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A Note from OEC Leadership

Ron Hewitt, Director, Office of Emergency Communications

In November 2015, several representatives from the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC), myself included, had the pleasure of attending the SAFECOM/National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) annual meeting in Norman, Oklahoma. During the meeting, we collected feedback to better understand what OEC can focus on to improve emergency communications interoperability. Based on the information we received, we developed a 2016-2022 action plan to improve interoperability. While the plan is currently being reviewed by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) leadership we have identified areas where OEC can immediately prioritize efforts to begin addressing your emergency communications priorities.

After Action Reports for large incidents often indicate that communications with Federal responders are challenging. To address this challenge, OEC has partnered with the DHS Joint Wireless Program Management Office, which manages all of DHS' tactical radio systems, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to develop interoperability training curriculum that is currently in the beta testing process. Once complete, the training will be rolled out across all response entities within DHS during 2016. After that, our goal is to provide the training to at least three additional federal agencies with incident response capabilities by the end of 2017, and then several others each following year until all federal response agencies have received the training.

Historically, OEC has offered technical assistance to all 56 states and territories each year. To ensure true interoperability during an incident, however, we must include other response entities that have not traditionally been included due to resource constraints. Accordingly, in 2016, OEC will begin consulting with stakeholders to explore the possibility of developing technical assistance offerings for tribal nations and federal responders.

OEC will begin addressing All-Hazards Communications Unit challenges identified by participants during the SAFECOM/NCSWIC meeting and supporting pre-event communications planning in high-risk urban areas. In 2016, OEC will partner with several Urban Area Security Initiative grant recipients to kick-off the initiative, with the end goal of producing a Planning and Assessment tool we can leverage in other cities and states and with critical infrastructure owners and operators. Additionally, we are bringing together stakeholders to discuss and plan for required

Communications Unit curriculum updates and conduct outreach to increase awareness of the Communications Unit roles and responsibilities during an incident.

We will continue to keep you updated on our progress throughout 2016, and we will share final details on the 2016-2022 Interoperability Action Plan when it completes DHS review. In the meantime, I invite you to enjoy this edition of the Emergency Communications Forum, which contains a variety of articles highlighting OEC's ongoing commitment to communications interoperability planning and preparedness. The lead article features an interview with Bob Schwent, Washington Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, on communications interoperability planning for the June 2015 U.S. Open Golf Championship in Tacoma, Washington. Later, we hear from OEC Coordinator James Jarvis on the continued importance of emergency communications planning. Cary Martin of OEC's Technical Assistance Branch writes about a recent Operational Assessment Workshop in Chattanooga, Tennessee. We round out with a recap of OEC's engagement with stakeholders at the All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association Training & Education Symposium and the SAFECOM/NCSWIC annual meeting.

Communications Interoperability Planning for the U.S. Open Golf Championship

Interview with Bob Schwent, Washington Statewide Interoperability Coordinator

The communications and security planning leading up to, and during the 2015 U.S. Open Championship, played June 18-21 just southwest of Tacoma, Washington in University Place, was a large scale effort involving 36 state, local, and federal agencies. An event of this size was unprecedented for the region, with an estimated 200,000 fans passing through the host city that has a standing population of a little over 30,000.[1] Communications interoperability among the different agencies, which included officials from the United States Golf Association, local police, and Pierce County, presented a formidable challenge. Bob Schwent, Washington Statewide Interoperability Coordinator and Electronic Services Division Commander for the Washington State Patrol (WSP), recently spoke to the Emergency Communications Forum about interoperable communications planning. What follows is a summary of that conversation.

What were some of the challenges you identified during initial planning for the U.S. Open?

For background, the WSP has traditionally operated on an analog VHF radio system, while most of the metropolitan areas of the state utilized 800 MHz trunked systems. This has led to long-time interoperability challenges. As part of the WSP narrowbanding project, we selected multi-band mobile and portable radios that were both Project 25 (P25) compliant and capable of operating on the proprietary analog trunked systems prevalent in the metro areas. As WSP began its narrowband conversion to P25 operation, we worked closely with Pierce County, which was going through a similar conversion from VHF analog to 700 MHz P25 trunking. This new system was ultimately used to provide public safety communications for the golf event.

[1] Badger, Sheri. "36 agencies join in support of U.S. Open security plan." *Pierce County, WA.* 8 June 2015.

Can you provide a general overview of interoperable communications planning for the U.S. Open?

