

Jim Downes Talking Points
Gulf Coast Technology Summit
October 27, 2009

Three Key Themes:

1. Good governance through Statewide and Regional Coordination
2. Stakeholder Input for updating the NECP, including Standards and Shared Infrastructure
3. Regional technical assistance coordination

Each of these helps OEC drive NECP implementation.

Introduction

- Good afternoon. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you briefly on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC).
- Our Director, Chris Essid wanted me to extend his regrets that he was unable to join you this afternoon.
- Many of you are familiar with OEC, but for those that may not be, our office serves as the Federal focal point for interoperable emergency communications policies and planning among Federal, State, Local, and Tribal public safety entities..
- We support the enhancement of emergency communications through
 - policy and planning,
 - coordination and collaboration,
 - technical assistance,
 - grants, and
 - demonstration projects

Statewide and Regional Coordination

- A critical element of our work is in supporting coordination and collaboration at all levels of government across emergency response disciplines.
- We recognize that statewide and regional coordination are absolutely critical to effective and efficient emergency communications.
- In OEC we continue to dedicate significant time and resources supporting coordination efforts.
- This coordination includes all levels of government. Increased Federal participation in various forums, including the FEMA RECCWG and groups such as this one. Conversely, we encourage additional participation from the State, Local and Tribal community in forums such as the FPIC, which I will touch on later.
- On the statewide level, OEC supported the development of 56 Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs).
- We continue to support the coordination of an ever-growing number of Statewide Communication Interoperability Coordinators (SWICs) through the SWIC Council.

- In the past year, we provided SCIP workshops to 51 States and territories, addressing topics such as statewide planning and governance issues.
- On the regional level, we have been working with DHS' Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to support the establishment of their respective Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Working Groups (RECCWGs)
- OEC is in the process of hiring ten regional coordinators to support the regional activities and work closely with the RECCWGs and other regional forums. I want to encourage you to continue working with your Statewide Interoperability Coordinators – many of them are here today – and also join your respective RECCWG. You will learn more about the RECCWGs from Charlie Hoffman this afternoon.
- Another way that OEC has supported coordination efforts is through the development of a guide to Establishing Governance to Achieve Statewide Communications Interoperability.
- We have also provided the National Interoperability Field Operations Guide, or NIFOG, to assist in frequency coordination and management during mission critical events. We have distributed over 5000 copies of this guide to the community.
- And we are now in the process of developing a regional governance guide, which is scheduled to be released next year.
- As you pursue regional coordination, I want to encourage you to become familiar with your respective SCIPs, as well as the National Emergency Communications Plan, or NECP.
- At a time when all 56 States and territories have a SCIP, and the Nation has the NECP—the first-ever nationwide strategy for emergency communications—we should all be playing from the same sheet of music.
- Unifying our efforts around these plans will ensure that resources are used strategically and will have a greater impact.

The NECP: A Strategic Plan

- Effective emergency communications is at the core of successful incident response. As a Nation and as a public safety community, we have seen numerous occasions when inadequate emergency communications capabilities adversely impacts response and recovery efforts, sometimes resulting in lost lives.
- As far back as January 1982 when Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the 14th Street bridge and the Potomac River, near downtown Washington, DC, this issue has received National-level interest-including dozens of After Actions Reports, papers, and hearings.
- Over the ensuing 25 years, there was a great deal of work taking place across the United States, at the Federal, State, local and tribal levels. That work was valuable and innovative, but at the same time it was often disconnected and not as effective as it could have been.
- For years, many of the people in this room and across the Nation recognized that short coming and called out for a National Strategy to link together all efforts to address this issue.

- In 2006, Congress established the Office of Emergency Communications to develop that national strategy and focus on emergency improvements, not only for interoperability, but operability and continuity of operations, meaning sustained communications. They asked us to do it in a relatively unique way: as a partnership with State and local governments, other Federal Agencies and the Private Sector.
- While we have a strong start with the National Emergency Communications Plan, there is still a lot of work left to complete.
- During the next year we will make some adjustments and updates to the NECP, and plan to have a full update published in 2011. We hope that many of you will reaffirm your commitment and be a part of those conversations to update the NECP to meet the needs of the public safety community.
- Working together to achieve emergency communications is not easy. It requires the ability to understand the needs and requirements of the other participants, and to work toward consensus. It is fine to disagree-as long as all parties are willing to work together to identify a solution.

New Technology

- Our major focus in updating the NECP will be integrating new technology. When we submitted the NECP to Congress in July 2008, we didn't include a lot of technology-related milestones because there were a lot of unanswered questions concerning how changing technology would affect emergency communications in the future.
- With the changing landscape of 700 MHz and the innovative efforts taking place across the nation, we need the best and brightest to help define and collectively build the path for implementation of future technologies.
- It is important to emphasize that public safety depends on push-to-talk peer-to-peer communications, and there is significant investment in current and planned land mobile radio technology. We must develop a technology implementation strategy that considers the near term needs of our public safety community such as the Project 25 Standards. We recognize the investments that have been made must be considered as a viable transition strategy is developed.
- In addition we have the question of how Social Media will affect public safety. Currently Web 2.0 capabilities provide the public safety community with an inexpensive mechanism to communicate internally and externally as we have never seen before.
- This said, some challenges include, privacy, generation gaps, and understanding current trends. As with any technology it requires advance planning, building solid partnerships, and ongoing training. The next step for our community is to help the users figure out how and when to apply these new tools – via best models or lessons learned.
- Over the next few months we will be seeking your input concerning new technology and we hope you will provide us with any information you feel is important.
- To ensure that the next iteration of the Plan reflects the priorities of those implementing regional coordination, we will need your input.
- We must remember this and prioritize relationships in order to truly transform the emergency communications landscape.

