Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips
February 20, 2009 – March 6, 2009

FEMA Seeks Public Comment on EAS Proposal

March 5, 2009
Radio World
URL: http://www.radioworld.com/article/75730

The Federal Emergency Management Agency wants to hear from you about the open standards process for the Emergency Alert System and specifically the coming upgrade to the Common Alerting Protocol.

This is the next step in the process to upgrading emergency alerts to a next-gen public warning system. The goal is to allow the president and authorized officials to send alerts using television, radio, wireless and wired telephone, e-mail and other communications technologies.

FEMA asks emergency management industries, state and tribal leaders and first responders to review and comment on the open standardization process for EAS CAP.

The CAP format for exchanging alerts allows a consistent warning message to be disseminated simultaneously over different warning systems.

Through May 2, emergency management stakeholders can submit comments online about the EAS CAP standardization process through the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards and its Emergency Management Technical Committee. Comments from members and non-OASIS members will be collected online.

FEMA submitted its draft EAS CAP requirement to the OASIS Emergency Management Technical Committee on Dec. 12, 2008. The committee formed a CAP Profiles Subcommittee to evaluate the requirements and develop a working draft of the profile; the document was bumped up to the full committee, which is now putting out the document for a 60-day public comment period.

OASIS will review the draft before it can become a specification and then a standard.

North Carolina and Virginia Law Enforcement Agencies Connect Via Internet Protocol-Based Solution

March 2, 2009
Government Technology
By Hilton Collins
URL: http://www.govtech.com/gt/624252

It's the type of nightmare that can raise a police officer's blood pressure: In the border region between Virginia and North Carolina, a suspect rockets down the highway so fast toward Pelham, N.C., that his car's speedometer creeps into the triple digits. Two Caswell County, N.C., officers follow behind as civilian vehicles swerve to avoid a collision. The suspect blasts through Pelham, and the officers see that he's heading toward Danville, Va. They radio their county

dispatch center, which in turn relays the message to Danville's dispatch -- but then things go awry.

The suspect crosses the state line, but the police officers must end the pursuit because Virginia is not their jurisdiction. And by the time Danville's dispatch notifies its police force and those officers are ready to engage, the suspect is gone. The inability of the two police forces to seamlessly communicate has enabled a criminal to avoid apprehension -- an alarming problem that occurs when law enforcement agencies have radio systems that aren't integrated. This is problematic when a chase runs through multiple jurisdictions and affects multiple law enforcement agencies.

"Pittsylvania County [Va.] surrounds Danville on three sides and also borders North Carolina, and the city of Danville borders North Carolina. And right across, sharing that same border is Caswell County [N.C]. There are at least two main thoroughfares that run between Virginia and North Carolina -- Highway 29 and 86," said Maj. Dean Hairston of the Danville Police Department.

Many law enforcement and emergency management forces use land mobile radio technology to communicate, but often each agency has its own frequency and range -- sufficient when talking among colleagues of a single department, but problematic for talking to other agencies. Sometimes a memorandum of understanding permits one agency to switch to another agency's frequency if necessary. However, the drawback is an agency can't use its own frequency while also using another jurisdiction's frequency. In these cases, the long arm of the law can be thrown seriously out of joint.

But there's hope on the horizon for regional authorities and their citizens.

Local agencies in Virginia and North Carolina are working to implement a permanent voice over Internet protocol (VoIP)-based solution that would link IP, non-IP and radio networks inside one system. This would allow officers to talk across jurisdictional lines without ditching the equipment they've used for years.

The work toward this VoIP system began in 2005 with the Piedmont Regional Interoperability Project, a partnership between the city of Danville and Cisco Systems. The pilot was designed to determine how Cisco's IP technology could assist authorities, and after reaching a promising 2007 proof-of-concept benchmark, officers and technicians are configuring the system for long-term use.

How it All Began
It was serendipity when Danville Police Chief Philip Broadfoot attended a 2005 International Association of Chiefs of Police conference and saw an eye-opening presentation by Cisco about the company's IP Interoperability and Collaboration System (IPICS) technology. He was impressed that it integrated various modes of communication. IPICS had been tested in Honolulu and Miami, and Broadfoot figured that his region would make a great addition, so he approached Jeff Frazier, a director in the public-sector practice of Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group.

"They discussed the particular problems we were experiencing, and based on the increased level of deployment, Chief Broadfoot and Jeff [Frazier] both agreed that this would be a good fit for the third phase of product testing because it would allow them to use state agencies, county agencies and municipalities [together]," Hairston said.

That initial talk led to further discussion between Danville, Cisco and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) -- the research, development and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. They wanted to know how IPICS could help jurisdictions in the Virginia-North Carolina border region communicate and collaborate, which led to the Piedmont Regional Interoperability Project's creation. The project made Danville the host for frequency linkage between its own city, the Virginia State Police, North Carolina Highway Patrol, Pittsylvania County Sheriff's Office and the Caswell County Sheriff's Office.

