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Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program

ICTAP OVERVIEW

The Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) is designed to enhance interoperable communications among Federal, State, and local emergency responders and public safety officials. ICTAP is funded by the Office of Grants and Training (G&T) in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Preparedness Directorate to provide guidance and suggestions to the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) sites. ICTAP personnel provide support for planning, roles and responsibilities, technical issues, and policy and operational decisions that need to be considered when developing interoperable communications. The goal of the ICTAP program is to enable local public safety agencies to communicate as they prevent or respond to a WMD attack and/or other disaster. ICTAP also works with other Federal, State, and local interoperability efforts whenever possible to enhance the overall capacity for agencies and individuals to communicate with one another.

ICTAP SERVICES

ICTAP provides a dedicated site management team to each Urban Area (UA) requesting assistance. The two-person team combines both operations-based

ICTAP Mission

The ICTAP mission is to provide free technical assistance to enhance interoperable communications among Federal, State, and local emergency responders and public safety officials from cities and States that have received grants from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

skills and technical expertise to bring a wide range of interoperable communications knowledge to each site. Based on each site, ICTAP can provide a variety of technical assistance and analysis tailored to the specific requirements of the site. For example, ICTAP provided on-site assistance during the assessment of the communications response to Hurricane Charley. ICTAP also created an After Action Report for a Denver tabletop exercise. During the Terri Schiavo crisis, ICTAP also analyzed the use of gateways as a means to communicate through hospital walls.

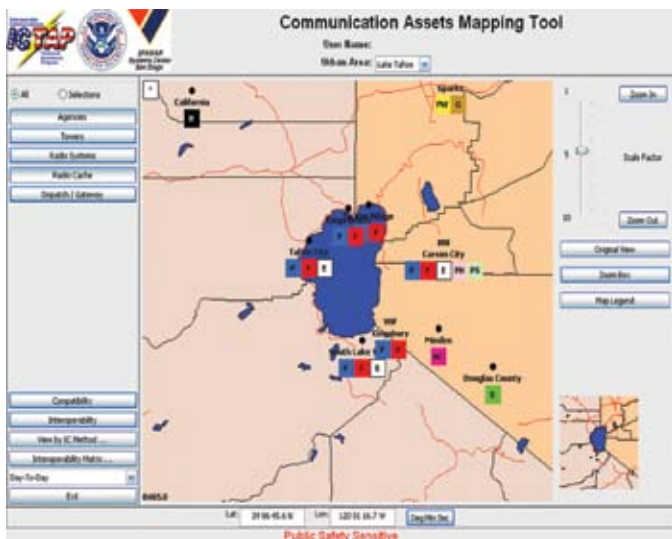
ICTAP also provides equipment inventory and procurement support. In Tampa and Miami, ICTAP assisted with the inventory of all of the Region 4 and

Region 7 communications assets. ICTAP led San Jose through a review of the current and future communications infrastructure and created a side-by-side comparison of equipment for the State of Kentucky.

ICTAP makes these findings available through the Lessons Learned Information Sharing Web site. To register for the site, please visit <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/index.cfm>.

CASM

The Communication Assets Survey and Mapping Tool (CASM) software developed by ICTAP provides a Web-based tool that agencies can use to store interoperable communications equipment inventory and current radio communications infrastructure information. This collected data will reside in a secure SPAWAR database that is accessible only by the participating agencies.



CASM Sample Mapping Display

The CASM tool provides a geo-spatial representation of which agencies can communicate and the means of connectivity. This data can be revised by authorized users at anytime, making it a valuable ongoing tool for both agency assessments and urban area use. In addition, CASM can be useful in accessing and identifying an agency's resources to provide an efficient inter-agency communications interoperability solution.

CASM Highlights

- A series of survey forms to lead user through the data collection process.
- Forms structured to minimize duplicate entries, with user help and data validation.
- Security mechanisms to prevent unauthorized access.
- Map-based visualization of agencies, radio systems, and communications infrastructure.
- Graphical display of UA interoperability and communications compatibility among agencies.
- Ability to “drill down” for greater detail.
- Interoperability assessments based on the SAFE-COM Continuum.
- Auto-generation of reports, including interoperable equipment data.
- On-line, detailed help.

By the beginning of 2006, over 35 sites had been equipped with CASM to collect and manage their interoperable communications data.

TACTICAL INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN (TICP)

Fiscal year 2005 DHS grant requirements included the creation of a TICP by May 1, 2006 for urban/metropolitan areas. ICTAP provided technical assistance in creating the plan to 65 sites. In order to help the sites meet the May 1, 2006 deadline, ICTAP created an intensive assistance plan to jump-start the regions and complete the requirements. The ICTAP assistance schedules included an initial kick-off meeting and a two-day workshop. ICTAP then followed-up with a final meeting to prepare the site to submit their TICP. All ICTAP-supported sites submitted their plans by the deadline.

Tactical Plan Requirements

The TICP is composed of six sections: UA Overview, Governance Structure, Interoperable Equipment, Policies and Procedures, Incident Communications Resource Plan, and Communications Unit

Leader Training. Each section provides pertinent communications information that the UA can use in day-to-day operations and during an emergency. The plans are living documents that will be updated and revised as the region's interoperable communications capabilities evolve.