Federal Coordination

- As you know, the Federal government also has some significant work to do relating to coordination among our multiple agencies. Within DHS alone, we are continuously working to improve interoperability through shared resources and establishing common goals.
- Emergency communications coordination shortcomings have hindered Federal, State, local, and tribal emergency responders' ability to effectively coordinate with one another and to protect lives and property from natural and manmade disasters.
- The Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC) will formally establish a central governance body for Federal interoperable and operable communications coordination across Departments and Agencies with emergency management responsibilities and that serve emergency communications needs.
- By achieving consensus on priority emergency communications issues, ECPC member departments and agencies can more effectively align resources, share information, and develop mission critical capabilities.
- Increasing coordination of Federal interoperable and operable communications will help to promote efficiency and more effective coordination and guidance to State and local emergency response partners.
- On October 21, 2009, the ECPC held the first Executive Committee meeting to establish a common vision across Federal departments and agencies for closing gaps in national interoperable and operable communications capabilities. Attendees discussed their department's emergency communications priorities.
- The ECPC is comprised of 12 Federal Departments and Agencies: the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, the Interior, Justice, Labor, and the Treasury; the Federal Communications Commission; and the General Services Administration. ECPC members represent a broad span from Federal emergency communications regulation and policy makers to operations, grants and technical assistance.
- Over the next several months, OEC will continue to provide administrative support to the ECPC and drive the Federal government toward coordinated efforts so we are better able to serve the public safety community through grants and technical assistance.

Regional Technical Assistance

I would also like to mention how we support emergency communications and the implementation of the NECP through technical assistance and coordination.

- OEC also provides technical assistance (TA) support to State and local agencies. Now that we have a national plan in place and all 56 States and territories have Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIP), we can prioritize our technical assistance to ensure requests are being met which are most critical for achieving the goals and initiatives of both the national and state plans.
- The support we can provide ranges from updating the tactical communications plans, which many of your agencies requested – to reviewing system design and procurement documents by serving as an honest broker to ensure you are getting what you need from vendors.

- Unfortunately OEC only has funding to perform about half of the TA requests it receives, so leveraging our resources and prioritizing TA requests according to the NECP and the SCIPs is extremely important.
- As the OEC Regional Coordinators are brought on-board, they will work with the FEMA DEC Coordinators and the respective RECCWG Chairs, as well as other regional coordinators and the Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWIC) in their regions.
- As I mentioned earlier, OEC is hiring a Regional Coordinator for each of the 10 FEMA regions.
- The OEC Coordinators will be responsible for coordinating the OEC activities across all levels of government and public safety disciplines within their region. This added level of coordination at the regional level will ensure enhanced assistance from OEC.
- Another coordinating activity that relates to technical assistance is to improve interoperability at all levels of government through resource sharing and leveraging existing systems and planned implementations among with our public safety partners.
- Through the Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications, affectionately known as the FPIC, OEC has implemented some shared infrastructure demonstration projects, where federal agencies partner with State and regional public safety agencies to develop opportunities to share communications resources such as sites, towers, equipment, backhaul, and spectrum to extend the effectiveness of regional public safety communications. One example of this partnership is in Wyoming, where a formal Memorandum of Understanding was signed this month. This partnership benefits all participants providing an operationally effective and cost efficient statewide system with enhanced interoperability.
- We feel that one key element in achieving interoperability is the development and adoption open standards. With this in mind, OEC acts as spokesperson for the FPIC in the TIA/Project 25 standards development effort by ensuring the user community and their needs are effectively represented. As the P25 Standards process is a user-driven development effort, there is a continuing need for more involvement from users at all levels of government, especially at the State, local, and tribal level. Without this direct involvement, user needs may not be fully understood by manufacturers and vendors. You do not have to attend the meetings to participate in the process and let your needs or concerns be known, you can participate through the FPIC or the RECCWG that can address standards and provide input.
- This morning we heard from representatives from five states providing information about the communications plans within their state. Project 25 was mentioned in one way or the other in each of these discussions, addressing plans for implementations and/or updates. As you move forward with these plans, I encourage you all to become familiar with the term “compliant” and what it actually means in the Project 25 Standards environment.
- Tomorrow you will hear more about Project 25 from John Powell.

Conclusion

- The Gulf States Regional Center for Public Innovations is an excellent example of how effective regional coordination makes a difference in securing the homeland and improving emergency communications. I commend you for the work this group has done over the years and OEC looks forward to continuing to work with you.

- I thank you for your time. I will be here the rest of the day and would be happy to address any questions you might have.