"We want to understand what role technology, in general, will play in that transition from analog to digital and what role Cisco may play in the analog-to-digital conversion," Frazier said.

Cisco helped other regions make the analog-to-digital transition prior to the Piedmont project. A November 2005 Techworld.com article reported that IPICS was used in three deployments. After a two-week test in October 2005, the system improved communication between Honolulu police and fire departments and also the local government's day-to-day operations.

Schiphol Telematics began testing IPICS in September 2005 in Amsterdam to evaluate its effectiveness for airport operations functions. Meanwhile, Maher Terminals began using it in June 2005 at a cargo terminal in Port Elizabeth, N.J., to give engineers a new way to deliver instructions to mechanics.

The Virginia-North Carolina partnership wanted its IPICS system to improve interagency collaboration and also save money in the long run. If the Piedmont project allowed agencies to communicate in a shared infrastructure with their existing landline phones, cell phones, radios and other handhelds, they wouldn't be forced to pay for expensive upgrades to their land mobile radio or other equipment. According to Frazier, government public-safety departments in the rural United States could benefit financially from something like IPICS.

"A lot of these areas don't have the money," Frazier said. "They have a huge need to collaborate, and the promise of radio over IP to allow them to have basic bridging and collaboration is enormously important for them."

Progress in Phases
By early 2006, Danville's police, fire, emergency medical services, public works and city utilities departments were rolled into the first phase of the IPICS project. The second phase incorporated Pittsylvania County and Caswell County's sheriff, emergency medical services and fire departments. The third phase brought in the North Carolina and Virginia state highway patrols.

Cisco donated the routers for the project. In turn, Virginia granted $68,000 to the project to incorporate the Halifax County, N.C., Sheriff's Office, which shares a joint emergency

operations center with the South Boston Police Department of Virginia. The project also received some NIJ funding.

The project was configured to assist law enforcement in several ways. It allowed users to create preset or ad hoc virtual talking groups (VTG) into which at least two different communication lines can be combined on land mobile radio frequencies. Users also were able to join VTGs with personal cell phones, listen to more than one VTG even when those VTGs couldn't hear each other; or send notifications and alerts to users to join VTGs.

"The system, for the most part, is a virtual system, meaning that you can access it from anywhere if you have IP connectivity," Hairston said. "You can log on to the server, and you can create virtual talk groups if you're authorized to do so."

The IPICS server -- located in Danville -- supports communication between the jurisdictions. All frequencies are connected to a router that's also connected to the server either by a T1, fiber optics or a microwave connection, Hairston said.

This connectivity and user functionality made for a successful test in 2007 that allowed law enforcement personnel to reach the proof-of-concept phase. But now that people know what they have, they must determine how to expand it and make it work best -- hence, the reconfiguration.

"This deployment was a little bit different than what you see, say, in someone going out and purchasing -- because we did not have any type of agreement. There was no maintenance contract," Hairston said. "Once you move to that phase and you start to look at, 'Well, hey, we want to use this system permanently,' you're talking about a brand new product. You're talking about the application of a number of different pieces of equipment, like routers, lines and things like that."

For example, the jurisdictions have to decide whether to continue using T1 lines for router connections, and if so, how they will pay for recurring costs. Any maintenance configurations or changes require infrastructure re-engineering, which takes time, cooperation and money. The jurisdictions also would like to connect the IPICS system to North Carolina's statewide radio system for emergency responders -- "VIPER," the Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders.

A Ways to Go
Although the IPICS system is functional, public-safety officers aren't using it until there's a permanent setup. Some kinks still must be worked out, according to Allan Sadowski, the IT manager of the North Carolina State Highway Patrol.

Cisco initially projected six months to reach the proof-of-concept phase, he said, but in reality it took about two years. The officers had their day jobs and so did Cisco personnel. There was also some workplace culture shock between the two groups.

"The Cisco people who came to the table on this were by and large [from a] voice-over-IP telephony background, and they came to the table and were talking with radio guys in a radio

shop," Sadowski said. Consequently there were some language barriers when it came to getting radio people to understand IP people, and vice versa.

The project's allure for Cisco, as Hairston sees it, was that it was an opportunity to learn how IPICS could work on top of a region's existing systems -- some of which are outdated, and others cutting edge.

"So basically, what they wanted to do was to get the system up and running and make sure it was functional," Hairston said. "Once they had a proof-of-concept that we had communication, that we were testing and that we were able to communicate among the disparate systems, then they would come back and reconfigure the system for more permanent use."

The jurisdictions contracted with ARINC, a transportation communication and systems engineering solutions provider, to handle the system configuration.

"To be honest with you, I thought that the system would have been up long before now. I think it's a matter of, as soon as our attorneys and Cisco's attorneys have a final agreement, and we are able to issue the requisition for ARINC to come in and do the work. I suspect that in a very short period of time, we'll be up and running," Hairston said.