When planning began for the U.S. Open, a Communication Committee was established following the Incident Command System (ICS) model. Prior to WSP officially becoming part of the U.S. Open effort, I was a member of the Communication Committee. It was apparent that WSP would be a key player in any kind of response, regardless of what role the agency would play in the actual event. This committee was heavily engaged with the Planning and Operations Committees to determine the communications requirements of the first responders. A communications plan and Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205) were developed and agreed upon. This, in turn, was communicated to the first responders, communications centers and dispatchers, and the Incident Commander and Incident Management Teams.

Can you provide some examples of collaboration among different agencies or disciplines?

There was a lot of coordination with Pierce County. For example, we [WSP] coordinated user and talkgroup IDs with Pierce County and entered into site and system sharing agreements with them. As part of the planning efforts, we agreed to share advanced system keys and to program all WSP units into the Pierce County combined communication network as users. County-wide interoperability talkgroups were developed and programmed into all Pierce County first responder radios, and several of these talkgroups were ultimately used by the different agencies on the ground.

How did interoperable communications actually function during the event?

WSP sent more than 225 troopers from around the state to provide vehicle traffic control. Traffic posts were established at strategic intersections around and along the main transportation routes to and from the course, and it was necessary for our troopers to communicate with the Pierce County folks. Prior to this, the ability of WSP troopers to talk to the Pierce County first responders was limited to a simplex VHF channel used for interoperability throughout the region, and was restricted to law enforcement only. Communications during the event went flawlessly. There were interoperable communications among police, fire, and EMS from the local level, up through the state and federal agencies.

What were the keys to success that made this event successful from a communications standpoint?

First and foremost, build relationships and put agreements in place that enable interoperability. We saw this particularly with our coordination with Pierce County beforehand. Second, deploy appropriate, standards-based technology compatible with the systems you need to work with when upgrading your radio system or equipment. Also, follow established ICS procedures and practices; ensure communication professionals are engaged with the operations and planning groups early and throughout the process; develop and implement a good communications plan with contingency plans for the worst case scenario; and establish and use common interoperability channels and talkgroups, not primary dispatch channels re-purposed for the event.

The Continued Importance of Emergency Communications Planning

James Jarvis, OEC Regional Coordination Branch

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Technical Assistance (TA) program serves all 56 states and territories, providing direct support to state, local, and tribal emergency responders and government officials through the development and delivery of training, tools, and onsite assistance to advance public safety interoperable communications capabilities. One of TA's core functions is to support the implementation of Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs): multi- jurisdictional and disciplinary statewide plans to enhance public safety and emergency communications. To that end, TA personnel facilitate SCIP workshops, where participants review the current SCIP goals and identify needs such as training, funding, and updating governance structures.

To account for changes in the emergency communications environment, OEC revised the SCIP structure and criteria based on stakeholder input to be more streamlined and focused on the future strategic direction of all (voice and data) emergency communications at the state, regional, local, and tribal levels. The two-day SCIP Revision Workshop has helped many states update their SCIP based on the revised template and criteria. The revised SCIP serves as a mechanism for states to explain to their leaders and elected officials the state's vision for emergency communications and the need for funding.

OEC further supports strategic planning efforts by facilitating a one-day SCIP Update Workshop to assist states with updating their plan to reflect activities with emerging technologies such as public safety wireless broadband, Next Generation 911, and using social media. States also use the update workshops to provide an official review of ongoing initiatives and to review the governance body to ensure it reflects a broader group of stakeholders.

During fiscal year 2015 (October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2015), OEC's TA branch facilitated 20 SCIP Workshops, including six SCIP Revision Workshops. As the Coordinator for the Great Lakes, I have had the privilege and pleasure of being involved in the planning and execution of these workshops. The workshops are goal-oriented, stakeholder driven, and consensus-based. The facilitation style brings together diverse subject matter expertise but also a neutral voice to support key strategic and policymaking decisions. The approach identifies points of contention and challenges and then guides the group in developing solutions for all parties.

In the world of emergency communications, there are knowns and unknowns. Chief among the unknowns is the precise date, time, and nature of the next emergency. We do know, however, from past experiences, that the key to successfully responding to the next emergency lies in effective emergency communications planning. OEC is proud to be involved in these efforts, but the true champions are the many regional, state, local, and tribal stakeholders who work with us on a daily basis to ensure effective planning occurs at all levels of government and who are on the front lines when the disaster does occur.

