
SAFECOM

Defining the Problem

Effective interoperable communications can mean the difference between life and death. Unfortunately, inadequate and unreliable communications have compromised emergency response operations for decades. Emergency responders—police officers, fire personnel, emergency medical services—need to share vital information via voice and data across disciplines and jurisdictions to successfully respond to day-to-day incidents and large-scale emergencies. 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.

Background

SAFECOM is working with the emergency response community and Federal partners to develop solutions to address these interoperable communications challenges. With its Federal partners, SAFECOM provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies. The scope of community-oriented SAFECOM services is broad, and includes more than 60,000 local and state emergency response agencies and organizations. Federal customers include agencies engaged in emergency response disciplines—law enforcement, firefighting, public health, and disaster recovery—and agencies that provide funding and support to local and state emergency response organizations.

A communications program of the Department of Homeland Security’s Office for Interoperability and Compatibility, SAFECOM is managed by the Science and Technology Directorate.

Practitioner-Driven Approach

SAFECOM is committed to working in partnership with local, tribal, state, and Federal officials in order to serve critical emergency response needs. In keeping with its unique “bottom-up” approach, SAFECOM has developed a governance structure that promotes the valuable input of emergency responders and policy makers and leaders.

Strategy

- Promote a system of systems approach through the use of standards-based communications equipment.
- Encourage establishment of governing bodies to foster a culture of cooperation and information sharing across agencies and jurisdictions.
- Support prioritization and funding of interoperability among local, state, tribal, and Federal leadership.
- Advance standardization of training and exercise programs.
- Support daily use of interoperable equipment throughout regions.

Long-Term Goals

- Achieve a system of systems environment supported by communications standards, tools, and best practices.
- Facilitate coordination of funding assistance through tailored grant guidance to maximize limited resources available for emergency response communications and interoperability.
- Pilot tools and methods as national models for emergency response at the rural, urban, state, and regional levels.
- Provide policy recommendations to promote efficiency in emergency response communications.