SAFECOM

DC Area Communications Planning Paid Off During Sniper Incident
SAFECOM After-Action Report Finds Relationships Among Public Safety Agencies Provided Foundation for Interoperability

Washington, DC —Existing partnerships among public safety officials at the local, state, and federal levels paved the way for effective communications during the Washington, DC-area sniper investigation, according to a report released today by SAFECOM. The study found that as a result of prior planning, multiple agencies were able to establish communications interoperability, share equipment, and coordinate efforts during the October 2002 investigation.

"The report shows that a willingness to collaborate across jurisdictional boundaries makes a real difference when it matters," said Dr. David Boyd, Director, SAFECOM. "Coordinated approaches, relationship building, and information sharing are all critical to solving key interoperability issues, and we encourage government and public safety officials to develop and sustain partnerships in their communities."

The report documents how officers and agents from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies used their communications capabilities to respond to and investigate individual incidents simultaneously. The report also includes a summary of operational and technical "lessons learned," which can provide guidance for communications planners and law enforcement personnel in preparing for future efforts of this magnitude.

In particular, the report highlights three areas crucial to the investigation's successful planning and use of interoperable communications systems—

- **Partnerships.** Strong working relationships forged both before and during the investigation helped build a foundation for shared communications. These partnerships took many forms—from a document outlining response procedures when interoperability was not feasible, to instructions to use plain English language during all communications.

- **Technical Staff.** Dedicated public and private technical staff worked around the clock to support control-center communications systems and to develop real-time solutions for search teams in the field. Their quick troubleshooting and knowledge of their own agencies' systems provided essential support to the task force's officers and agents.

- **Technology.** In only 1 day, Montgomery County, working closely with a communications vendor, created a link between the county's old communications system and a new system that allowed greater interoperability both within Montgomery County and throughout the region. In addition, the widespread use of mobile telephones enabled investigation organizers to keep in constant contact with one another.

However, the report cautions that the large number of different technical solutions needed to ensure interoperability across the region and among many users, shows that there is no "one-size-fits-all" interoperability solution. Regions will still need to use a variety of solutions to meet their unique local needs.

The SAFECOM report is based on the analysis of data collected from interviews with local, state, and federal agencies involved in the sniper investigation. It addresses both public safety land mobile radio communications and commercially provided communications. The report is available in its entirety at www.safecomprogram.gov/libmain.cfm.

SAFECOM is the umbrella program within the Federal Government that helps local, tribal, state, and federal public safety agencies improve response through more effective, efficient interoperable wireless communications. For more information on SAFECOM, visit www.safecomprogram.gov or contact the SAFECOM Program at 1-866-969-7233.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology division serves as the primary research and development arm of the Department, utilizing our nation's scientific and technological resources to provide federal, state and local officials with the technology and capabilities to protect the homeland. Established in 2002 as part of the President's Management Agenda, SAFECOM is the overarching umbrella program within the Federal Government that oversees all initiatives and projects pertaining to public safety communications and interoperability.

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