Highlights from the 2015 Maryland Command and Communications Rally

On October 8, 2015, incident command vehicles from the mid-Atlantic states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Connecticut and Washington, D.C., gathered at Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport's FedEx parking lot to participate in the 2015 Maryland Command and Communications Rally. The rally, hosted by Anne Arundel County Office of Emergency Management and the Baltimore Urban Area Security Initiative, and sponsored by Incident Communication Solutions (ICS), gave state, local, and federal agencies an opportunity to test their interoperability capabilities, share best practices, and improve incident responses involving multiple agencies. In conjunction with the rally, several agencies participated in an Encrypted Communications Exercise (COMEX) hosted by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) and the Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC).

The exercise provided an opportunity for FPIC to capture data, which could be used to address anticipated deficiencies in secure communications interoperability in the Mid-Atlantic Region. OEC was one of several DHS components and federal departments to participate in the hands-on exercise, providing support to the nearly 30 incident command vehicles from different agencies and jurisdictions. Participants included 11 federal agencies, seven state agencies and 11 local agencies.

Throughout the exercise, agencies participated in five "roll calls" on different talk groups and different channels. The "roll calls" tested the VHF frequency band in both the 162-174 MHz range and at 700 MHz. Sixteen of the 30 participating agencies were able to transmit and receive encrypted messages across those frequencies, with the most successful being the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, the DHS Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and the U.S. Department of Justice/Federal Bureau of Investigation – Baltimore Field Office.

Qualified Communications Unit Leaders (COML) provided critical assistance in preparation for the COMEX. The U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Department of the Treasury/Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, DHS' Homeland Security Investigations and the Fairfax County Police Department (Virginia) provided qualified COML staff, who supported on-the-spot radio programming, helped assess the readiness of land mobile radio equipment, resolved questions about encrypted key versions, and facilitated engagement among the participants.

Although the exercise was generally successful, the hosts and participants learned important lessons from challenges they encountered:

- Planning for future exercises should begin earlier to maximize the availability of participants.
- Response to real-world emergencies may take precedent over certain aspects of a COMEX. In this instance, a nearby high-risk search operation for fleeing felons diverted participating agencies' resources away from the exercise. The search operation may also have demanded the use of the spectrum planned for the COMEX.

The FPIC will incorporate its lessons learned as it plans for the next COMEX, which will be conducted concurrently with the Fairfax County Department of Information Technology's Command, Control, and Communications Vehicle Rally. The event is tentatively scheduled for June 2016 in Chantilly, Virginia.

OEC Provides Communications Support for the Pope's U.S. Visit

In mid-September 2015, hundreds of thousands gathered in Washington D.C., New York City, and Philadelphia over six days to witness Pope Francis' first official U.S. visit. The significance of this visit prompted the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Secretary, Jeh Johnson, to declare it a National Special Security Event (NSSE). Designation as an NSSE permitted enhanced cooperation among federal, state, and local partners in establishing a safe and secure environment. For participating emergency management agencies, the unprecedented event demanded months of planning and collaboration among federal, state, and local public safety partners. Prior to the Pope's visit, emergency managers devised multiple plans to protect participants, religious leaders and the public, and mitigate impacts to the host communities. The 70th Annual United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) – held a few days prior to the Pope's arrival – further complicated emergency management planning efforts in New York City and made multi-agency collaboration even more vital to the safeguarding of all involved.

With this in mind, federal, state, and local public safety personnel, including members of DHS' Office of Emergency Communications (OEC), collaboratively planned and exercised potential emergency situations. With support from the Technical Assistance Branch, OEC's Regional Coordination Branch's Chris Tuttle leveraged existing communications plans from Super Bowl XLVIII and worked closely with state, local and regional emergency communicators to ensure interoperable communications. In addition to supporting emergency communications planning, OEC's presence in the Emergency Operations Center during the Pope's visit provided state and local agencies with a liaison to their federal partners. As a result of collaborative planning, emergency communications remained interoperable and available.

OEC Government Emergency Telecommunications Services (GETS) and Wireless Priority Telecommunications Systems (WPS) provided additional interoperability support. These services provided priority to National Security/Emergency Preparedness personnel on cellular and landlines during times of congestion. OEC conducted automated and manual GETS/WPS testing during the visit and expedited a number of requests for these services. GETS and WPS exceeded performance objectives and the network experienced minimal congestion during the event. Additionally, there were no media reports of disruption to wireline or wireless communications during the Pope's visit to the three cities, and interoperability remained constant. Effective collaboration, pre-planning, and participation in real-life exercises ensured Pope Francis's visit to the United States was a success on all levels. His message was delivered, attendants were protected, and emergency communications remained interoperable.