Had the jurisdictions gone the traditional RFP route instead of volunteering for testing, Hairston said the system would have been completed much sooner.

"At the end of the day, it'll be well worth it because we'll have a cutting-edge system and our basic cost on it will be minimal," he said. "Those are just some of the headaches that you kind of have to put up with."

New means of communication can affect the governance model when different jurisdictions work together for the same processes. IPICS is a bridge that links not only different forms of communication, Frazier said, but also different agencies in ways they've never been linked before. As a consequence, they are able to establish new modes of trust.

"We're not talking essentially about a technology, we're talking about a business change," Frazier said. "We're seeing IT change the governance structure."

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First Responder IPT, Interoperability and Preparedness Dominate DHS S&T Stakeholders Conference
March 2, 2009
Government Technology
By Corey McKenna
URL: http://www.govtech.com/dc/articles/624271

The big news of the Homeland Security Stakeholders West Conference last week was the presentation of a thirteenth integrated product team focused on serving the first responder

community. With panels of first responders weighing in on technology priorities and observations of challenges, sessions included overviews and updates on some of the 12 other IPTs and how private sector contractors can do business with S&T and help bring technology solutions to market.

Last week also saw the launch of Firstresponder.gov, a one-stop-shop for information from across the federal government of interest to first responders.
There are an estimated 25 million first responders in the United States. In an effort to reach as much of that community as possible, the conference sessions were streamed live online and those not able to attend the conference could watch the sessions online and comment live on the discussions and ask questions. Recordings of the conference sessions should be available online shortly.

Discussions of interoperability, technology priorities and capability gaps and commercialization invited lively discussion. Interestingly, there was little discussion of the governance issues that lay across achieving interoperability with technology dominating most of that discussion. Dr. David Boyd, Director of the Command Control and Interoperability, did raise the governance issue, making the point that there are over 3,100 counties across the country each with different needs and laws they must adhere to. He said the individualities of counties' needs make it difficult to write detailed operational requirement documents (ORDs) which the private sector will want to develop into products.

Another topic of discussion, with much happening on it, was the need to develop a common operating picture among emergency management players. Success in this is highlighted by Virtual Alabama and similar projects, such as one in Virginia. Jose Vasquez even floated the name Virtual USA, hinting at the possibility of these efforts being linked across the country, though there are serious hurdles to that. One such issue is the need to tailor the data to the person looking at it. For example, someone with a more operational focus may want to have a different view than an elected official, for example.

Developing a culture of preparedness was another topic of much discussion at the conference. First, Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, the commander in charge of coordinating military relief efforts in the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, introduced the topic in a keynote address. This was then picked up and echoed by others during the panel discussions. A big piece of this is working "left of boom" to deter, detect, prevent and prepare for natural disasters and acts of terrorism. Honore noted that being prepared is the best mitigation strategy. He said $1 spent in preparedness can save up to $9 in recovery costs.

Progress is being made on first responder technology projects previewed at the Technologies for Critical Incident Preparedness conference in Chicago last October. Three dimensional personnel location technology has improved. Vehicle stopping technology and a thinner, lighter self-contained breathing apparatus prototype was previewed at the conference. The next step, an attendee suggested, would include better particulate filtration.

Other projects highlighted include a project which the human factors IPT is working on to train checkpoint personnel on how to spot suspicious people and tell if someone is hiding something

akin to Fox's *Lie to Me* TV show and the detection at a distance of suspicious objects that might pass through a checkpoint at an airport or train station.

The last discussion of the conference on Thursday highlighted the need for a secure social network where first responders and potential technology providers can come together and share needs and potential solutions to first responder capability gaps.

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Public safety, CTIA ask FCC for relief in 700 MHz band
February 27, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/ctia-ask-fcc-700-mhz-relief-0227/

Three public-safety organizations and CTIA, the trade association for commercial wireless carriers, this week asked the FCC to address the use of low-power devices in the 700 MHz band—specifically, wireless microphones—that could interfere with first-responder communications in the band.

In a letter to Acting FCC Chairman Michael Copps, CTIA and the public-safety organizations—the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) urged the commission to "take action to curb the harmful use of these low-power devices."

NPSTC Chairman Ralph Haller said the purpose of the letter was to ensure that the FCC is aware of the concern, but he acknowledged that finding a method to rid the 700 MHz band of wireless microphones would be difficult.

"I don't have a good answer for that, because there's no database of who the users are or where the microphones are," Haller said during an interview with Urgent Communications. "Therefore, you can't do a letter campaign and say, 'Be off of these frequencies in six months.'"

Thousands of entities—schools, hotels, playhouses, churches and other venues throughout the country—use wireless microphones that operate on the same 700 MHz frequencies that the FCC has allocated for public-safety use, Haller said. Unless the matter can be resolved, the low-power microphones can interfere with public-safety communications in the band within a small geographic area, while the high-power public-safety systems promise to interfere with wireless microphones throughout a much larger area, he said.

