Statement for the Record

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Thank you Chairman Price, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here today with my colleagues from the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Grants Program Directorate (GPD) to discuss our coordinated efforts to improve interoperable emergency communications for emergency response providers and government officials at the Federal, State, local, tribal, and territorial levels.

As we have learned through after-action reports and other assessments of our emergency response efforts, responders face a number of challenges in their ability to communicate effectively and seamlessly during emergency situations. These challenges could impact response and recovery efforts for large-scale disasters such as hurricanes and terrorist attacks, as well as localized incidents that take place every day in cities and towns across the Nation.

The Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) was created to assist emergency responders with developing the necessary capabilities to communicate with other jurisdictions, disciplines, and levels of government so they can manage incidents and restore essential services. Ensuring the effectiveness of emergency communications is not something the Federal Government can accomplish on its own. OEC, OIC, and FEMA/GPD maintain strong partnerships with the tens of thousands of State, local, tribal, and territorial emergency response providers to coordinate planning and implement solutions for interoperable emergency communications.

Before addressing the specifics of our programs, I would like to provide the subcommittee with an update on staffing.

Since becoming operational less than two years ago on April 1, 2007, we have worked hard to stand up an effective organization while at the same time executing OEC's mission requirements. We are hiring talented professionals with the right mix of technical and managerial skills to carry out OEC's programs in the areas of planning, stakeholder outreach and coordination, and technical assistance. As of today, we have 27

Federal employees and are making great progress toward becoming fully staffed at 51 Federal employees, including regional coordinators located throughout the Nation. When I took over as Director of OEC in December 2007, we had four Federal employees. Much progress has been made, but our work is still under way.

Now I will provide the subcommittee with an update on the key OEC programs and activities that are driving progress and highlight some of our accomplishments.

Policy and Planning
National Emergency Communications Plan

Congress directed OEC to develop a National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) to serve as the overarching strategy to guide national planning and coordination. OEC developed the NECP in coordination with stakeholders at all levels of government. Completed in July 2008, the NECP is a strategic roadmap to help drive improved interoperability, operability, and continuity of communications for the emergency response community. The Plan was developed with the input of more than 150 emergency responders from all levels of government and was designed to build on the substantial progress that we have made collectively as a Nation.

Completion of the Plan was a major milestone for both OEC and the emergency response community, as it was the first plan of its kind and now serves as the platform for National planning and implementation activities. We now use the NECP goals and objectives to prioritize interoperable emergency communications grant policies and more efficiently and effectively deliver our technical assistance services.

We are a little over seven months into the implementation of the NECP and already have achieved many key milestones. While OEC is managing the overall implementation of the NECP, success is found in the actions that stakeholders take to accomplish the remaining key benchmarks. OEC provides the overall guidance and assistance necessary to ensure that the Federal, State, local, and tribal communities that helped craft the Plan are able to achieve the milestones established in the Plan.

The goals set forth in the Plan were developed in coordination with stakeholders to set targets for achieving a baseline level of interoperability across the Nation. OEC is working closely with representatives from the emergency response community to identify the appropriate requirements and milestones for demonstrating response-level communications during both routine incidents and disasters in accordance with the Plan's three goals:

Goal 1 – By 2010, 90 percent of all high-risk urban areas designated within the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) are able to demonstrate response-level emergency communications within one hour for routine events involving multiple jurisdictions and agencies. ("Response-level emergency communications" is the capacity of individuals with primary operational leadership responsibility to manage resources and make

timely decisions during a multi-agency incident without technical or procedural communications impediments.)

Goal 2 – By 2011, 75 percent of non-UASI jurisdictions are able to demonstrate response-level emergency communications within one hour for routine events involving multiple jurisdictions and agencies.

Goal 3 – By 2013, 75 percent of all jurisdictions are able to demonstrate response-level emergency communications within three hours of a significant event as outlined in the National Planning Scenarios. Developed pursuant to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, the 15 National Planning Scenarios highlight a plausible range of significant events such as terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies that pose the greatest risks to the Nation.

Also, OEC is closely monitoring a key policy proceeding with regard to the creation of a nationwide interoperable broadband network for public safety in the 700 megahertz (MHz) band. We have heard directly from a number of first responders at all levels of government that they need access to advanced emergency communications capabilities. OEC supports the successful conclusion of the Federal Communications Commission's rulemaking for the 700 MHz band and any other steps needed to successfully deploy this valuable network to public safety personnel.

Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans

In addition to planning on a national level, OEC played a critical role in the development and approval of Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs) in all 56 States and territories. Developed in accordance with the requirements of both the Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grant Program and the Homeland Security Grant Program, the SCIPs address a common set of requirements and guidelines, as well as the current interoperability environment within each State and territory. OEC worked side-by-side with State and local communities to provide related guidance and technical assistance during development of their SCIPs. OEC leveraged critical information from the 56 SCIPs during development of the NECP, particularly with respect to understanding interoperability gaps within and across States.

