

Written Statement of
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on behalf of the
SAFECOM Executive Committee Chair

before the

UNITED STATES HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY'S
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS,
PREPAREDNESS, AND RESPONSE
Hearing on
"Assessing the Framework and Coordination of the National Emergency
Communication Plan"

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Charles Werner. I have 34 years of public safety experience and presently serve as the fire chief for the City of Charlottesville Virginia, a member and former Chair of the Virginia Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee and a member of the Charlottesville-Albemarle-University of Virginia Regional Communications Center Management Board. I am appearing today as the SAFECOM Executive Committee Chair.

Last year America's public safety agencies responded to millions of emergency incidents across this nation. Collectively these same public safety agencies continue to prepare through an 'All Hazards' approach to various emergency incidents including natural disasters and terrorist attacks. I appear today to address a specific and continuing communications need for America's public safety – interoperability and the development of a National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP). First, I would like to thank Congress for the legislation that created the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) and the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP)

About SAFECOM (www.safecomprogram.gov)

SAFECOM is a communications program of the Department of Homeland Security. SAFECOM provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on interoperable communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies. The Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) supports SAFECOM's development of guidance, tools and templates. The Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) supports SAFECOM-related research, development, testing, evaluation and standards. OEC is managed by the Directorate for National Protection and Programs. OIC is managed by the Science and Technology Directorate.

The SAFECOM Executive Committee is a public safety practitioner driven advisory committee that serves as an effective and collaborative bridge between OEC and OIC.

About Interoperability

As the SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum explains, Effective interoperability requires the effective blending of Governance, Standard Operating Procedures, Technology (voice & data), Training & Exercises and Usage.

Planning is one key component to successful public safety interoperability. As of March 2007, only 8 states¹ had Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs).

Just over a year later, ALL 56 states and territories have SCIPs that address a common set of requirements and guidelines. THIS IS A MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR OUR NATION! These SCIPs are an important step in creating a culture of effective planning for interoperability and emergency communications.

¹ Based on data collected at the Los Angeles National Governor's Association Conference to discuss interoperable communications

These SCIPs are the first necessary step to begin a continued dialogue between and inclusive of all public safety disciplines and across levels of government (local, tribal, state and federal).

OEC played an important role in the development, review and approval of all 56 SCIPs. Additionally OEC conducted SCIP workshops for the 30 states and 5 territories that requested assistance.

The next monumental step toward improving emergency communications is through the development of the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP). The NECP is the first **NATIONAL** (not federal) strategy for emergency communications.

The NECP is a critically important and absolutely necessary step to provide guidance, define measurable outcomes, identify gaps and develop long term sustainable emergency communications strategies that are inclusive of and between local, tribal, state and federal governments. The paradigm must be changed to create/allow opportunities for the various levels of government agencies to leverage existing systems when it can satisfy the needs of each respective agency.

One vital acknowledgement is the way in which OEC Director Chris Essid has gone about the development of the NECP. How the plan is developed is as important as the plan itself.

Director Chris Essid's leadership has been stellar; he has actively engaged hundreds of first responders and practitioners from the local, state and federal governments as well as private industry to achieve meaningful input for the development of the NECP. This input is invaluable as it is directly from the people who "own" the problem and know first hand what is needed.

I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary of Cybersecurity and Communications, Greg Garcia, the Deputy Undersecretary and Undersecretary for the National Protection and Programs Directorate, Scott Charbo and Robert Jamison, Deputy Secretary Schneider and Secretary Chertoff for their support of Director Essid and the development of the NECP.

Successful Implementation of the NECP

The NECP must be developed in such a way that while establishing a national plan it is able to embrace common themes from the SCIPs and build upon the work that has already been done by the states and its respective practitioners.

The NECP must continue to actively involve public safety practitioners in the ongoing development through SAFECOM's Executive Committee, Emergency Response Council, State Interoperability Coordinators, etc.

The NECP must provide support to states and localities as they implement the goals and initiatives in the NECP and their individual SCIPs.

Technology funding for voice and data equipment that aligns with SCIPs and the NECP

Technical support/assistance – Systems and solutions have become very complex, technical with difficult contractual and procurement processes. Over the last year, OEC supported over 120 requests for technical assistance in the areas of training, planning, governance and engineering. For the same reasons, it is important to preserve the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP).

Funding for the technical support through the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) was identified as a priority by the SAFECOM Executive Committee and the Emergency Response Council both of which are comprised of emergency response practitioners. It is believed that the \$50 million investment in 2008 for the purpose of planning, governance, conducting training/exercises, and developing common procedures and protocols will have a profound impact on the SCIPs and NECP.

Training – Train certified Communications Unit Leaders (COML) across the nation to establish communications during large scale incidents according to a standard procedure that support the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

To date, OEC has supported training for over 90 emergency responders from at least ten states. Included were personnel with a role in the two political national conventions and the 2010 Olympics in Canada. Additional training of this type is essential.

A National Interoperability Field Operations Guide (NIFOG) was published and distributed by the OEC in 2007 with over 90,000 downloads to date.

Other Contributing Factors to Enhance the NECP

Every state institutionalizing a broad multi-discipline representative governance

A designated/dedicated interoperability position in every state to continually develop the SCIPs, provide input to the further development of the NECP and to insure the SCIPs remain in sync with the NECP

Implementation of plain language policy

Implementation of common channel naming program

Training of a cadre of trained All Hazards Type III COMLs in every state

There must be continued support of research toward the development and implementation of new communications technologies (voice and data) as has been successfully done through the Office of Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC).

The successful deployment of a national public safety broadband network is critical and will greatly enhance the communications capabilities for all public safety responders and will dramatically expand the scope of the NECP.