"There's not an easy answer for it, but the commission needs to be aware of it," Haller said. "If there are cases of interference to public-safety systems, the commission needs to go in and do enforcement action and issue forfeitures to make people aware that you can't just put something on the air and use it."

In the joint letter, the public-safety organizations and CTIA ask the FCC to approve an order clarifying that "low-power auxiliary devices must not interfere with authorized public safety and commercial licensees, and that those devices must accept all interference from licensed users." They also ask that such devices cease operating within one year of such an order being adopted. The letter also calls for a ban on the sale of such devices operating in the 700 MHz band.

"Decisive commission action to halt additional unauthorized users will ensure that critical public safety systems and the commercial systems that carry emergency calls are unhindered by interference," the letter states.

If the FCC takes such action, Haller expressed empathy for the users of wireless microphones in the 700 MHz band.

"They didn't know that their use of these microphones is actually illegal," he said. "I feel bad that these people have bought these [microphones] and now they're faced with having to do something."

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Interoperability, change orders slow rebanding efforts
February 26, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/networks_and_systems/news/interoperability-slow-rebanding-0226/index.html

Officials for two 800 MHz public-safety licensees in Florida expressed frustration with slowdowns in their respective rebanding efforts caused by interoperability agreements and a lengthy change-order process during a panel at the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Winter Summit in Orlando last week.

The panelists represent two very types of licensees. Greg Holcomb is the director of the communications technology/E-911 division of the Department of Public Safety for Lake County, Fla., which currently uses a VHF system for public-safety communications and only uses 800 MHz for mutual-aid communications with nearby agencies. Lesley Lewis is the radio-system manager and dispatch manager for Brevard County, Fla., fire rescue, which has 67 different agencies using an 800 MHz system that includes 60 frequencies that must be rebanded on more than 3000 pieces of subscriber equipment.

With only four channels and 19 subscriber units to deal with, Lake County, Fla., was deemed a "simple" system that would be rebanded for $128,000, according to the rebanding agreement signed in August 2007, Holcomb said. However, the county has yet to make any progress rebanding its infrastructure to date, because taking such action would result in the loss of its mutual-aid communications with neighboring agencies, several of which have not yet negotiated a rebanding deal with Sprint Nextel. In addition, Holcomb said he recently was told that the state mutual-aid channels might not be rebanded until 2010.

"We have a very small system—four channels reliant on completing rebanding—and I'm not seeing that happen until probably the 2010 time frame, which is a hurry-up-and-wait process," he said. "For 19 units … the process has been as long and as cumbersome as it's been for the other (larger) agencies."

Greater public-safety interoperability has been a priority for Congress since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, but such interoperability can make it much more difficult to complete rebanding, said moderator Alan Tilles, who represents numerous public-safety agencies as a partner in the law firm of Shulman Rogers Gandal Pordy & Ecker. This reality is very evident in Florida, where the interoperability system "may be the best I've seen in the nation," Tilles said.

"It's amazing," he said. "One of them can't make a move without the others."

For Brevard County, the primary frustration has been a change order related to specialized accessory equipment that was not noted in the negotiation process because "there was no place to put them on the form that Sprint Nextel provided to us," Lewis said.

Brevard County submitted the change-order request more than six months ago but has not received approval, which has left the entity in limbo, Lewis said.

"I'm at the point where we have everything set up to retune the backbone of the system—all the panels are waiting, we have our assigned frequencies and Sprint Nextel has cleared the channels that are assigned to us," she said. "If we could receive our change order, we'd be done in 30 days or less."

Given the delay associated with change orders, Lewis advised other rebanding agencies to check that all accessories and other "exotic" items are included in their rebanding agreements. If they're not, licensees should submit any necessary changes as quickly as possible. Lewis said she is worried that further delay will create complications with natural weather cycles.

"We don't like to mess with the system during hurricane season, because we are coastal county," she said. "We did expect to be completed by June [2008]. We thought we were going to be on schedule, but the change-order process simply kicked in. Now, I'm looking at another hurricane season coming up when I'm probably going to be engaged in [rebanding], and I'd prefer not to be."

From an operational perspective, Lewis said one of the biggest challenges to date has been getting access to radios during the planned time period.

On one occasion, several local police and fire departments arrived for rebanding without the equipment they were supposed to have with them. Agencies also have been know to show up "on a day when we had another agency scheduled and expect to be able to swap out their equipment while we were trying to swap out 500 or 600 pieces of equipment for a larger agency," she said. "They didn't stick to the schedule."

Officials eye a geospatial 'Virtual USA'
February 25, 2009
Federal Computer Week
By Ben Bain
URL: http://fcw.com/Articles/2009/02/24/Virtual-USA.aspx?Page=1

Federal and state authorities are collaborating on a project that would allow state and local caches of geospatial data to be interoperable and more useful with the goal of creating a "Virtual USA" for emergency response purposes.