Section One: Urban Area Overview

Provide a basic description of the UA and its efforts to address interoperable communications issues.

Section Two: Governance Structure

Provide an overview of the region's communications governing bodies. The Operational Working Group determines operational and training requirements. The Technical Working Group identifies existing interoperable equipment and methods.

Section Three: Interoperable Equipment

Collect pertinent information on interoperable equipment, such as cached radios, gateways, shared channels, and shared systems.

Section Four: Equipment Policies and Procedures

Document and/or develop policies and procedures for all interoperable equipment in the regions. Operational policies will address rules of use, interoperable communications requests, equipment activation/deactivation, and problem ID and resolution.

Section Five: Incident Communications Resource Plan

Detail what methods or specific interoperability resources will be used for multi-agency communications during an incident.

Section Six: Communications Unit Leader Training

A training curriculum is being developed by the NIMS Integration Center in cooperation with SAFE-COM and G&T. Include the POC information for those individuals who receive Communications Unit Leader training.

TACTICAL PLAN VALIDATION EXERCISES

In order to review each TICIP, ICTAP organized five review panels consisting of subject matter expert peers

from around the country. The panels gathered to review the TICIPs and assess the real-world feasibility of each. Following approval from the panels, the sites are required to validate the TICIP through a limited full-scale exercise. All 75 UASI sites are required to hold an exercise that illustrates the region's communications interoperability by fall 2006. The focus of the exercise is on availability, coordination, and integration of systems that the various agencies would experience in response to a multi-jurisdictional event.



A tactical plan validation exercise in Los Angeles, California

ICTAP, in collaboration with the DHS exercise personnel, supports the sites by assisting with planning, scheduling, and executing the exercises. The exercises conform to Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) standards and are evaluated on the communications-specific aspects of the Target Capabilities List (TCL). The goals of the exercise evaluation are to validate areas of strength, identify opportunities for improvement, and establish how prepared the region is in order to prevent, protect against, respond to, and/or recover from natural or man-made disasters.

Along with peers from around the country, ICTAP experts visit each exercise and evaluate the region's interoperable communications. The evaluation team analyzes how well the region followed their TICIP and if the plan was effective in providing tactical interoperable communications during the exercise

Following the exercise, the sites receive an After Action Report (AAR) and an Improvement Plan (IP)

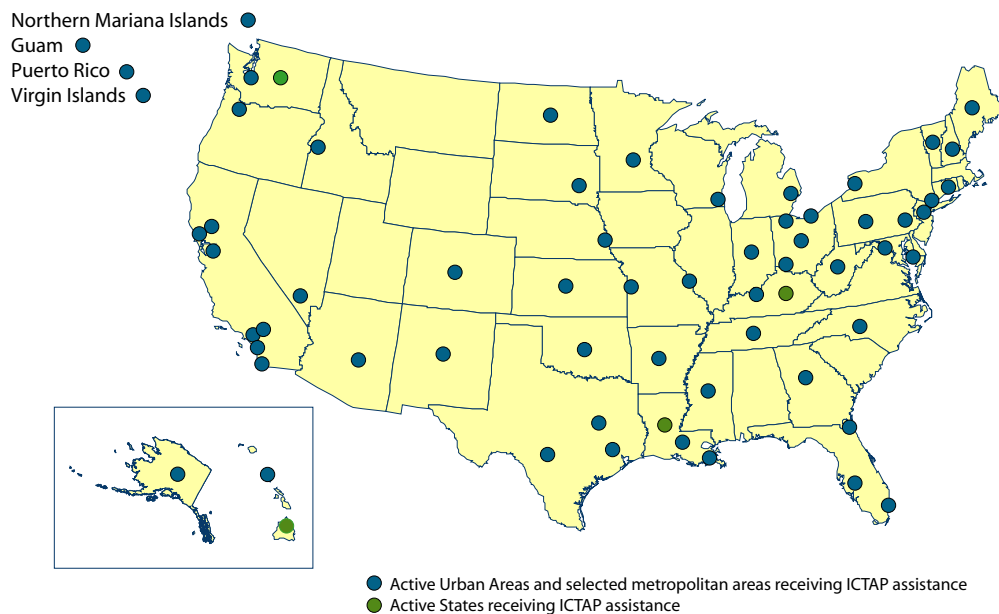
which will lead to the development of a scorecard based on the SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum. This information will help determine the region's current interoperable communications capabilities and how best to improve them in the future.

TICP IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOPS

Through ICTAP, the TICP Implementation Workshop is available to assist each site in preparing for the Tactical Plan Validation Exercise (TVE). All regional agency personnel—including law enforcement, fire, and EMS incident management staff and communications specialists are invited to attend the workshop.

The workshops cover a variety of topics to prepare sites to efficiently exercise their tactical plans according to the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command Structure (ICS) standards during the validation exercise. At the workshop, instructors provide an overview of NIMS and the ICS Communications Unit and explain the associated standards and training. The instructor helps identify the site's appropriate Communications Unit Leader (COML) based on the 19 required core competencies. The site also reviews the TICP and, with the assistance of the instructor, develops an Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS-205) for the exercise.

ICTAP Site Map



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program, or other initiatives of the Office of Grants and Training (G&T), please contact the Centralized Scheduling and Information Desk (CSID) at 1-800-368-6498 or askcsid@dhs.gov.