ECF
Emergency Communications Forum

Office of Emergency Communications

Editor's Note

We are pleased to announce that the *Emergency Communications Forum* (ECF) will now be distributed through an automated e-mail system, GovDelivery. Using this system allows us to share the ECF with you, while protecting your privacy and providing you with options about updates you receive from the Office of Emergency Communications.

We look forward to sharing our stories with you in the months to come. If you have any questions about the GovDelivery system, please contact OEC@dhs.gov.

SAFECOM Announces New Leadership and Key Initiatives for 2011

The SAFECOM Emergency Response Council conducted its bi-annual meeting on November 15-16, 2010, to discuss critical and emerging issues affecting the public safety community. Comprised of representatives from State and local emergency response agencies and national public safety and intergovernmental associations, the SAFECOM Emergency Response Council provides a forum for subject matter experts to engage in discussions to improve nationwide interoperable emergency communications. Among the initiatives discussed at the meeting were efforts to plan for the 10-year anniversary of September 11, 2001.

During the meeting, the SAFECOM Executive Committee announced the election results for the 2010-2011 Chair and Vice-Chair positions. Kevin McGinnis was elected to serve as SAFECOM Executive Committee Chair and Chief Charles Werner was elected as Executive Committee Vice-Chair. Meeting participants received briefings on the various efforts underway at the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) and the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility. Department of Homeland Security Under Secretary for the National Protection and Programs Directorate, Rand Beers, provided timely insights during his keynote address updating the group on the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center activities and discussing the September Public Safety Communications Planning Forum. In addition, the Emergency Response Council heard from local government officials, including the Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management for the District of Columbia, Millicent West, and a panel of National Capital Region representatives.

Participants engaged in conversations about communications issues facing public safety, including broadband and the narrowbanding mandate. OEC hosts a number of working groups to address these topics that allow stakeholders from across the Nation with diverse and extensive experience in the field to collaborate and to communicate the importance of these issues to the broader public safety community. During the meeting, members of the Emergency Response Council heard updates from the working groups, including efforts to prepare for the 10-Year Anniversary of September 11, 2001. The 10-Year Anniversary of 9/11 Working Group is a joint effort between OEC, SAFECOM, the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators, and the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council. The working group was established to mark the upcoming anniversary of the 9/11 attacks by highlighting for stakeholders the progress made toward the goal of interoperability over the last 10 years.

The working group is building a timeline to chart milestones in improving emergency communications. During the meeting, the working group invited members of the Emergency Response Council and the public safety community to contribute to the timeline. OEC is drawing on the working group's feedback and support to create initiatives such as the case studies, which highlight the Interoperability Continuum areas of governance, standard operating procedures, technology, training and exercises (voice and data), and usage.

For more information about SAFECOM initiatives, including the 9/11 Working Group activities, visit the SAFECOM website.

Technical Assistance Program Aids Public Safety Progress

Since the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program was transferred to the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) in 2007, it has continued to expand and strengthen interoperable emergency communications across the Nation. Over the past three years, OEC has provided all 56 States and territories with at least one delivery of technical assistance (TA), which includes training, tools, and onsite assistance. In 2010, OEC received 270 requests from all 56 States and territories and was able to complete 143 requests.
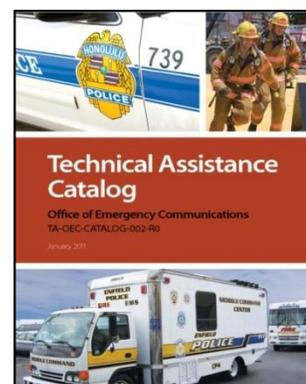
Despite the name, technical assistance support is not strictly technical in nature. For example, TA can target improving governance structures or standard operating procedures so jurisdictions can coordinate better with each other. All TA service offerings are intended to help emergency responders continue to communicate in disasters or large-scale planned events. All of the offerings are designed to support the implementation of Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans and align with the National Emergency Communications Plan. OEC's TA program also addresses all five lanes of the Interoperability Continuum: governance, standard operating procedures, technology, training and exercises, and usage.

Tailored Support: Communication-Focused Exercises
Technical assistance is well received because it is tailored to the recipient's individual needs. One of the more popular TA requests is for support with tabletop and full-scale exercises to ensure that equipment, procedures, and personnel are prepared to communicate during emergencies. In 2010, OEC supported eight Communications Unit Leader exercises, two full-scale exercises, two special events, and five tabletop exercises. One tabletop exercise in Atlantic City, New Jersey, involved approximately 125 public safety and government officials from the region participated in the five-hour exercise. OEC developed a scenario involving an improvised explosive device detonating in a train station and a nearby casino, followed by a secondary active shooter/hostage situation within the casino. While no equipment was deployed, the exercise fostered an awareness of known interoperable communications, and, more importantly, helped responders identify which agencies and disciplines need to be included in broad-based planning for man-made disasters.