The Homeland Security Department's Science and Technology Directorate recently sponsored a first meeting where officials from several Southern states discussed their efforts to manage and use geospatial data and how they could share it with each other. Officials say the goal is to make local- and state-owned geospatial data interoperable and usable across jurisdictions, with non-federal authorities maintaining control over the data and deciding what data to share.

The program was inspired by the success that Alabama had in using information gathered at a local level to aid first responders. The recent meeting was hosted by Alabama's Homeland Security Department, which created Virtual Alabama. That is a system built on Google Earth Enterprise software that allows authorities to create data mashups by quickly pulling together information from an array of sources across the state's 67 counties and make it available to first responders.

David Boyd, director of DHS Science and Technology's Command, Control and Interoperability Division, said the idea of a "Virtual USA" is to make data usable regardless of platform or software. He said the project's name may change as it progresses.

"What Virtual USA does is go beyond any single platform and says to the states basically we don't care what platform you use; what we care about is working with you to develop the technology and the mechanisms required to allow that information to be shared across platforms," he said. "We want to create what amounts to capabilities that counties can use, that states can use, that in an emergency the nation can use, that is essentially platform and application agnostic."

Jim Walker, Alabama's homeland security director, said his team approached Boyd by saying "we don't know when or where the next terrorist attack will come from, but we can almost guarantee that there is going to be a hurricane at some point in the Gulf of Mexico."

The states represented at the recent meeting in Mobile, Ala. included Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Tennessee and Georgia.

"The reason why we've been successful and the reason why Louisiana and other states have been successful is it's the bottoms-up approach," Walker said, speaking of individual states' efforts to

mash up local geospatial data. Walker added his experience with Virtual Alabama has taught him that the best imagery and photography is at the local level.

Boyd said DHS also advocates the bottoms-up approach, adding that it would be very expensive for the federal government to compile the data for a mapping system while states and localities already maintain the data for their own purposes.

"It's not like we're going to build a national system, what we're looking to do here is to create a national system of systems exactly as we have been doing with interoperable communications so that disparate systems can communicate with each other even though the basic application, the basic platform may be different," Boyd said.

Walker said during the recent meeting state representatives agreed to form groups to focus on what type of information should be shared and about how to respect states' sovereignty in the process.

Boyd said officials are working on creating a pilot program for states on the Gulf Coast and in Southeast region to show that multiple states can participate, regardless of platform. He said that would serve as a real world laboratory for the project.

"In our experience, it's not primarily the technology that's the deciding issue," he said. "The fundamental issue and the thing that takes the greatest amount of time…is getting everybody to agree on what the rules are going to be and how it is they're going to go about cooperating. At the end of the day, it's the human component that's the principal and most difficult driver."

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DHS Chief Urges 'Fresh Look' at Interoperable Communications
February 25, 2009
TR Daily
John Curran
URL: Not available (subscription only)

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said today she plans to take a "fresh look" at the how communications interoperability can be achieved among emergency first responders and other public safety groups, and indicated some interest in employing mobile communications equipment to provide a "patch" between public safety communications systems that may not be interoperable.

"I think we need a fresh look" at communications interoperability, she said in testimony before the House Homeland Security Committee in response to a lawmaker's question, and specifically a fresh look at what levels of public safety users that interoperable communications should extend to. By example, she cited police and fire officials, but wondered whether officials that were "higher up" should also have interoperable systems.

"One of the paradigms has been, if everyone is not interoperable, then that's bad," she said. "I intend to focus on this," she said, adding the issue was a "key frustration" to her when she was governor of Arizona. During that time, the state purchased and deployed mobile communications vans that she said provided a "patch" between different communications systems used by first responders.

"These vans were brought in and within hours were set up," Ms. Napolitano explained. "We need to look at some of these other methodologies that are available . . . and whether we can get functional interoperability more quickly than we have been given so far."

Rep. Jane Harman (D., Calif.), a member of the committee, reminded the DHS secretary that the primary reason behind the ongoing digital television transition is to free up 700 megahertz spectrum that can be used to construct a nationwide interoperable communications network for first responders.

"As one in a state with lots of fires, I'm not sure that the bridging technology of [communications] trucks won't be enough," Rep. Harman said. "We still need the national public safety network."

Secretary Napolitano promised she would keep committee members apprised of DHS's efforts on interoperable communications.

Regarding the funding of substantial grants in recent years to finance equipment and other upgrades for first responders, Ms. Napolitano said that "nobody is more committed to those programs than I am." She said that in addition to equipment purchases, funding under those grants should also be used to finance "sustainability, replacement, repair, training. In other words, all of these have to be part of a web and weave for what we do at DHS not just this year, but moving forward."

