



# OEC Bulletin

## *Connecting Emergency Responders, Keeping America Safe*

*The mission of the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) is to support and promote the ability of emergency responders and government officials to communicate in the event of natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other man-made disasters. OEC works to ensure, accelerate, and attain interoperable and operable emergency communications nationwide.*

## Looking Forward to FY 2008

OEC had a busy agenda in 2007. In April, the Office opened its doors for business, and its new team promptly set out to interact with stakeholders, oversee the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Plans (SCIPs), and develop an aggressive 2008 agenda.

The arrival of Chris Essid, the former Interoperability Coordinator for the Commonwealth of Virginia, means that OEC will enter 2008 with a fully-staffed leadership team. For more information about Essid, please turn to page four of this bulletin.

Here are two of OEC's planned initiatives for 2008:

### National Assessments and Plans

OEC is completing the first phase of the National Communications Baseline Assessment (NCBA), and will complete the second phase in 2008. In phase one, OEC used existing documents, surveys, and assessments, plus interviews with hundreds of public safety stakeholders from all levels of government, but phase two will

**“In 2008 we will evaluate the SCIPs, develop the National Emergency Communications Plan, and much more. It’s going to be a very exciting year for OEC and our stakeholders.”**

Chris Essid, Director, Office of Emergency Communications

incorporate fresh data and perspectives from each State and territory’s SCIP, among other resources.

OEC is also developing the first nationwide emergency communications plan with help from other Federal agencies, State and local practitioners and the private sector. Using insights from existing documents, the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) will make recommendations and suggestions for enhancing interoperable communications nationwide.

“We have a very aggressive schedule for 2008,” said Essid. “The OEC team is well-positioned to maintain the great service to our stakeholders from 2007, plus take on important new projects in 2008.”

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## Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications

The Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC) has become an integral part of OEC's interoperability assurance strategy. The FPIC serves as an advisory body representing the Federal user community and provides a forum in which Federal, State, local, and tribal users can share information, coordinate activities, and leverage synergies. The FPIC identifies potential demonstration projects, recommends "quick-hit" interoperability solutions in high-risk or priority areas, and serves as a focal point for the integration of Federal users onto regional, statewide, local, and tribal communications systems.

Current FPIC projects include:

- Developing an interface between Wyoming's statewide trunked system (WyoLink) and conventional Federal users.
- Partnering with the Oregon Wireless Integrated Network (OWIN) to test OWIN's proposed solution for the interoperability layer of their network architecture.

- Testing an interoperability solution in Florida that would provide flexible, on-scene communications during incident response.
- Integrating Federal users into the Virginia Statewide Agencies Radio System (STARS).

Recently, FPIC has been assisting OEC in the establishment of the Southwest Border Communications Working Group (SWBCWG). This group is designed to facilitate the effective use of the region's scarce critical resources by identifying and leveraging opportunities for sharing resources and establishing interoperability among Federal, State, local, and tribal agencies who are implementing wireless infrastructure along the United States-Mexico border.

At present, FPIC has over 200 members representing 42 Federal and 54 State, local, and tribal agencies. At the October 2007 General Membership Meeting, FPIC members unanimously approved the adoption of its charter, thereby formalizing FPIC's mission and objectives. Currently, FPIC is chaired by OEC Division Chief Jim Downes.

**For additional information concerning FPIC or to become a member, please contact Brian Mazanec at [FPIC@dhs.gov](mailto:FPIC@dhs.gov).**