OEC Emergency Support Function (ESF) #2 Response Activities in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Regional Coordination Branch (RCB) was busy this past summer supporting Emergency Support Function (ESF) #2 response activities across the Nation. DHS's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) activates ESF #2 when a significant impact to the Nation's communications infrastructure is expected or has occurred. It ensures the provision of federal telecommunications support to federal, state, local, and

tribal (FSLTT) response efforts following a presidentially-declared major disaster or emergency. OEC is one of the primary offices that serves as a coordinator of ESF #2. In this role, the office provides support to FSLTT stakeholders when their systems have been impacted and restores public communications infrastructure. In doing so, OEC mitigates land mobile radio issues and landline/cellular voice/data network damage issues. Among some of the tools at its disposal are priority telecommunications services programs, such as the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) and Wireless Priority Service (WPS), which ensure priority communications access over landline and wireless networks. OEC Coordinators are intricately involved in ESF #2 response efforts surrounding a major incident or event. They do so by providing emergency communications support within their respective regions.

Tom Lawless, an OEC Coordinator assigned to the Pacific Rim region, which includes Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), was engaged in response activities to mitigate the impact of Typhoon Soudelor that moved across the largest of the islands, Saipan, on August 2, 2015. The typhoon, declared a major disaster by President Barack Obama, caused widespread damage, and many of Saipan's 55,000 residents were without water and electricity. The Saipan Mayor's office and the FEMA Region IX Regional Emergency Communications Coordinator requested technical support when their primary radio system went offline. Mr. Lawless stepped in to assist with troubleshooting efforts, which included installing an ad hoc antenna, and coordinating the transfer of 50 radios from Guam and another 40 from the FEMA cache in Bothell, Washington, to the Saipan government. In this effort, he worked hand-in-hand with the CNMI Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, another position that OEC provides direct support to.

OEC Releases Emergency Communications Governance Guide for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Officials (Governance Guide)

In 2014, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) released the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) with an emphasis on improving decision-making, coordination, and planning for emergency communications through strong governance structures. The *Emergency Communications Governance Guide for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Officials* (Governance Guide) was developed to address Goal One (Governance and Leadership) in the NECP. The Governance Guide is a tool for public safety professionals at all levels of government and disciplines to establish, assess, and update governance structures that represent all emergency communications capabilities (Land Mobile Radio [LMR], broadband, 911/Next Generation 911 [NG911], alerts and warnings). Developed with direct input from a wide array of responders across the country, this tool lays out governance challenges, best practices, and recommendations.

In developing the Governance Guide, a working group comprised of OEC-supported SAFECOM and National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) members, was established to leverage its members' subject matter expertise in governance. The working group met between December 2014 and July 2015 and supported case studies with over 20 states, cities, and regions across the country to compile information on successful models of governance that can be emulated by other states, localities, tribal nations, and territories. Thus, these best practices and recommendations are real-world solutions to real-world problems.

As a tool, the Governance Guide assists with the development of a formal governance authority and provides guidance and examples to emergency communications officials. In the constantly evolving

emergency communications landscape, the Governance Guide's best practices and recommendations demonstrate ways to improve current governance, establish new governance, and coordinate across jurisdictions, functions, and capabilities to allow for better management of communications assets. Key benefits of the Governance Guide include promoting cohesive and representative governance structures at the state and local level to support collaboration and resource sharing; and providing real-world examples of how to expand or update current governance structures, processes, and investments to effectively include all facets of the emergency communications landscape.

Please contact OEC@dhs.gov or visit http://www.dhs.gov/safecom/governance for further information about the Governance Guide.

Southeast US EMAC Deployments of COMU Resources

Cary Martin, OEC Technical Assistance Branch

On October 28-29, 2015, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications' (OEC) Technical Assistance (TA) Branch facilitated a Region IV Operational Assessment Workshop in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a follow on workshop to one held in Orange Beach, Alabama in June 2015. In all, 20 representatives from ten states participated in the October workshop, including eight from Region IV (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) and two from Region VI (Arkansas and Louisiana).

Region IV Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWICs) Charles Murph, Derek Nesselrode, Chris Tant, Jim Millsap, Dent Guynes, and Sammy Williams attended the October workshop. Several state level Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) Coordinators and state homeland security officials also attended. EMAC is a national interstate mutual aid agreement that enables states to share resources during times of disaster.

Both workshops have been part of an ongoing TA engagement to further collaboration between SWICs and state EMAC officials and to "type" emergency communications assets (personnel and equipment) similar to other emergency response equipment as outlined in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Resource Management & Mutual Aid Program.