She refused to be pinned down by several questions about any new formulas for funding to states based on risks that each might face from terrorist attacks or other calamities. "Everywhere in the country has some sort of risk," she said, adding that "some base level of funding needs to accommodate that." But, she said, "There are areas of particular risk that would have broader impacts, and that is where we need to focus our analysis."

In general, she said she and her staff at DHS are in the process of "kicking the tires, and looking at some issues with a fresh set of eyes." Ms. Napolitano also pledged to work toward a "strong relationship" with the House committee.

News and Notes from the Napolitano Hearing
February 25, 2009
Security Debrief
By Rich Cooper
URL: http://securitydebrief.adfero.com/news-notes-from-the-napolitano-hearing/

Janet Napolitano dove into the Congressional Hearing pool today making her first appearance as DHS Secretary before the House Homeland Security Committee. The nearly three hour session (which included two recesses for floor votes) was as much a listening session as it was a "listing" session where Members gave her their respective thoughts and concerns. Outlined below are some summations and notable news items that I took away from today's session:

Napolitano's Performance
Just like her confirmation hearing in early January before the US Senate's Homeland Committee, she was cool, calm, collected and enormously prepared for everything that Members brought up. She also demonstrated her "quick on her feet" nature when responding to Rep. Dent's (R-PA) question on whether workers in colonial garb who tend to mules that pull canal boats should have to TWIC cards. (He even brought pictures to share!) She didn't take the bait and dealt with the issue in a respectable manner.

Probably the best summation of her performance came from an observation that Rep. Harman (D-CA) shared of one of her fellow Committee Members at the Hearing's close: "She's a well trained lawyer that can speak to the general public."

Mexico & the Escalating Drug Wars
The deteriorating conditions along the US Southern border with the ongoing battles between Mexican authorities and the drug cartels was the issue raised the most by the Committee's membership. The fact that the new Secretary had hands-on experience with the areas and issues involved made her responses that much more compelling. Stating that the Administration has pledged its support to Mexican President Calderone in the fight against the cartels, the Secretary shared that she has been in touch with local sheriffs and other authorities to keep abreast of what is happening on a local level. Everyone recognized the seriousness of the situation with Rep. Pascrell (D-NJ) expressing his concern that the affected Mexican areas become like the terror breeding sites in mountainous areas in Pakistan.

Congressional Oversight
Both sides of the aisle expressed their concerns over the Congressional oversight demands that Congress makes of DHS. Sec. Napolitano pledged her willingness to work with the Congress on all of the homeland issues but did not offer any specific guidance on how oversight should be organized. Interestingly enough, she did offer some gut-wrenching statistics about DHS' appearances before the House in the last session of Congress.

• DHS attended/supported 269 Congressional hearings held by the House. Of these, 126 were for the House Homeland Committee (and its Subcommittees); 111 hearings were held by other House Committees; and 32 hearings were held before House Appropriators.

Future of FEMA
While she was questioned by at least three different Members about her thoughts on FEMA remaining inside DHS, Sec. Napolitano declined to offer her opinion on the subject other than to reinforce her pledge at her confirmation hearing to work with the organization she has and make it better. She did offer that she had not spoken to the President about his preferences on the subject and wanted to get his guidance on the matter. Rep. Cuellar (D-TX) shared that Rep.

Oberstar (D-MN) was going to introduce legislation either today or some time this week to remove FEMA from DHS, fulfilling his pledge to so from some months back. Rep. Oberstar is the Chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee which also has some oversight responsibilities over FEMA.

The Secretary also offered that central to FEMA's success is its leadership and operational functions - not its placement on an organization chart. She also went at lengths to stress the fact that FEMA is not a first responder organization and that as a nation we needed to carefully examine our expectations of the agency to be up and operating in an instant.

Cargo Scanning Mandates
With candor that would have probably had her predecessors as Secretary drawn and quartered before the Committee, Secretary Napolitano said that the congressionally- imposed 2012 mandates for 100% scanning of maritime cargo "is not going to work." She shared that there are hundreds of international agreements that need to be put in place first "and under the current state of the program I don't see it happening."

Interoperability
It wouldn't be a homeland security hearing if the issue of interoperability was not brought up. Members continued to express their concerns about where we are on this critical issue. In addressing these questions, the Secretary offered some interesting points including:

• The need to take a fresh look at the DHS Office of Emergency Communications;
• DHS, working with states and local governments, need to help determine who should be interoperable with whom (for example, is it just first responders - what about computers?);
• As governor of Arizona, her state used DHS monies to purchase mobile communications vans to provide a communications "patch" to those areas impacted by emergency conditions to ensure communications between responding parties. She shared that she saw the same practice being used last week in Kentucky during her visit to review response efforts following the devastating ice storms;
• She also wanted a fresh look at what technologies are really needed to make interoperability happen

When questioned by new Committee Member Rep Himes (D-CT) on how DHS is working interoperability issues in his state which has counties but has no organized, central county governments, the Secretary expressed her surprise at this type of governmental arrangement and pledged to get back to him. Rep. Himes certainly didn't seem to be trying to trip her up with a trick question, but the example of his state's organization demonstrates the complexity of dealing with this issue.

