Homeland Security

Office of Emergency Communications

October / November 2007

OEC Bulletin

Connecting Emergency Responders, Keeping America Safe

The mission of the Office of Emergency Communications is to support and promote the ability of emergency responders and government officials to communicate in the event of natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other man-made disasters, and works to ensure, accelerate, and attain interoperable and operable emergency communications nationwide.

About the Office of Emergency Communications

Title XVIII of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 established the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) to support and promote the ability of government officials and emergency responders to continue to communicate in the event of a natural disaster or an act of terrorism. OEC does this by ensuring and advancing interoperable communications capabilities nationwide. In support of this mission. OEC was established to bring together three programs from other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) entities into OEC — the Integrated Wireless Network (IWN), the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP), and certain elements of the SAFECOM program.

IWN, a joint initiative between the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and the Treasury, works to improve the tactical wireless communications operability and interoperability capabilities of Federal law enforcement through a consolidated common infrastructure. ICTAP provides technical assistance to local emergency responders and public safety officials to enhance interoperable communications. SAFECOM provides guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to Federal, State, Tribal, and local emergency response agencies.

Each of the three programs brought together under OEC has a proven history of providing interoperable solutions to the emergency response community. Now they will work collectively through OEC, the focal point of emergency communications interoperability, to meet the Nation's interoperability challenges.

IN THIS ISSUE

OEC Leadership

On September 4, 2007, Michael Roskind joined OEC as Deputy Director. Mr. Roskind brings to his position experience in the public safety world, and understanding of emergency communications issues. He was Deputy Sheriff at the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office in Washington State, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, a naval aviator, and elected Councilman and a member of the Homeland Security Committee of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO).

OEC Oversees Statewide Communications Plan Efforts

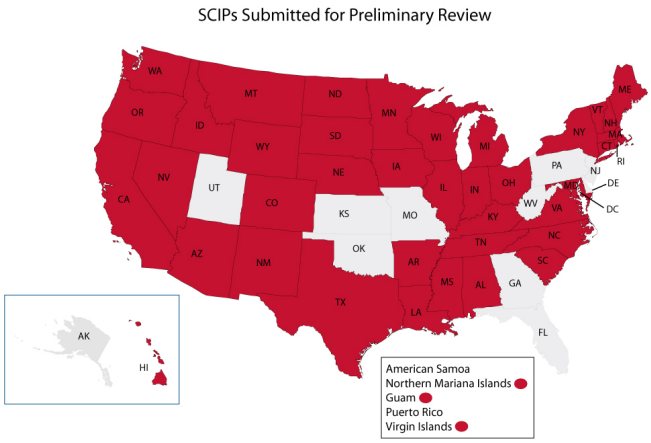
The Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) and the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program require each of the 56 States and territories to submit a Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP) to maintain eligibility for Federal interoperable communications grant funds. Final plans are due to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on December 3, 2007.

Through its Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) and SAFECOM Program, the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) is responsible for overseeing both the technical assistance and the peer review process for the SCIPs. SAFECOM has utilized extensive input from State and local emergency responders to develop the SCIP criteria and process by which SCIPs will be evaluated. Through ICTAP, OEC is facilitating technical assistance, if requested by the State or territory, during the development of each SCIP. Throughout the process, OEC has strived to ensure that statewide planning efforts are locally driven, include multi-disciplinary and multi-jurisdictional involvement, and address all five lanes of the Interoperability Continuum.

Supporting SCIP Development

In March 2007, SAFECOM, in association with the National Governors Association (NGA) and the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC), hosted the Statewide Planning Workshop for Public Safety Communications Interoperability. Representatives from all 56 States and territories were invited to attend.

ICTAP's support of the SCIP development began with a kickoff meeting to help State leaders prepare for the SCIP effort. After the kickoff was held, ICTAP followed up with a workshop involving representatives from public safety agencies throughout the State. The workshops were designed as working meetings to bring the necessary participants together to address the plan in more detail. ICTAP customized the meetings to best meet each State's specific needs, as reflected in its progress on the SCIP. To ensure a successful workshop, the participants were asked to collect information and begin work on developing a draft of the SCIP prior to the meeting. With a draft SCIP, ICTAP was able to help focus the workshop on the specific gaps that were identified.



As of the end of October, ICTAP has provided ongoing support for SCIP development in 48 States and territories.

Preliminary SCIP Reviews

To assist States and territories in enhancing their plans before final submission, OEC facilitated a peer review of draft SCIPs. In order to be eligible for the preliminary review, the State Administrative Agency was required to submit the draft plan to the DHS portal by September 30, 2007. A total of 42 of the 56 States and territories took advantage of this opportunity. More than 40 State and local members of the public safety community participated in the peer review of the preliminary plans. Each plan was evaluated by two peers; OEC then compiled the comments and provided them to States and territories in mid-October to assist with the enhancement of SCIPs before final submission.

Additionally, OEC, in consultation with the DHS Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), is establishing a joint peer review process for the evaluation and approval of the final SCIPs. This will take place in early 2008. The peer review panels will be made up of Federal, State, and local public safety representatives from around the Nation; more than 100 peers are expected to participate in the process.

