Virtual USA—a collaboration between the Department of Homeland Security, the emergency response community and eight states across the nation —is an innovative information sharing system that helps federal, state, local and tribal first responders work with all levels of government to make fast, well-informed decisions.

Virtual USA links these partners' disparate tools and technologies in order to share the location and operational status of power and water lines, flood detectors, helicopter-capable landing sites, emergency vehicle and ambulance locations, weather and traffic conditions, evacuation routes, and school and government building floor plans across federal, state, local and tribal government, and does so without requiring any state to change either the system it now uses or the way it does business. Conceived in early 2009, Virtual USA currently operates as a pilot in eight states: Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Virginia and Tennessee—with plans to incorporate additional states underway.

Virtual USA:
- Integrates Existing Frameworks and Investments: Virtual USA complements existing policies, processes and architectures and leverages existing information sharing platforms and other solutions in each of the respective states to permit new and existing technologies and concepts to seamlessly exchange information with one another.
- Draws on Practitioner Input: Virtual USA was created based on the needs of local and state practitioners to manage data access within their own jurisdictions and to share information with relevant jurisdictions across the nation.
- Employs a Comprehensive Approach: Virtual USA is not limited to making information exchanges possible between only two agencies or fixed points; instead, the initiative fosters dynamic information sharing among all federal, state, local and tribal practitioners.
- Provides a Flexible, Accessible Platform: Because Virtual USA uses open data standards and open source software, more states and localities can join this information exchange project.
- Involves Everyone: Virtual USA allows Americans in their own communities to contribute information to complement that of police, fire and other government workers to develop more complete pictures of disaster and recovery efforts in real-time.

In Virginia alone, it has reduced response times to hazardous material incidents by 70% allowing the state to quickly address threats to the health and safety of its citizens.

For more information, visit www.dhs.gov.