Information Sharing
In answering questions on how tied in she and DHS were to the nation's intelligence networks and the level of information sharing going on among them, the Secretary offered that she receives a daily briefing from the FBI, the respective intelligence agencies, as well as the President's Daily Security Brief.

Rep. Harman (D-CA), the Committee's and by far the House's most engaged Member on information sharing issues, observed that while DHS has made improvements to information sharing over time, its Information & Analysis Division is still a "stovepipe" when it comes to sharing information with states and locals. She encouraged the Secretary and the Administration to "appoint a cop to lead it."

Rep. Harman also unloaded on DHS' National Applications Office. Commenting that it was still "operating at a weak level," she thought the entire office and its use of military satellites for domestic purposes was "a mistake;" existing laws are working in these areas and to "please shut it down."

In terms of Fusion Centers, the Secretary pledged her support to them, offered that she would speaking at the National Conference for Fusion Centers in two weeks, and that she was going to do everything she could to "pump them up."

REAL-ID
Only one Member, Rep. Souder, asked about REAL-ID. With diplomatic candor, the Secretary shared that the entire program "was stood up with no consultation with state governors;" "had lots of implementation issues;" and, "had no money behind it either." Speaking as a former governor who had to deal with this issue, her authority on it was unquestioned or unchallenged.

Grants
There were several questions about grants, specifically making sure that risk-based approaches were used to address the most pressing needs by Rep. Pascrell (D-NJ)
Pascrell pressed the Secretary to "commit that this Administration will not cut grant funds from the first responder programs."

Secretary Napolitano pledged that she was more than supportive of those programs and shared that she and the Obama Administration would be operating under the assumption that there would no cuts to the programs. She then offered that the entire Department as well as Congress needs to look to at the long-term sustainability for funding for jobs, training and other grant funded efforts. She offered words to the effect of, "I fear that grant programs are not written with sustainability in mind and I'm looking to see how we look to and measure long-term success."

Border/Secure Border Initiative
In the questioning offered by Rep. Carney (D-PA) who shared his disappointment with the progress DHS had made with the SBI Program and in particular P-28 (which occurred in Arizona), he asked the Secretary to outline her thoughts on what needed to be fixed. In response, Sec. Napolitano said any border solution required boots on the ground as well as technology that works as promised. She offered that she and members of her leadership team were looking at what the vendor promised, how bidding for the program occurred and how things were selected.

Chairman Thompson joined the line of questioning and asked how often DHS communicated with her about the P-28 Project while she served as governor of the test area. The Secretary offered that there were some discussions but it was mostly a federal job. She went further and

said that the state was not part of the design, the selection process for technologies for deployment or in the decision on the length of the contracts.

Wrap up Thoughts

Some of the usual things that occur at this type of hearings took place (i.e. invitations from Members to come to their respective districts; assertions that a lab in their district has a solution for that problem; pledges by the Secretary to travel to the various districts to see things first hand; brief hearing recesses for floor votes, etc.) but to sum it up, let's just say some of the same stuff that always happens happened to occur.

In addition to those issues outlined above, other topics included cyber security, the importance of vigilance against terrorism, FEMA accountability, etc., but what was most notable to me about today's Hearing were two things:

• The loss of some senior Committee Member voices; and
• The addition of some new Member voices.

It's always good to get fresh perspectives to homeland issues, and the fact that there are a number of new faces and voices to the Committee is a very healthy thing.

That being said, the loss of Members like Rep. Langevin (D-RI), the smartest Member in Congress on the issue of cyber security, is a real blow to the Committee. I recognize and respect that Members move on from some Committee assignments to rise up and take other positions that are of additional interest to them and their districts. There are certainly smart and able-bodied persons to step up to fill their spots, and I'm confident that Rep. Clarke (D-NY) who succeeds Rep. Langevin as Chair of the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cyber Security, and Science and Technology will do a good job. But when you have people as good as him on the most pressing issue facing our nation's infrastructure (cyber security), it's a helluva void to fill and I thought his loss to the Committee was evident today.

As for the Hearing itself and Sec. Napolitano's first laps in the Congressional Hearing pool, she did great. Overall, there were no fireworks but then again, none were expected. There is still a honeymoon period for everyone involved here, but how long that lasts is anyone's guess.

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NLC Offers Emergency Management Training to Local Officials
February 25, 2009
EHS Today
By Sandy Smith
URL:
http://ehstoday.com/fire_emergencyresponse/news/Emergency_Management_Training_1583/

In the wake of recent disasters such as Hurricanes Rita and Katrina and the Minneapolis bridge collapse, the National League of Cities (NLC) has created the NLC-Emergency Management Training Program to provide in-depth emergency management training to local officials.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) is collaborating with NLC on the project, with support from the Department of Homeland Security.

