

Emergency Communications Forum

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A Note from OEC Leadership

By: Ron Hewitt, Director, Office of Emergency Communications

We can all identify with the ways in which technology has transformed the way we communicate with each other on a day-to-day basis. It not only involves the devices that we use, but also the kind of information that we share with one other.

These same advancements in technology are also changing the way the nation's first responders communicate with other responders, government officials, and the general public. This new emergency communications landscape is a focus of OEC's efforts to support our stakeholders on multiple fronts. This includes updating the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP); conducting workshops with States and Territories to ensure their plans are current; and providing enhanced training, tools, and resources to prepare for tomorrow.

Some of OEC's efforts are being highlighted in this issue of the Emergency Communications Forum, along with updates from the field. First, we feature an article by Mark Grubb, Delaware's Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), that describes the value of the SWIC in helping to navigate this new environment, whether it is enhancing LMR systems or preparing for broadband and Next Generation 911. We also provide an overview of the updated NECP (set to be released soon), the latest Technical Assistance training and tools, and Priority Services. We've also included a report about how Oregon SWIC Steve Noel and Oregon officials helped develop the OEC workshops that are helping to prepare States for their consultations with FirstNet.

On behalf of OEC, thank you for all that you do. We look forward to continuing our work with you to keep America safe, secure, and resilient.

Respectfully,
Ron

With Broadband on the Horizon, the Role of the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator Is More Critical Than Ever

By Mark Grubb, Delaware Statewide Interoperability Coordinator and Chair of the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators

As the emergency communications community and State executives prepare to work with the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) on the build-out of the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN), many of us find ourselves consumed by broadband. Bring into that picture the evolving nature of 911 services and the ongoing need to focus on land mobile radio systems, statewide interoperability, and communications planning amid ever-tighter budgets, and you begin to see the complicated mix of needs and priorities facing jurisdictions nationwide.



States have responded to this growing complexity in different ways. Some have combined the governing body focused on radio communications with broadband and 911 bodies into one unified effort. Others have created three separate bodies to address each discrete task. However a State decides to allocate the responsibilities, there is one position that should be central in every State's approach to first responder communications: the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC).

SWICs play a central role in a State's emergency communications and interoperability efforts by working with first responders across all levels of government, acting as a central coordination and outreach point of contact, and guiding efforts around the creation and implementation of Statewide Communications Interoperability Plans (SCIPs). Because of their wide-angle view of communications across a State, SWICs can bring a vital perspective and strategic vision to a State's efforts. This includes guiding thoughtful spending decisions, lining up needed training and workshops, and improving preparedness statewide.

Recently, States have been asked by FirstNet to appoint a State Point of Contact (SPOC) to assist with the planning and implementation phases of the NPSBN. In 18 States and the District of Columbia, the SWIC is also acting as the SPOC. In 12 States, the SWIC and SPOC both work within the same department, but in another 25 States, the two roles are located in separate departments.

A SPOC coming from a purely technical background, who is reporting directly to a State information or technology officer, can be a great asset to a State's broadband efforts. But, he or she likely has less experience serving and working with first responders. This is where the SWIC should come in. Every SPOC should leverage the knowledge and public safety coordination and outreach abilities of their State's SWIC and make use of the existing public safety networks and structure.

In Delaware, I have been asked to fill both the SWIC and SPOC roles, and have also been asked by the Governor to serve on the E911 board. This enables me to look at the three elements in the most comprehensive, strategic, and public-safety focused way. It also allows Delaware to use the governance structure of its existing Statewide Interoperability Executive Council to address the design and use of a broadband system in the State. In addition to keeping the SWIC involved in a State's work with FirstNet, States should consider the following to make the best use of this valuable position.

Continue to Provide Full Funding and Support to Your SWIC

The SWIC position was created with support from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) and many States used funding from the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) to keep a SWIC on staff. With IECGP funding now expired, many States are struggling to continue to fund the SWIC position and even keep the interoperability body operating. OEC has been working to ensure applicable grant programs recognize SWIC support as an allowable cost to help States keep this vital position funded.



I would also urge States to find the funds to continue to support this position that both creates value and ensures efficiency. Among their vital roles, SWICs can be cost savers by ensuring a State spends its emergency communications grant funding and budgets effectively. Because the SWIC is able to take a comprehensive view of a State's communications systems, it is easier to ensure an agency doesn't unnecessarily spend money on a system that is redundant when a solution is already available in the State, or invest in something that is incompatible with other current or emerging technologies.