OEC is now working with the States and territories to provide support to implement the SCIPs and to ensure that future versions of their SCIPs are aligned with the NECP goals and objectives. OEC is providing individualized technical assistance to support SCIP implementation in the form of one-day SCIP workshops offered to all States and territories. As of today, 52 States and territories have expressed interest in hosting SCIP workshops. Of those, 23 workshops have been completed, and the remaining 29 are on schedule to be completed by June 2009.

Grants

OEC is responsible for developing and coordinating grant guidance for all departmental grant programs funding interoperable communications. OEC's annual SAFECOM Recommended Federal Interoperable Communications Grant Guidance outlines recommendations for grant funding eligibility. This includes application criteria, guidelines, and resources to help Federal grant programs use their funds to effectively strengthen interoperability within the emergency response community.

In addition, OEC has worked in partnership with the FEMA GPD to execute the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP), for which $50 million was appropriated in both FY 2008 and FY 2009. In developing the grant guidance for this program, OEC is working to ensure that the IECGP is consistent with the priorities and initiatives of the NECP and the SCIPs.

Like the NECP, the IECGP focuses on governance, planning, standard operating procedures, training, and exercises. In FY 2009, the appropriations language also included communications equipment as an allowable cost under this grant program. In January, FEMA received applications from all 56 States and territories for FY 2009 IECGP funds. FEMA and OEC are currently reviewing the grant applications for FY 2009, and we expect grant funds to be awarded within the next two months.

Stakeholder Coordination

OEC's programs and activities reflect a stakeholder-driven approach to achieving nationwide improvements to emergency communications capabilities. OEC administers and coordinates its outreach work through a number of forums designed to collect feedback on its programs and policies from emergency response providers at the Federal, State, local, tribal, and territorial levels.

- **SAFECOM Executive Committee (EC)/Emergency Response Council (ERC)** –
  The SAFECOM EC and ERC, managed jointly by OEC and the S&T OIC, are composed of emergency responders at every level of government. SAFECOM brings together Federal, State, and local stakeholders to improve interoperability by developing tools, best practices, and methodologies for emergency response agencies. Working together with its stakeholders, OEC developed key tools that foster NECP implementation and address gaps identified in SCIPs. This includes the *Governance Sustainability and Strategic Planning Implementation Methodology*, which provides guidance and lessons learned in creating and sustaining an effective statewide communications interoperability governance structure through SCIP implementation. OEC is also developing guide books to help stakeholders develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and standard operating procedures for use among emergency responders.

- **Statewide Interoperability Coordinators Council (SWICC) –** Recently established by OEC in response to Statewide Interoperability Coordinators' (SWIC) recommendations, this forum is dedicated to facilitating information sharing and capacity building among the SWICs. State interoperability coordinators are critical for ensuring that State, local, and tribal emergency communications collaboration is occurring within each State and along State borders.

- **Metropolitan Area Working Group (MAWG) –** At the request of stakeholders, OEC recently launched the MAWG to strengthen interoperability partnerships among the Nation's urban areas and the Federal Government. This forum defines and articulates the unique needs of the metropolitan emergency response community.

- **Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC)** – Title XVIII of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, as amended, directs the ECPC to serve as the interagency focal point and clearinghouse for intergovernmental information on interoperable emergency communications. To stand up this entity, OEC established an interagency working group to develop the ECPC as a centralized, user-driven resource to improve coordination. ECPC Working Group activities to date have centered on implementation of NECP milestones, grants and technical assistance coordination, and clearinghouse development.

- **Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC) –** The FPIC is a voluntary organization of Federal, State, local, and tribal emergency communications users, managers, and planners that is chaired by OEC. The FPIC serves as a forum to build partnerships and collaboratively address operational and technical challenges related to spectrum, standards and technology, and security. It also enables DHS and other Federal departments and agencies to engage in resource sharing initiatives with State and local agencies across the Nation.

Our capstone stakeholder outreach activity will be taking place next month in Chicago, with our first annual National Conference on Emergency Communications. This year's conference, *Effective Communications for a Secure Nation*, will promote coordination among Federal, State, local, tribal, and territorial first responders and private-sector personnel for communications during natural and man-made incidents and disasters. The conference agenda will engage participants to discuss tangible solutions for critical challenges facing the emergency communications community and to identify real-time recommendations and solutions to increase practitioner involvement, coordination, and partnerships.

Technical Assistance

Another important element of OEC's mission is the provision of technical assistance to State, local, tribal, and territorial governments through the Interoperable Communications

Technical Assistance Program. Since its inception, OEC has supported hundreds of requests for technical assistance, including development of effective multi-jurisdictional and multidisciplinary governance structures, training exercises, systems engineering, radio frequency/channel planning and use, interoperability needs assessments, and the integration of voice and data technologies.