This TA engagement also aims to establish standard operating procedures for an emergency communications regional response team akin to the Incident Management Teams already in place across the country. Ideally, the team would be able to organize per type incident and utilize equipment already typed and catalogued in the 2013 Region IV States and Arkansas & Louisiana Strategic Interstate Communications Resource Allocation Plan (SIC-RAP). The SIC-RAP documents specific emergency communication resources that have been identified by participating states as potential deployable assets available to neighboring states through EMAC requests.

Participating states have demonstrated impressive initiative in undertaking this effort. History has shown that the fallout from natural disasters and other large scale emergencies frequently extends beyond state borders, thereby reinforcing the need for regional cooperation and coordination in response to such incidents. OEC looks forward to continuation of the effort and the possibility that it may serve as a catalyst for a broader effort to establish emergency communications regional response teams nationwide.

OEC Engages Stakeholders at AHIMTA and the SAFECOM-NCSWIC Joint Meeting

During November and December 2015, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) participated in the All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association (AHIMTA) Training and Educational Symposium and facilitated a joint meeting between SAFECOM and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC).

This year's AHIMTA Symposium convened from December 7-9 in Denver, Colorado, where 584 attendees from across the country attended training sessions and networked with peers. OEC's outreach team deployed a booth to educate attendees about OEC's programs and services, while Dick Tenney and Brandon Smith of the Technical Assistance Branch led a panel on All-Hazards Communications Unit (COMU) best practices. The panel presentation included an overview of OEC Technical Assistance services, COMU training workshops, the role of the COML within the IMT structure, and COML qualifications. Over the course of the symposium, OEC staff engaged with an array of stakeholders from state and local government, first response, and emergency management. Overall, OEC's participation in the event was a success, as the office was able to interact with new and existing stakeholders and promote its emergency communications services.

The SAFECOM-NCSWIC Joint Meeting met from November 3-4 in Norman, Oklahoma. Participants collaborated on current and future initiatives affecting public safety emergency communications, with discussions addressing the T-Band migration, governance and sustainment of interoperability at the state level, maintaining and upgrading land mobile radio systems, building a national Communications Unit program, and other topics. DHS Deputy Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas delivered the keynote address. He emphasized the importance of coordinated partnerships at the federal, state, local, and territorial levels for achieving sustainable interoperable communications, and he affirmed his support for SAFECOM and Statewide Interoperability Coordinators. DHS Assistant Secretary of Infrastructure Protection Caitlyn Durkovich provided additional opening remarks. On November 5, following the joint meeting, the NCSWIC and SAFECOM Executive Committees convened to discuss internal business and strategic priorities for 2016.

Moving into 2016, OEC looks forward to participating in many more engagements, including the International Wireless Communications Expo slated for March 21-25 in Las Vegas, Nevada and the 30th Annual Florida Governor's Hurricane Conference from May 8-13 in Orlando, Florida.

Sprint Drops WPS Subscription Fees

The Office of Emergency Communications would like to announce that Sprint has dropped all monthly fees associated with the Wireless Priority Service (WPS). This change has been implemented for the existing customer base and future subscribers.

WPS provides wireless priority access and priority call processing for public safety subscribers in all nationwide and several regional cellular carrier networks, greatly increasing the probability of call completion during times of extreme congestion on the networks. The service is provided to those responsible for national security, emergency preparedness, and public safety in all levels of government

(federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial), and members of the Critical Infrastructure Key Resources industries. For additional information, please visit the WPS page at www.dhs.gov/wps.

OEC Team on the Road

As part of our stakeholder engagement activities, OEC will be participating in the following events:

Emergency Management Consultative Group Meeting
January 26, 2016, Ottawa, Canada

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Interagency Continuity Advisory Group Meeting
February 11, 2016, Washington, DC

Hamcation (Amateur Radio Convention)
February 12-13, 2016, Orlando, FL

Michigan Statewide Interoperable Communications Training Conference
February 22-25, 2016, Traverse City, MI

Disaster Recovery Journal (DRJ) Spring World 2016
March 13-16, 2016, Lake Buena Vista, FL

International Wireless Communications Expo 2016
March 21-25, 2016 Las Vegas, NC

The Emergency Communications Forum (ECF), published by OEC, is intended to engage and inform the emergency response community, policy makers, and federal, state, local, and tribal officials about issues and events that directly impact everyday nationwide emergency communications.

Interested in contributing articles for future editions of the ECF? Please send any articles or content ideas to: OECOutreach1@dhs.gov.