In addition, SWICs are able to help jurisdictions respond better to natural disasters, emergency incidents, and large-scale planned events by focusing on Statewide planning and supporting broader training and coordination. A strong SWIC knows where each Communications Unit Leader is in the State, has them trained and ready, and can quickly deploy them to an incident commander for any type of response.

Elevate the SWIC in a State's Structure

For the SWIC to be most effective, the position must be placed high enough within the State structure. We have some SWICs who are really strong and knowledgeable, but they are not placed in a position to effectively coordinate efforts, prepare for emerging technologies, and help ensure wise purchasing policy.

As Delaware's SWIC, I report directly to the Secretary of the Department of Safety and Homeland Security who chairs the Statewide Interoperability Executive Council and reports directly to the Governor. The secretary chairs the council's monthly meetings and votes as one of the 15 council members. The other members represent State and county governments and first responder groups.

I'm an active part of the council, but, by design, I am not a voting member. That neutrality gives me the opportunity to study and present facts, and then step back from any politics and allow the board to make its decision.

Access the NCSWIC Network and OEC's Support

SWICs play an important role, but we could not do it without the support of OEC. The office really helps us do our jobs – especially in environments where funding has been cut – by setting priorities, bringing together the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC), and providing guidance and training.

Before NCSWIC was created in 2010, SWICs didn't have nearly the bandwidth we have now because we couldn't reach across the country for ideas and support. We now have that deep bench and can get in direct contact with other SWICs who have faced similar challenges and scenarios. We can reach out and get really good answers and samples from other States' experiences and best practices. For example, Oregon worked with FirstNet to put together an incredible website on broadband for public safety. We received permission to utilize a lot of the framework from that website, and now Delaware is working to launch its State FirstNet site.

The benefits of the NCSWIC came about because OEC helped set up the program and continues to support us in our joint efforts. In addition, by allowing each SWIC to request up to five technical assistance offerings each year, OEC empowers SWICs to bring additional training, education, and governance support to a State.

Robust communications are a must for first responders in every State. A strong SWIC can help make that a reality by bringing people together, developing a strategic vision for interoperability, and working toward the best solutions for a State's citizens. It is in every State's best interest to make effective use of this crucial position.

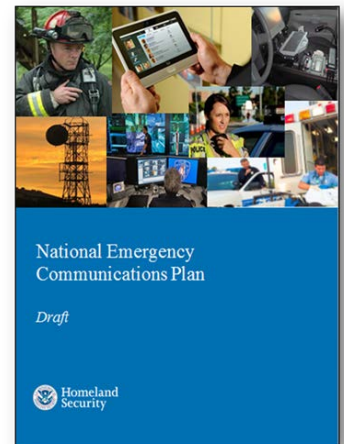
A Preview of the Updated National Emergency Communications Plan

Since early 2013, OEC has been working to update the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP), which was first released in 2008. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 requires the Department of Homeland Security to periodically update the NECP, and the rapidly evolving nature of emergency communications created a pressing need to revisit and revise the plan.

The original NECP presented a vision for emergency communications nationwide, outlining goals and objectives aimed at strengthening those communications systems. Since the release of the 2008 plan, localities have worked to improve governance structures, create communications leadership positions, develop tactical plans and protocols, and train additional communications unit leaders and technicians. The updated NECP seeks to build on the progress made since the first plan was issued, incorporating lessons learned and recalibrating the goals and objectives of the plan to reflect an emergency communications environment that has been altered by emerging technologies and a growing user base.

Many public safety organizations have already begun to use data along with traditional voice communications over land mobile radio (LMR). The use and reliance on data networks is expected to increase as localities prepare for the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network. In addition, the updated NECP reflects the need for increased coordination and planning with the growing number of entities that communicate and share information with public safety during emergencies, including the public, secondary responders, international partners, and others.

As OEC reworked the plan, it conducted extensive outreach to more than 350 stakeholders from public safety organizations; emergency management agencies; Federal, State, Local, and Tribal governments; the private sector; partnership groups and associations; and secondary responders such as utilities,



non-governmental organizations, and auxiliary sources. This input was crucial to making the NECP update a document that represents, and is useful to, those in the field.

The updated NECP identifies three top priorities for emergency communications over the next five years:


- Identifying and prioritizing areas for improvement in current LMR communications systems used by responders;
- Ensuring emergency responders and government officials plan and prepare for the adoption, integration, and use of broadband technologies, including the planning and deployment of the NPSBN; and
- Enhancing coordination among stakeholders, processes, and planning activities across the emergency response community.