Through its technical assistance catalog, OEC offers support addressing a wide range of interoperability needs, including communications systems engineering support, governance assessment and modeling, tactical communications enhancement support, communication assets survey and mapping, and communications unit training.

Currently, the centerpiece of OEC's communication unit training is the Communications Unit Leader (COML) course, with a train-the-trainer course in final development. Also, a Communications Unit Technician (COMT) course is in the early stages of development. OEC and our partners in OIC developed the course after stakeholders identified a need for Type III All-Hazards COML training. OEC has completed 21 COML training sessions, training 594 responders as of last month, and anticipates that a total of 1,000 emergency responders will have completed the COML training by the end of FY 2009.

Historically, technical assistance programs have successfully enhanced emergency communications capabilities jurisdiction by jurisdiction, in response to requests from individual agencies on a first-come basis. Going forward, OEC has developed targeted technical assistance offerings that address gaps in the current capabilities and target initiatives identified in the NECP. Currently, OEC annually provides a revised technical assistance report and request form to each State and territory. The report outlines the SCIP initiatives and suggests technical assistance catalog offerings that support each initiative. States and territories may request up to five technical assistance engagements annually from OEC's technical assistance catalog.

OEC internally reviews all technical assistance requests, evaluating how they address SCIP gaps and advance interoperability by increasing capability and mitigating risk. Requests are then prioritized to maximize the impact of the assistance for the State or territory to fully implement its SCIP and achieve NECP goals and objectives.

Cross Border Interoperability

Cross border interoperability is critical in enabling emergency response providers to coordinate the response to criminal activities at the borders. These activities include drug and human trafficking and terrorism. OEC is leading several initiatives in support of communications interoperability in coordination with our domestic and international partners (i.e., Canada and Mexico), including:

- **2010 Olympics Project** – OEC is supporting the 2010 Olympics Security Committee Communications Interoperability Working Group in its efforts to ensure effective interoperability during the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Our key contributions include coordinating the development of an *Integrated Interoperable*

Communications Plan and related training and exercises for all applicable Federal, State, local, tribal, and non-governmental organization emergency response providers.

- **U.S.-Mexico High-Level Consultative Commission (HLCC) on Telecommunications** – The HLCC's Security Communications Task Group (SCTG), co-chaired by OEC, is a joint U.S.-Mexico effort to address cross border communications among emergency responders. In May 2008, HLCC principals agreed to the SCTG's *Action Plan for Improving and Expanding Cross Border Security Communications*. Under this plan, OEC will lead the U.S. development and implementation of a Cross Border Security Communications Network, enabling emergency responders to share video surveillance streams, conduct joint operations teleconferencing, and securely exchange fingerprints and photos.

- **U.S.-Canada Cross Border Interoperable Communications Workshop** – OEC has partnered with Public Safety Canada to jointly convene the inaugural U.S.-Canada Cross Border Interoperable Communications Workshop in May 2009, in Niagara Falls, New York. This workshop will bring together a diverse set of practitioners and officials from all levels of government from both nations. The workshop aims to help participants develop a common understanding of and a unified approach to U.S.-Canadian cross border interoperability challenges, resulting in the identification of best practices and action plans for cross border communications.

Interoperability Demonstration Projects

OEC has fostered partnerships among Federal, State, and local agencies to facilitate resource sharing that provides cost-effective solutions to public safety communications challenges and to improve mission critical wireless capabilities, including interoperable communications.

As a recent example, OEC facilitated a partnership between the State of Wyoming and Federal agencies with complementary missions and operations in overlapping regions of the State to coordinate and integrate available communication resources. This partnership augments State spectrum with federally allocated frequencies and incorporates federally owned land and infrastructure for radio repeater sites, resulting in more effective and comprehensive coverage for all participants. Additionally, OEC is assisting with the development of MOUs for spectrum sharing and Federal use of State resources, and is providing technical guidance and support for the development, solution design, implementation, and testing of the interoperability solution in the State.

The Wyoming program bridges the gap between Federal and State operations by integrating existing spectrum and technology capabilities to achieve interoperability. The Wyoming program provides a repeatable model for direct collaboration between Federal and State agencies to address similar challenges.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for your continued support for such a vital part of the overall homeland security mission. OEC is committed to achieving a unified vision for the Nation, one that enables emergency responders to communicate as needed, on demand, and as authorized, at all levels of government and across all disciplines. We are extremely proud of the accomplishments OEC has achieved over the past two years to meet this challenge to improve interoperable communications for the emergency response community, and to ensure the sustainability of communications in an all-hazards context.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.