

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: NATIONAL INTEROPERABILITY BASELINE SURVEY**What is the National Interoperability Baseline Survey?**

The National Interoperability Baseline Survey is designed to assess the capacity for communications interoperability among law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) first responders in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia (DC).

How are the findings going to help improve interoperability?

The survey will provide insights into the ways and extent to which law enforcement, fire, and EMS communications are currently interoperable, and where gaps exist. It will help public safety officials make better-informed decisions about how to most effectively allocate future investments for improving communications interoperability. It also will provide a benchmark to help measure the effectiveness of those efforts.

Haven't similar surveys been done before?

The National Interoperability Baseline survey differs from other surveys. It is derived from a *comprehensive* definition of interoperability that was developed in partnership with the public safety community and founded on the SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum. This definition recognizes the importance of governance (administration and decision making), standard operating procedures (SOPs), technology, training and exercises, and usage of interoperable communications in establishing reliable communications interoperability. The survey assesses all of those elements.

The sample size for this survey is also unprecedented. SAFECOM is surveying 22,400 randomly selected law enforcement, fire, and EMS agencies in each of the 50 states and DC.

What is the SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum?

SAFECOM's Interoperability Continuum is a graphic tool designed to help the public safety community and local, tribal, state, and federal policymakers address critical elements for success as they plan and execute interoperability solutions. These elements are governance, SOPs, technology, training and exercises, and usage of interoperable communications.

Which agencies and individuals will be asked to respond to the survey?

SAFECOM is surveying 22,400 randomly selected law enforcement, fire, and EMS agencies in each of the 50 states and DC. SAFECOM will also ask homeland security directors in each state and DC to complete a shorter version of the survey.

Why is SAFECOM surveying only law enforcement, fire, and EMS first responders, and State Homeland Security Directors?

SAFECOM worked with public safety community representatives from across the country to develop the survey and to decide which public safety disciplines should complete it. This group determined it necessary for SAFECOM to limit the number of disciplines surveyed to make the response data manageable in size. To achieve a representative sample, SAFECOM is asking 22,400 agencies to respond to the survey.

How is SAFECOM administering the survey?

Each of the agencies in the sample group will receive a letter inviting them to respond to the survey. That letter will be followed by a postcard, with instructions for completing the survey online. SAFECOM will also ask homeland security directors in each state and DC to complete a shorter version of the survey. Further, the program plans to conduct approximately 30 site visits to gather supplemental qualitative and anecdotal information. SAFECOM will synthesize and analyze all of this data.

The survey should take approximately 25 minutes to complete. SAFECOM will assure respondents that all data will be published in aggregate format only, that no single agency's responses will be published, and that no identifying information will be retained.

Can agencies that have not been selected as respondents provide their perspectives as the survey is fielded?

Unfortunately, they cannot. Survey methodology requires that respondents be randomly selected to ensure the results accurately represent the larger population. Responses from agencies not selected in the random sample would bias the data.

If you would like to provide general comments to the SAFECOM program regarding the nation's capacity for interoperability, please direct emails to baseline@dhs.gov.

What about the homeland security directors who will be asked to complete a shorter version of the survey? How will their responses shape the findings?

The responses from the homeland security directors will be considered and reported separately from the rest of the sample. They will complement the findings that the first responder surveys generate. Most first responder data will come from local agencies: it will be useful to have a separate analysis of interoperability from the State governments.

Because response is voluntary, how can you be sure you will end up with a valid assessment?

SAFECOM is working directly with leaders from the law enforcement, fire, and EMS communities and through the trade and consumer press to publicize the survey and to encourage response. This effort underscores the expected value that the survey results will

provide, and encourages agencies that receive the survey to complete it. SAFECOM will contact non-respondents, as needed, in an effort to increase the response rate.

What will happen if the survey receives a better response in some states than in others?

If the response rate is lower in a particular area, SAFECOM will focus resources in that area to encourage potential respondents to complete the survey.

In light of constrained federal budgets, how does the survey help make the best use of limited resources?

The survey will provide quantitative and qualitative data that will help us identify definitive interoperability capacity gaps. That understanding can be used, in turn, to guide future investments for the public safety community to make the best possible use of resources.

How long will it take to complete the National Interoperability Baseline Survey?

SAFECOM will administer the survey for a two-month period beginning in May 2006. SAFECOM anticipates conducting follow-up site visits and presenting preliminary response information in August 2006.

What is the purpose of the site visits?

The information gleaned from the site visits will provide real-world insights from first responders. In addition, the site visits will allow SAFECOM to obtain feedback on survey questions to improve future studies. The data gathered during these site visits will deepen SAFECOM's understanding of survey findings by affording the program an opportunity to identify trends, analyze questions raised, and clarify any ambiguities in the findings collected through the online survey.

When will the results be available?

SAFECOM anticipates presenting preliminary response in August 2006.

Who will get the results?

SAFECOM will post the findings on its website; the findings will be available to anyone with Internet access.

When will SAFECOM repeat the survey?

SAFECOM plans to re-administer the survey every two years.

How can I get more information?

Questions can be directed to baseline@dhs.gov. Further, for more information about the SAFECOM program, visit www.safecomprogram.gov or call 866-969-SAFE.

How will the results be used?

The baseline will provide a “snapshot” of public safety’s capacity for interoperable communications. Interoperability involves more than just technology. Public safety agencies must also coordinate and resolve other critical elements, such as training, governance, usage and standard operating procedures. The baseline will measure the level of proficiency in each of these elements. Public safety leaders and elected policy officials can use these measurements to identify gaps in interoperability and to target resources towards elements with the greatest need.

Once SAFECOM and DHS have a clear understanding of the state of interoperability, what will be done to make improvements?

SAFECOM will provide recommendations, based on gaps identified through the survey, to the public safety community and policy officials.