## OEC Supports SCIP and PSIC Efforts

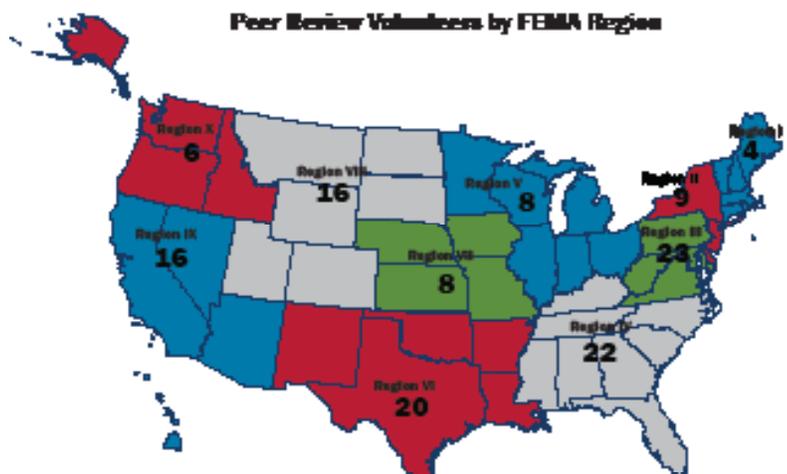
All 56 States and territories met the December 3, 2007 deadline for submitting Statewide Communications Interoperability Plans (SCIPs) and Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program Investment Justifications (IJs). OEC has been instrumental in supporting States and territories in meeting the deadline for development and submission of SCIPs and IJs by providing guidance and technical assistance.

To assist the States and territories with development of their IJs—a central part of the PSIC Grant Program, OEC held workshops in 27 of the 56 participating States and territories across the country and conducted IJ reviews for an additional 23.

The IJ workshop's agenda consists of topics such as reviewing the site's proposed plan, identifying gaps in the IJs, and recommending steps to address any of the gaps or issues.

More than 100 peers from Federal, State, and local public safety agencies across the Nation

have volunteered to review the SCIPs and IJs. OEC, in conjunction with the Grant Programs Directorate (GPD) of FEMA and the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is overseeing the review process of SCIPs and the IJs.



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## San Diego Successfully Employs Lessons Learned in Coordinated Response to Wildfires

On a Sunday morning in mid-October, Southern California news channels reported a fire burning in Malibu. By the end of the week, 17 active wildfires in 7 counties destroyed 2,233 homes and caused 10 deaths, with over 500,000 acres of land burned. San Diego County had seven fires burning simultaneously.

To deal with the threat of further destruction, hundreds of thousands of residents were notified of evacuations via a computerized Reverse 911 phone call system. Law enforcement officers also notified residents directly by driving through evacuation areas.

The San Diego Urban Area (UA) includes the City of San Diego and all jurisdictions in San Diego County. The majority of first responders in the UA operate on the San Diego County-Imperial County Regional Communications System (RCS), a large 800 MHz trunked system providing coverage over the 9,000 square miles of both counties. The City of San Diego also operates an 800 MHz trunked system. Both of these systems support console patches for interoperability between systems and with various Federal users, including the U.S. Department of Defense, operating in the VHF and UHF bands. Conventional interoperability channels in multiple bands, caches of portable radios, and gateways provide additional interoperability among Federal, State and local first responders.

### TICP “Thorough and Well Planned”

San Diego officials learned from the devastating fires of 2003; After Action Reports (AARs) analyzing the response to the fires identified RCS system capacity and user training among items to be addressed. An Interoperable Communications Committee was formed and commenced drafting what became the San Diego UA’s Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP).

Today, the region recognizes strategic communications interoperability planning as a priority and uses its shared systems on a daily basis for multi-agency, multi-discipline responses. A DHS review of San Diego’s plan calls the TICP “thorough and well planned.”

### Communications Response

In an average month, the RCS handles 3.2 million requests



**An officer checks a radio system used to patch together radio frequencies for communications for the Incident Command Center**

for channel assignment (“calls”), with 1,950 delayed channel assignments (“busies”). From October 21 to 26, the RCS processed 1.2 million calls, with 46,572 busies averaging a delay of 4.1 seconds. The busiest day, October 22, saw 264,048 calls, with 33,021 busies and an average delay of 5.6 seconds. This was a 71 percent improvement over the figures for the 2003 fires, when there were 104,605 busies with an average duration of 19 seconds.

