



FEMA

Lessons Learned
Information Sharing
LLIS.gov

Sharing Information
Enhancing Preparedness
Strengthening Homeland Security

LESSON LEARNED

Emergency Communications: Utilizing a Communications Unit to Implement an Interoperability Plan

SUMMARY

During large-scale incidents, incident command can implement a comprehensive communications interoperability plan through the use of a communications unit.

DESCRIPTION

The US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and Joint Forces Command co-sponsored the Ardent Sentry exercise from May 7 to 18, 2007, in the US and Canada. Ardent Sentry consisted of five exercise components: the National Guard full-scale exercise (FSE) Vigilant Guard, the Northern Edge FSE in Canada, the Hoosier Sentry combined functional and full-scale exercise in Indiana, the Alaska Shield combined functional and full-scale exercise in Alaska, and the HURREX tabletop exercise in Rhode Island. The main goal of Ardent Sentry was to demonstrate multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional unity of effort in support of a civilian-led response to a national crisis. Ardent Sentry simulated a Category 3 hurricane making landfall in New England, a nuclear detonation in Indiana, and several terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure in Alaska and waters along the western US – Canadian border. Ardent Sentry required the coordination of over 3,000 federal, state, and local responders and more than 2,000 active-duty personnel.

Canada served as a full partner in the Ardent Sentry exercise through the coordination of Canada Command and US military resources. Canada Command oversees the operations of Canadian forces and coordinates with NORTHCOM.

NORTHCOM, the National Guard, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, the Indiana National Guard, and the Indianapolis—Marion County Emergency Management Division co-sponsored the Hoosier Sentry combined functional and full-scale exercise from May 10 to 13, 2007, at 6 locations in south-central Indiana. Hoosier Sentry simulated the detonation of a 10-kiloton nuclear device by a terrorist cell in northeastern Indianapolis. Exercise objectives focused on integrating National Guard and active-duty military resources with emergency response operations. The combined exercise also evaluated federal and state abilities to support local responders during a weapon of mass destruction/hazardous materials incident. The exercise required emergency response and military teams to provide sheltering operations for over 77,000 notional civilians and to treat over 500 role-playing victims. Over 100 federal, state, and local agencies and 1,000 response personnel participated in the Hoosier Sentry exercise.

Exercise artificiality ensured that local responders were able to communicate with one another during the FSE. However, local responders could not effectively communicate with federal and military response elements. No effort was undertaken to initiate uniform communications interoperability across all response elements. According to the FSE after-action report (AAR), communications interoperability could still have occurred through the communications hardware available through Civil Emergency Response Forces, the Federal

Emergency Management Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, and three civil support teams from the National Guard at the incident site.

The deployment of a multi-agency task force to conduct on-scene radiation monitoring illustrated the interoperability problems during the FSE. When a question arose regarding how the task force leader would communicate with the operations section, the task force provided the operations section chief with a single radio. As a result, only the task force leader could communicate with the operations section chief. The AAR notes that this was not the most efficient method for achieving interoperability. Alternate approaches, such as networking the radios using an ADU-1000 or similar hardware, would have produced true interoperability and allowed monitoring and coordination of all radio traffic.

During large scale incidents, responders should implement a comprehensive communications interoperability plan through the use of a communications unit.

CITATION

Indianapolis - Marion County Emergency Management Division. *2007 Ardent Sentry, Indiana Homeland Security District 5 After Action Report*. 16 Aug 2007.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=26593>

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.