To implement the 2014 NECP, OEC will coordinate with public safety agencies and emergency responders from across the Nation to identify strategies and timelines to accomplish the plan's goals, objectives, and recommendations and to measure progress nationwide. The nature and structure of any assessments that are linked to the plan may take many forms, and they will be developed with the input of stakeholder groups.

OEC expects to release the plan in the fall of 2014.

CASM Next Generation Tool Helps Jurisdictions Track and Deploy Communications Resources

The Communications Assets Survey and Mapping Tool (CASM) was originally created in 2005 as a way for Urban Area Security Initiatives to inventory public safety emergency communication capabilities. In 2007, the program was expanded to nationwide use, and the system now has nearly 4,000 users with data from nearly 100,000 agencies. In 2014, OEC worked to update the CASM tool, now called CASM NextGen, to provide more detailed information about public safety and emergency communications assets for first responders.



OEC's CASM Next
Generation Tool is
available at
publicsafetytools.info.

CASM NextGen's redesign allows for public safety communications staff to quickly visualize and access communications resources using an intuitive map interface and user-defined filters. The tool's filters allow a user to see exactly the kind of assets they are seeking and will even show photos when they are available. In addition, the tool integrates agency information from CASM, Statewide Interoperability Coordinators Tools (SWICT), and Frequency Mapping Tools (FMT) for multiple data layers on a single map.



Due to the sensitivity of asset location, CASM NextGen access is controlled. Each State's SWIC is the approving authority for access to searchable data. CASM NextGen's searchable data includes communications resources such as radio systems, shared radio channels and talk groups, mobile communications vehicles, radio caches and other mobile equipment. Once located, the user may view detailed information, including the managing agency, resource locations and points of contact.

Communications unit staff are able to leverage assets information acquired from CASM NextGen during incident/event planning and operations. As States prepare for consultation meetings with FirstNet this year, CASM NextGen will assist them as they address the data collection and analysis that will be required by FirstNet.

Oregon's Work on Broadband Is Assisting States Nationwide

OEC's Technical Assistance program has now provided a broadband preparation consultation workshop to nearly every U.S. State and Territory. The optional workshop is designed to help States prepare to work with FirstNet on creating the State plans that will guide the build-out of the National Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN).

Oregon Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC) Steve Noel and the State of Oregon were there for the very first workshop in April 2013. In fact, Noel helped OEC develop the idea for the workshop and was willing to have Oregon test it out.

"It was the result of a number of things," Noel says of the first workshop. "FirstNet was just getting up and rolling, OEC had some ideas to help work with States through the technical assistance branch, and we were able to provide that stakeholder input."

Nearly 56 States and Territories have now benefited from the workshop Oregon helped to create.

Noel says that first meeting generated a lot of feedback and input from an audience eager to ask questions and receive more information on the planned broadband network. He also says that the maps and data presented by the OEC technical assistance team have been a great reference and a building block as Oregon has gathered information on users and coverage needs in advance of their October consultation with FirstNet. FirstNet began its consultations with States on July 31, and is planning more meetings as States indicate they are ready to move forward.

In 2010, Oregon was one of the 21 jurisdictions that received 700 MHz broadband waivers from the Federal Communications Commission. The State did not receive any grant funding with its waiver and that waiver program was later supplanted by the law that granted the spectrum and funding to allow for the creation of the NPSBN, but Oregon's early work on broadband has given the State a head start thinking about and planning for a data network. One of the results of that early work is what is now the *FirstNet in Oregon* website.

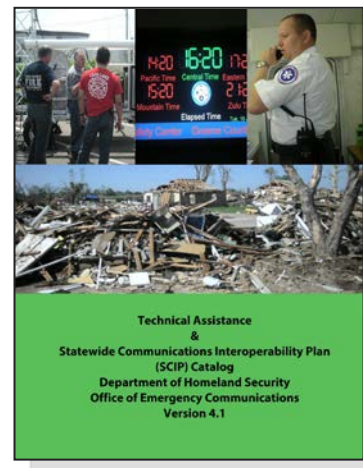
The site, which is designed to provide information for the public and extensive background and documents to public safety, has become a model for other State websites (as mentioned in Mark Grubb's article on SWICs). The website states: "In preparation for FirstNet and Oregon's portion of the FirstNet Network, Oregon has taken an active role in supporting and influencing FirstNet development, ensuring the State's unique needs are addressed. Furthermore, Oregon's size, population densities, and terrain make it a manageable and productive proving ground for refining FirstNet's design and process." Noel says the State is "anxious to move forward on the consultation," and the rest of the nation is anxious to learn from Oregon's experience.