A series of pilot seminars will begin March 14-15 in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with NLC's annual Congressional City Conference. Subsequent pilot seminars are scheduled for May 8-9 in Chicago; July 13-14 in Mobile, Ala.; and Sept. 21-22 in Bismarck, N.D. The program is expected to offer several more seminars in 2010, focusing on metropolitan, rural and collaborative leadership.

Local leaders will learn their roles in emergency management and will receive an overview in preparing for, responding to and recovering from any type of emergency, disaster or terrorist event. Participants will learn to identify hazards unique to their community, analyze their community's emergency management structure and find available resources to support local officials' responsibilities before, during and after an emergency or crisis.

Each day-and-a-half seminar will address the four missions of emergency management: prevention, protection, response and recovery.

The program supports the Department of Homeland Security's National Preparedness Goals of meeting specific national priorities of expanded regional collaboration, strengthening information sharing and collaboration and interoperability communications.

Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano recently issued an action directive requiring the Department of Homeland Security to work more closely with state, local and tribal governments. The Department will solicit input on critical infrastructure, grant making, interoperability, intelligence collection and dissemination and emergency services.

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San Antonio invests in cross-agency, data-sharing system
February 24, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Mary Rose Roberts
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/mobile_data/news/san-antonio-cross-agency-data-sharing-0224/

San Antonio city officials awarded TriTech Software Systems a $14.7 million contract for the development of a citywide emergency-communications data system. The system includes a computer-aided dispatch, mobile data and records management solution that will create a virtual center between three brick-and-mortar facilities, said Chris Maloney, the company's CEO.

The system will be installed across law-enforcement, fire and EMS agencies for the city of San Antonio, Bexar County and the neighboring city of Schertz. The area wanted to consolidate to support data sharing while still retaining autonomy in separate centers, Maloney explained. Agencies also wanted to share resources, such as police officers or fire trucks, across jurisdictions. The solution was a fiber-optic network that connected each center to a centralized

server that houses TriTech's VisiCAD Command, a Windows-based computer-aided dispatch system. The result that agencies will be able to access geographic and criminal record data from other jurisdictions, he said.

"The centers operate as one, big virtual agency, even though they are physically separated," Maloney said during an interview with Urgent Communications. "This allows them to instantly request resources across agency boundaries."

TriTech also will include its mobile data solution, a wireless PC-based fleet application that extends the CAD system to field personnel in more than 1000 first-responder vehicles. Users will have access to agency records and communicate to nearby units from other agencies via mobile-to-mobile computer messaging, Maloney said. In addition, a records-management solution will integrate the CAD, the mobile solutions and other third-party applications so San Antonio Police, Bexar County Sheriff and Schertz Police departments can share and receive information.

"This is just the start of [the three agencies'] future of data sharing," Maloney said. "They expect this project to grow much larger."

Maloney noted the company is working with subcontractors on the project, including Advanced Public Safety Systems; Emergency Technologies; US Digital Design; Orion Communications; GIS Data Resources; Deccan International; and Priority Dispatch.

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High tech, high pricetag technology supports first responders
February 23, 2009
The Walton Sun
By Mary Brady
URL: http://www.waltonsun.com/news/system_2720___article.html/state_walton.html

Even in a disaster situation, positive outcomes can emerge. South Walton has hurricane Katrina to thank for its present state-of-the-art emergency response system.

In 2006, still reacting to the devastation of Katrina, as well as the issues raised during 9-1-1, the federal Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau was established to "develop, recommend and administer policies pertaining to public safety communications issues."

Thanks to a 2008 grant from that agency, the South Walton Fire District now has a state-of-the-art network in place. SWFD personnel are anxious to explain exactly what that means to citizens of the county.

"This allows us to talk to one another as well as other fire departments across the state," said Marc Anderson, SWFD's Assistant Chief "We can use our radios to receive help from outside agencies and provide better disaster response. Our radios will operate anywhere in the state, now."

Last November, the five fire stations in South Walton threw the switch on the new 800 MHz system. More than $1 million in funding needed for the new system was provided by a federal grant, which was developed in partnership with Walton County.

Prior to effecting this change, the Federal Communications Commission had regulatory clearances as well as equipment upgrades to negotiate before the plan could be made functional. Clearing the 800 MHz bandwidth for emergency communications to prevent interference from other wireless communication networks was necessary.

In addition to making the system interoperable, making 911 services accessible to wireless customers and Internet-based devices, referred to as "enhanced 911 services" was important.

84 percent of the population now uses wireless phones, and 13 percent have no land line service in their homes. Creating a system that allows emergency responders to pinpoint the location of 911 wireless calls has required significant effort.

Robin Etienne, Communications Coordinator, credits the ability of South Walton agencies to cooperate with obtaining the necessary resources to make this happen." All of our people worked together to put this in place," said Etienne.

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