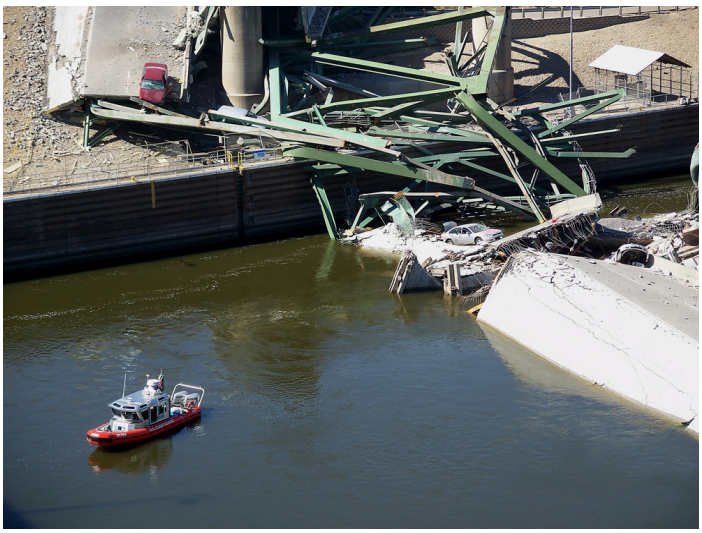
Successful Communications at Minnesota Bridge Collapse

Shortly after 6 p.m. Wednesday, August 1, the I-35W bridge over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis collapsed. When officers arrived, they found the entire I-35W span crumpled into the river below, injured people, burning vehicles, a school bus carrying 60 children on the broken roadway, submerged vehicles, and people scrambling up the riverbanks.

Established Procedures and Exercises Guide Coordinated Response

Area officers, firefighters, and citizens rushed to rescue stranded and injured motorists; cell phone communications were quickly overloaded. What could have been a difficult or impossible communications scenario for emergency responders instead became a well-coordinated rescue and recovery response. Minneapolis emergency responders were able to communicate and coordinate at the chaotic scene because they have been trained to incorporate their interoperable communications assets such as cache radios, gateways, shared channels, and shared systems, both in planned exercises and in mutual aid events. Minneapolis, part of the Twin Cities Urban Area (UA), has well-established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that are used frequently.

"The bottom line is that everything worked because we have accomplished the implementation of a mature regional shared system, by developing SOPs, pre-planning, and training incident commanders and end users on radio interoperability," says Roger R. Laurence, Communications Manager, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office.



Minnesota's I-35W collapsed on August 1, 2007

Shared 800 MHz Trunked System Ensures Responders Are on Same Frequency

As the scene unfolded, the Minnesota State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the Minneapolis EOC were activated. Radio communications were established using multiple tactical nets to support operations based on mature interoperability SOPs. Extensive use was made of shared systems—the Twin Cities UA has an integrated 800 MHz trunked system—with limited use of shared channels, fixed gateways, and swap radios. Command net operated on a combination of radio and commercial wireless resources. The city's 2-month old WiFi network was extended to the scene and opened for citizens and emergency responders.

> ***"The recent endeavor facilitated by DHS in assisting us in developing and exercising a TIC plan substantially contributed to the region's readiness for such a response. The technical assistance resources are immensely valuable."***
>
> -- Roger R. Laurence, Communications Manager, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, Minneapolis, Minnesota

An Incident Command System (ICS) 205 form [used to record all radio frequency assignments for an operation] was created on the dispatch network. Using the network, operators at dispatch points on the shared network were instantly updated when shared channels and talk groups were allocated. Hennepin County, the State, and Minneapolis Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) allocated resources in coordination with their Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP).

The shared system statistics during this event are impressive, Laurence reports. During the incident response there were 114,397 Push to Talks; double the normal load. Only 67 calls were delayed more than 10 seconds, and only two of these were the regionwide and statewide interoperability/critical incident talk groups. Most delays greater than 10 seconds were non-mission-critical talk groups.

Overall, the shared radio system performed as expected, including busy system periods due to the extraordinary traffic load. "There will likely be some minor tweaking of talk group priorities, contingency procedures to balance and/or shed load, and some incremental channel capacity added to selected sites going forward," Laurence reports.

Golden Phoenix Exercise

During July 16-27, 2007, the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) provided support to the Golden Phoenix exercise in California. Golden Phoenix is a collaborative training event for local emergency responders, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) forces, and elements of the California National Guard. Training focused on communications interoperability and disaster relief protocols. The GP07 activities centered on a catastrophic earthquake scenario along the San Andreas Fault.

Emergency responders test communications protocols during exercise

OEC provided subject matter experts to assess voice communications interoperability and to provide leadership for an After Action Report (AAR) on the overall communications interoperability assessment. OEC personnel also served as the Training Leader and Data Collection team lead. The OEC team is now assembling the AAR. The report will identify best practices and areas for improvement involving interoperability among local law enforcement, fire and emergency management agencies, with particular emphasis on the interface between military components and civilian agencies.

OEC Participates in IACP Conference

During October 13-17, 2007, OEC attended the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conference in New Orleans. At the OEC booth, representatives demonstrated the Communication Assets Survey and Mapping (CASM) tool. Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) representatives also answered questions on the new office, the upcoming Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) requirements, and Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program. The conference hosted over 17,000 law enforcement professionals and held seminars on a variety of topics, including education and training, current legislative issues, and the impact of technology in the world of public safety.

OEC'S UPCOMING EVENTS

NOVEMBER

1 OEC and OIC host the Executive Committee (EC) Conference Call

6-8 Critical Incident Preparedness Conference in San Francisco, CA

12-14 IAEM Conference in Reno, NV

DECEMBER

3 Final Statewide Plans are due

13 OEC and OIC host the Emergency Response Council (ERC)

For additional information on the Office of Emergency Communications or its initiatives, please email oec@hq.dhs.gov.