### Cache Radios and Repeaters Used

During the October fires, RCS deployed cache radios to out-of-area personnel using 160 portables owned by the system and 250 rented from Motorola. To support approximately 150 peace officers sent by the State and Riverside County, two conventional 800 MHz repeaters were tied to the RCS to incorporate the out-of-area personnel into patrol operations responding to the incident.

The lessons learned from the recent wildfires reinforce the critical need for proper operational planning, coordination, and training and exercises. Additionally, technical analysis of traffic loading and a county-wide focus on interoperable communications is needed to fill in the identified gaps. San Diego has demonstrated a commitment to improving interoperable communications since the 2003 wildfires—an investment that paid off with the well-orchestrated response to the October 2007 wildfires.

## ***From Our Partners:*** **NPSTC**

### **Common Channel Naming**

In February 2007, the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) convened a forum to tackle the problem of naming common channels. NPSTC invited participants from across the Nation to develop a consensus on a standard channel-naming scheme based on the recommendations of the FCC's Public Safety National Coordination Committee (NCC). The lack of common channel names and an immediate communications capability are significant impediments to public safety's ability to respond to multi-agency incidents. The nationwide forum encouraged open discussion, developed understanding and alternate recommendations and, ultimately, a national consensus from the public safety community.

More than 50 public safety professionals attended, with more participating via teleconference. As a result, NPSTC suggests implementation occur for spectrum below 512 MHz as agencies narrowband; in 800 MHz, as agencies reband; and, in 700 MHz, as new systems come on line.

**For more information and to access the Common Channel Naming Report, please visit [www.npstc.org](http://www.npstc.org).**

## **SAFECOM EC/ERC**

### **Biannual Meeting**

The Executive Committee (EC) and Emergency Response Council (ERC) were convened by OEC and the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) December 12-13 in Orlando, FL. The EC and ERC are comprised of emergency response practitioners, elected officials, and national association representatives from all levels of government across the country. The December meetings focused on statewide interoperability planning and implementation, the NECP, and the development of future tools to assist planning and implementation efforts. OEC's Chris Essid, Mike Roskind, and Keith Young addressed the group and received essential input that will ensure that the diverse needs of the practitioner community are incorporated into its activities.

## **New OEC Leadership Chris Essid**

On December 7, DHS announced the selection of Chris Essid as Director of OEC. In his new position, Essid will guide the department's policies, programs, and activities promoting emergency response communications for Federal, State, local, and tribal governments.



**New OEC Director, Chris Essid, gives a presentation on the SAFECOM Interoperability continuum**

"It's a great opportunity to make a real difference in each emergency responder's life," says Essid, who joins DHS from the Virginia Governor's Office of Commonwealth Preparedness.

Essid brings considerable interoperable communications expertise to OEC; he previously served as Virginia's first Interoperability Coordinator, overseeing initiatives to improve interoperability at Federal, State, and local levels of government.

Known for his leadership and innovation in the Governor's office, Essid has advocated for greater partnerships among Federal, State, and local communications efforts. Essid coordinated the establishment of the State Interoperability Executive Committee and built a partnership between State and local responders. Under his direction, Virginia became the first State to develop a SCIP, paving the way for the national methodology for plan development.

"We knew the SCIP was vital to responders in Virginia, but we didn't foresee the impact we'd have on all 56 States and territories," Essid says. "You never know what your State might do that will have a national impact. We are here to serve the first responders and the State governments. We respect the experience and perspective of those we serve, so our door is always open."

**To contact Chris Essid, please e-mail [OEC@dhs.gov](mailto:OEC@dhs.gov).**

### **OEC's UPCOMING EVENTS**

#### **JANUARY**

**26** Interoperable communications tested during Gasparilla Festival, Tampa, FL.

#### **FEBRUARY**

**11-15** SCIP and IJ Peer Review panels held in St. Louis, MO.

**For additional information on the Office of Emergency Communications or its initiatives, please e-mail [oecc@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:oecc@hq.dhs.gov).**