time without a forced change. Furthermore, passwords are stored in plain text rather than encrypted.

Computer system access controls are not designed to limit or detect access to computer programs and data. These controls protect information from being viewed, altered, or destroyed by unauthorized individuals. Users are allowed unlimited login attempts, and are not locked out after a period of inactivity. In addition, the system is not designed to detect and prevent suspicious activities leading to unauthorized access.

Access to the computer system is not always terminated for ex-employees. One employee had access 3 months after leaving and another employee 11 months after leaving. By allowing access to ex-employees, there is increased risk of these employees or others gaining unauthorized access to sensitive criminal information.

Access to fingerprints cards was not adequately controlled thus increasing the risk of losing cards. The door to the fingerprint card room was open 39 of the 43 (91%) times we checked. In addition, nearly 4,000 criminal fingerprint cards were stored in open containers by the door to this storage room.

The Bureau's disaster recovery plan for the criminal history records database does not address all key components that are designed to ensure protection of assets. Specifically, the plan has not been tested, there is no specific assignment of responsibilities, and critical data has not been identified. In addition, the location used to store a backup copy of the criminal history database is not off-site.

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Audit Division
Legislative Counsel Bureau

STATE OF NEVADA
LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU
LEGISLATIVE BUILDING
401 S. CARSON STREET
CARSON CITY, NEVADA 89701-4747
Fax No.: (775) 684-6600

LORNE J. MALKIEWICH, *Director*
(775) 684-6800

LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION (775) 684-6800
RICHARD D. PERKINS, *Assemblyman, Chairman*
Lorne J. Malkiewich, *Director, Secretary*

INTERIM FINANCE COMMITTEE (775) 684-6821
WILLIAM J. RAGGIO, *Senator, Chairman*
Gary L. Ghiggeri, *Fiscal Analyst*
Mark W. Stevens, *Fiscal Analyst*

PAUL V. TOWNSEND, *Legislative Auditor* (775) 684-6815
ROBERT E. ERICKSON, *Research Director* (775) 684-6825
BRENDA J. ERDOES, *Legislative Counsel* (775) 684-6830

Legislative Commission
Legislative Building
Carson City, Nevada

We have completed an audit of the Security and Integrity of the State's Criminal History Repository. This audit is part of the ongoing program of the Legislative Auditor as authorized by the Legislative Commission. The purpose of legislative audits is to improve state government by providing the Legislature, state officials, and Nevada citizens with independent and reliable information about the operations of state agencies, programs, activities, and functions. The results of our audit, including findings, conclusions, recommendations, and the Department of Public Safety's response, are presented in this report.

We wish to express our appreciation to the management and staff of the Department of Public Safety for their assistance during the audit.

Respectfully presented,

Paul V. Townsend

Paul V. Townsend, CPA
Legislative Auditor

April 5, 2002
Carson City, Nevada

STATE OF NEVADA
SECURITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE
STATE'S CRIMINAL HISTORY REPOSITORY

AUDIT REPORT

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SECURITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE STATE'S CRIMINAL HISTORY REPOSITORY

Purpose

The purpose of this audit was to determine the security and integrity of the state's criminal history repository. Our audit included a review of controls over the criminal history records database, and data stored in the database as of March 30, 2001.

Results in Brief

Errors and missing data in the criminal history records database reduce the reliability of programs that rely on this information. Such programs include background checks for employment and gun purchases. In addition, thousands of criminal fingerprint cards have not been fully processed and others were not processed timely. These weaknesses have resulted from a lack of controls in entering and testing data, and allocating resources to other activities.

Computer security weaknesses place the criminal history repository at risk of unauthorized access to the system and data. This could result in sensitive and confidential information being viewed, altered, or destroyed deliberately or accidentally. In addition, controls over physical access to source documents and computer equipment need strengthening. Furthermore, the lack of a complete disaster recovery plan leaves the system vulnerable in the event of a disaster or tampering with data. Sustained management commitment is needed to ensure these weaknesses are addressed.

Principal Findings

- The criminal history database contained inaccurate information and some records were missing. In one test, 31 of 945 (3%) data elements in the database contained errors. In another test, 56 of 155 (36%) data elements contained errors. These errors were caused by data entry, lack of a re-key function, and system design problems. Furthermore, the entire criminal histories for 47 individuals were no longer present in the database. The cause of these missing records is unknown. Having errors in records of criminal history will impact the accuracy of background checks for gun purchases and work-related background checks. (page 12)

- Nearly 70,000 criminal fingerprint cards have not been fully processed by the Records and Identification Services Bureau. Specifically, information from the cards has been entered into the criminal history records database, but the fingerprints have not been matched to existing records. In addition, the re-key function has not been performed for 40% of these cards which could reduce the accuracy of the information entered into the database. This has resulted from the Bureau's decision to put more resources into other activities, such as civil applicant background checks. (page 14)

- Adequate password controls, designed to prevent unauthorized access to computer data, have not been implemented. We found 4,381 of 4,757 (92%) passwords tested for one computer system did not meet the criteria for strong passwords. In addition, we found passwords that had been in use for an extended period of time without a forced change. One employee had used the same password for 2½ years. Furthermore, passwords are stored in plain text rather than encrypted. (page 17)

SECURITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE STATE'S CRIMINAL HISTORY REPOSITORY

- Computer system access controls are not designed to limit or detect access to computer programs and data. These controls protect information from being viewed, altered, or destroyed by unauthorized individuals. Users are allowed unlimited login attempts, and are not locked out after a period of inactivity. In addition, the system is not designed to detect and prevent suspicious activities leading to unauthorized access. (page 19)

- Access to the computer system is not always terminated for ex-employees. One employee had access 3 months after leaving and another employee 11 months after leaving. By allowing access to ex-employees, there is increased risk of these employees or others gaining unauthorized access to sensitive criminal information. (page 20)

- Access to fingerprints cards was not adequately controlled thus increasing the risk of losing cards. The door to the fingerprint card room was open 39 of the 43 (91%) times we checked. In addition, nearly 4,000 criminal fingerprint cards were stored in open containers by the door to this storage room. (page 21)

- The Bureau's disaster recovery plan for the criminal history records database does not address all key components that are designed to ensure protection of assets. Specifically, the plan has not been tested, there is no specific assignment of responsibilities, and critical data has not been identified. In addition, the location used to store a backup copy of the criminal history database is not off-site. (page 23)

- The Bureau is required to audit biennially each local agency within the State that uses the criminal history computer system. Agencies include sheriff's offices, district attorney offices, and federal agencies. Ten of 112 (9%) agencies were not audited within the last biennium. These audits ensure that local agencies are

complying with Nevada and FBI criminal justice policies and regulations. (page 24)

Recommendations

This report contains 14 recommendations to improve the security and integrity of the criminal history repository. The Bureau should test the accuracy of the criminal history records database, implement the re-key function for disposition information, and standardize and file disposition forms to allow more effective entering and efficient retrieval. The Bureau should also re-enter missing criminal records and determine how records were deleted. In addition, it should retain fees for services performed. To provide greater security over criminal history records, the Bureau must provide password controls, lock users out after a specified period of inactivity, and ensure only current employees have system access. In addition, the Bureau should capture information and report on user activities and limit physical access to authorized individuals. Furthermore, the Bureau should update its disaster recovery plan and provide offsite backup storage. Finally, it should ensure each local criminal justice agency is audited biennially. (page 35)

Agency Response

The agency, in its response to our report, accepted all 14 recommendations. (page 31)