Visit FirstNet in Oregon at <http://firstnetinoregon.org>

OEC Releases Updated Technical Assistance Catalog to Include SCIP Workshops

Providing emergency communications technical assistance to Federal, State, local, tribal and territorial public safety is a hallmark of OEC's mission. To that end, we are excited to publicize our updated Technical Assistance (TA) and Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) Catalog, Version 4.1. The new catalog features multiple course updates and changes, of which the most visible is the addition of the SCIP Workshop. This change combines OEC's statewide planning and technical assistance efforts.

The SCIP Workshop is a two-day planning workshop that is a vital tool for public safety officials at all levels of government to assist States in prioritizing resources, establishing or strengthening governance, and addressing interoperability gaps. SCIP Workshops are tailored to focus on State-specific needs and do not count against a State's annual TA allotment. Other updates include expanded or revised TA offerings, notably new broadband workshops to assist in statewide planning efforts, new Communications Unit training, and revised Next Generation 9-1-1 and dispatch operations workshops. The Technical Assistance and SCIP Catalog, along with the TA request form, can be found at http://www.publicsafetytools.info/ta_request/start_ta_info.php. For questions, please email oc@hq.dhs.gov.





Priority Services Unveils New GETS Card, User Resources

OEC recently updated resources for users of Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) and Wireless Priority Service (WPS) that provide priority access to landline telephone lines (GETS) or cellular networks (WPS) during emergencies, when increased call volume and or damage to telecommunications facilities can hinder the ability of users to complete calls.

These program enhancements include: changes to the appearance and content of the GETS card, an added ability to reach toll-free destination numbers using GETS, stickers with WPS dialing instructions, and updated email addresses to manage GETS and WPS user accounts.



New Look for GETS Cards: In response to user feedback, a redesigned GETS card was released in June 2014. The new design includes primary dialing instructions on the front of the card, with alternate access numbers listed on the back. All existing GETS cards and included phone numbers remain valid; this change in the appearance for new GETS cards will have no effect on a user's ability to make a GETS call. To request reprints of your current GETS

cards, please contact your organization's GETS/WPS point of contact (POC) or call the DHS Priority Telecommunications Service Center at 866-627-2255 or support@priority-info.com.

GETS and Toll-Free numbers: It is now possible to place a call to a toll-free destination number using GETS. To do so, you must use the Sprint IP Network GETS access number, 1-855-333-4387, enter your GETS PIN at the tone prompt, and then enter the toll-free destination number. Reaching a toll-free destination is still not possible when using any of the other GETS access numbers, including the Universal Access Number, 1-710-627-4387. When using those GETS access numbers, you must enter the local translation of the toll-free destination number. If your organization uses 800, 888, 877, 866, or 855 for conference calls or other uses, determine in advance the local translations of those toll-free numbers and distribute that information to your GETS users.

WPS Stickers: As a way to remind users about WPS, OEC now has stickers that contain WPS dialing instructions. These stickers are designed to fit on wireless devices and many users have placed them on the back of their phones for easy reference. POCs making their first WPS requests will receive a small supply of the stickers in their service packet. Other POCs wishing to receive the stickers can request them at the DHS Priority Telecommunication Service Center at 1--866-627-2255 or support@priority-info.com.

New Email Addresses: The new address for the DHS Priority Telecommunications Service Center is: support@priority-info.com. Please coordinate with your IT department to make sure that SPAM or email filters do not block the delivery of messages from this address. The gwids@saic.com address will remain active for several more months to allow for a smooth transition to the new address.

OEC Team on the Road

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

APCO Conference & Expo
August 3-6, New Orleans, LA

SAFECOM Executive Committee Meeting
August 7, New Orleans, LA

Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council Conference
August 13-15, Spokane, WA

Washington State SCIP Workshop
August 13-15

Civil Air Patrol National Conference
August 15-16, Las Vegas, NV

Tennessee SCIP Workshop
August 19-20

Massachusetts SCIP Workshop
September 4-5

Public Safety Mobile Applications Design Day
September 9-10, New York, NY

**National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC)
Executive Committee Meeting**
September 17, Boulder, CO

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.