Expansion of TA Program Assist Broadband Efforts
Every year OEC, makes revisions to the TA Program based on stakeholder feedback. The 2011 TA Catalog includes 13 new or revised offerings that directly reflect recent trends and needs within the emergency response community. TA support is expanding to address emerging technologies that will affect the emergency response community. OEC has developed a new Broadband Systems Support offering that is intended to provide support to jurisdictions preparing for or exploring the integration of broadband capabilities into their emergency communications. OEC will also offer direct TA to several of the jurisdictions with waivers from the Federal Communications Commission to build broadband networks for emergency responders in their areas. OEC will provide planning support for the waiver jurisdictions' wireless broadband efforts.

OEC will continue to work with stakeholders in the future to collect feedback and develop new TA offerings to stay current with the needs of practitioners. Those interested in learning about TA requests in a particular State should contact their Statewide Interoperability Coordinator. For more information about the TA program, visit the TA website or e-mail OEC@dhs.gov.
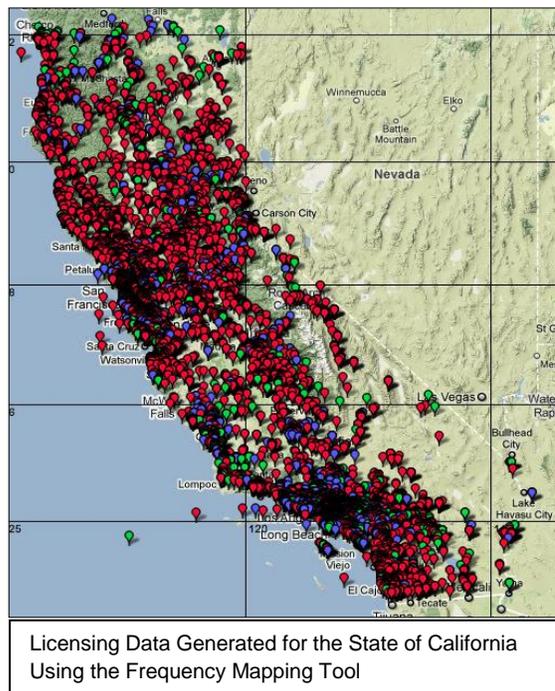
OEC Offers Support for Narrowbanding Efforts

Last year, the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) offered technical assistance (TA) to support States' efforts to meet the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) narrowbanding mandate by the January 1, 2013, deadline. Through this support, OEC developed a tool for States to assess the progress made to date with respect to narrowbanding. Six States requested this TA and started using the tool to measure their progress toward meeting the FCC mandate and estimate the amount of work yet to be completed to meet the narrowbanding deadline.

The OEC Frequency Mapping Tool analyzes FCC licensing data to identify the impacted frequencies in each State. Users can download the FCC's land mobile radio private licensing data, which is updated weekly and includes data for both public safety and private sector users. The Frequency Mapping Tool uses Google Maps™ to graphically depict radio licenses in each State based on the latest FCC licensing data. States can also use the tool to produce regional and community reports for distribution to appropriate stakeholders. Recently OEC made the tool available to all States, not just those requesting TA for narrowbanding. Later this year, OEC will offer webinar training with guidance on how to use the Frequency Mapping Tool.

In addition to providing useful data through the OEC Frequency Mapping Tool and TA program, OEC hosts a working group that allows stakeholders to collaborate and to communicate the importance of narrowbanding

Licensing Data Generated for the State of California Using the Frequency Mapping Tool

to the broader public safety community. In addition, OEC will release a narrowbanding guide in 2011 that identifies practical steps for the narrowband transition and case studies. The guide will be posted on OEC's Guidance Documents and Publications website when available. Stakeholders are also reminded that the FCC has created a website specifically dedicated to providing information and assistance on narrowbanding issues. The webpage, www.fcc.gov/narrowbanding, includes information on benefits as well as frequently ask questions.

For more information about the Frequency Mapping Tool or any other support offered to OEC stakeholders, please contact OEC@dhs.gov.

OEC Releases New Guidance Document

In December 2010, the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) released a new guidance document, the Regional Intrastate Governance Guide, developed with input from stakeholders. The new guide explains how to set up regional governance organizations for emergency communications. These regional organizations support strong statewide governance and provide a way to unite stakeholder voices and ensure that local concerns are heard and addressed at the State level. Additionally, these organizations can provide a new means for establishing procedures, communicating, and sharing resources within a region.

The Regional Intrastate Governance Guide is available on OEC's Guidance Documents and Publications website.