

OFFICE FOR INTEROPERABILITY AND COMPATIBILITY**Defining the Problem**

Emergency responders—police officers, fire personnel, emergency medical services—need to share vital voice and data information across disciplines and jurisdictions to successfully respond to day-to-day incidents and large-scale emergencies. Unfortunately, for decades, inadequate and unreliable communications have compromised their ability to perform mission-critical duties. Responders often have difficulty communicating when adjacent agencies are assigned to different radio bands, use incompatible proprietary systems and infrastructure, and lack adequate standard operating procedures and effective multi-jurisdictional, multi-disciplinary governance structures.

OIC Background

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) in 2004 to strengthen and integrate interoperability and compatibility efforts in order to improve local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response and preparedness. Managed by the Science and Technology Directorate, OIC is assisting in the coordination of interoperability efforts across DHS. OIC programs and initiatives address critical interoperability and compatibility issues. Priority areas include communications, equipment, and training.

OIC Programs

OIC's communications portfolio is currently comprised of the SAFECOM and Disaster Management (DM) programs. SAFECOM is creating the capacity for increased levels of interoperability by developing tools, best practices, and methodologies that emergency response agencies can put into effect, based on feedback from emergency response practitioners. DM is improving incident response and recovery by developing tools and messaging standards that help emergency responders manage incidents and exchange information in real time.

Practitioner-Driven Approach

OIC is committed to working in partnership with local, tribal, state, and Federal officials in order to serve critical emergency response needs. OIC's programs are unique in that they advocate a "bottom-up" approach. The programs' practitioner-driven governance structures gain from the valuable input of the emergency response community and from local, tribal, state, and Federal policy makers and leaders.

Long-Term Goals

- Strengthen and integrate homeland security activities related to research and development, testing and evaluation, standards, technical assistance, training, and grant funding that pertain to interoperability.
 - Provide a single resource for information about and assistance with interoperability and compatibility issues.
 - Reduce unnecessary duplication in emergency response programs and unneeded spending on interoperability issues.
 - Identify and promote interoperability and compatibility best practices in the emergency response arena.
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