



## *Southeast Regional Operations Platform Pilot* *A component of Virtual USA*

### **The Problem**

The need for real-time, actionable information is critical during day-to-day and emergency response operations where multiple jurisdictions and disciplines interact. Plenty of homeland security-related information exists at the local, tribal, state, and Federal levels, but since equipment investment decisions have been made based on the specific operational needs of individual agencies without benefit of a national strategy or standards, this information is often trapped in silos. As a result, potentially critical information often does not make it into the hands of the people who need it the most.

### **The Southeast Regional Operations Platform Pilot**

The Southeast Regional Operations Platform Pilot (SE ROPP), a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate's *Virtual USA* initiative, is focused on helping states seamlessly share all-hazards information and imagery across disparate platforms. Created by the Directorate's Command, Control and Interoperability Division (CCI) in partnership with the DHS S&T First Responder Technologies (R-Tech) program, this pilot integrates existing platforms, visualization tools, and other data sets to allow participating states' systems to interoperate and share information, regardless of the technology. The SE ROPP creates scalable and replicable models to enable effective multi-jurisdictional, multi-disciplinary incident management across the Nation—all while leveraging existing infrastructures at the state and local levels. Leveraging and maximizing existing systems avoids duplication of past efforts and costly infrastructure investments. DHS supports the pilot through technical and policy assistance aimed at the development of an operational framework to enable information sharing across state lines; the documentation of new best practices for interstate information sharing governance, workflows and visualization tools; and the demonstration of real-time regional information sharing that utilizes new technical solutions.

### **Participants**

**State:** Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee (observer), Texas, and Virginia

**Federal:** DHS Science & Technology; Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Response Coordination Center (NRCC), National Exercise Simulation Center (NESC), and Incident Management Systems Integration Division (IMSID)



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## **Virtual USA**

The Nation's ability to seamlessly share information across local, state, and Federal levels is limited by incompatible technology applications, information assurance concerns, and costly data collection efforts that affect the sustainability of maintaining current information. To address this problem, CCI created the *Virtual USA* initiative. *Virtual USA* established a cost-effective nationwide capability that significantly improves information sharing and decision making during emergencies and day-to-day operations. Based on current and emerging technologies, *Virtual USA* integrates existing information sharing frameworks and technologies to enable collaboration at the local, state, and Federal levels by providing critical context for information – thereby making it actionable. Developed in partnership with the emergency response community, *Virtual USA* improves emergency response by ensuring practitioners at all levels have immediate access to the information they need to make decisions.

## **Virtual Alabama and VIPER**

Two successful models of information sharing—both with regards to technology and governance—that are leveraged throughout the SE ROPP include Virtual Alabama and the Virginia Interoperability Picture for Emergency Response (VIPER).

Virtual Alabama is an initiative in Alabama's Department of Homeland Security that uses the Google Earth Enterprise platform to depict geo-referenced data gathered by local agencies and responders. Virtual Alabama also provides a means for other states in FEMA Region IV to share information. Using a visualization platform with a standards-based open architecture framework, Alabama continues to provide a secure common operations platform for incident management and emergency response personnel by overlaying operational data on three-dimensional maps. Today, Virtual Alabama provides more than 5,300 people in more than 1,450 different agencies (including 35 Federal offices) with access to a robust set of data made available by each of the state's 67 counties. The system supports daily operations while still providing the enhanced situational awareness necessary to respond appropriately in emergency situations.

VIPER is the Virginia Emergency Operations Center's (VEOC) common operating picture that provides a strategic view enabling statewide situational awareness coupling analytics. The picture is displayed on a geospatial platform using Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) products for real-time information and analytical support. VIPER, an integration of existing emergency management systems, is a data aggregation tool capable of showing the spatial relationships of data pulled from different systems. Moreover, VIPER has a variety of analytical tools that provide information context and allow Virginia to make better decisions during emergencies, as well as day-to-day operations. For example, VIPER can illustrate the demographics of certain areas to appropriately formulate an operations plan and response during an emergency. State agencies successfully used VIPER for the first time during the 2009 Presidential Inauguration. Different versions of VIPER are available for users ranging from government agencies to residents, depending upon the security requirements associated with the information displayed. VIPER has also integrated Web 2.0 tools, such as Twitter and Flickr, and has capitalized on social media as a means to communicate with the public.



*Developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Science & Technology Directorate's Command, Control and Interoperability Division, in partnership with the response community, Virtual USA creates a cost-effective nationwide capability to significantly improve information sharing and decision making during emergencies and day-to-day operations.*