

**Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips**  
**April 17, 2009 – May 1, 2009**

Feds: We can help with disaster recovery..... 2  
Authorities on Track to Meet Most Early Milestones of NECP, Official Says ..... 3  
FCC approves Thales multiband radio ..... 4  
Regardless of incident type, advance planning is the key to response ..... 5  
Open Discussion Leads to Details and Answers..... 7  
Assistance to Firefighters Grant Now Open ..... 8  
Department of Homeland Security Recognizes VoiceInterop as BSI Implementer..... 9  
Surge Capacity: Is your system prepared for the victims of a large-scale incident? ..... 10  
APCO Launches Study to Assess Human Resources in Public Safety Communications ..... 13

## **Feds: We can help with disaster recovery**

April 27, 2009

*Urgent Communications*

By Donny Jackson

URL: [http://urgentcomm.com/policy\\_and\\_law/news/federal-disaster-recovery-help-20090427/](http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/federal-disaster-recovery-help-20090427/)

CHICAGO — When a natural or manmade disaster occurs, federal agencies are willing and able to provide considerable resources to aid the recovery effort. And state and local agencies can take steps to help ensure that the federal effort is a benefit instead of a hindrance, panelists said Thursday during the National Conference on Emergency Communications.

But state and local entities must take the initiative to solicit help from federal agencies, said Rex Whitacre, a national response coordinator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

"I want to support, and I want you to know that I'm not coming in as the federal government to take over your entity," Whitacre said. "That's not my role, our place or what we want to project. We want to support you so that your citizens don't suffer any more than they absolutely have to, and we can't do that unless you ask or request us to help. And just because you request our help doesn't mean we're taking over the state or local environment — I can't stress that enough."

FEMA can provide help in a number of areas, including help with facilities, restoration, tactical support, and planning and coordination, Whitacre said. Federal response is greatly enhanced in states that already have developed disaster plans that FEMA can use to determine where resources are needed most and "what we're dealing with," Whitacre said.

In some cases, resources are best provided by the military. When dealing with such organizations, local and state law-enforcement officials should keep in mind the primary mission of these entities, especially when communicating over non-secure links, said Capt. Christopher Alexander of the U.S. Coast Guard, Atlantic Area.

"As much as we want to be fully engaged and want to be full partners with you guys, there are certain things — from a national-security level and from a practicality standpoint — I can't tell you, [such as] where all of my assets are," Alexander said. "There's drug smugglers, there's illegal-alien smugglers and there's other countries that, if they know that everything is south of this port, then that means that the north part of that region is open, and it exposes us to unneeded vulnerabilities.

"So, when you deal with us, it's not that I don't want to [share such information], it's that I can't."

While the Coast Guard has some domestic responsibilities, the U.S. Navy is funded to "fight the away games" yet provide resources in domestic disaster-recovery situations, said Capt. Eric Patten, operations officer for the U.S. Navy, Southwest. One recent example of such aid was the Navy providing incident awareness and assessment resources that allowed California wildfires to be tracked at night in 2007, he said.

"It helped us understand where the fire was moving, so the firefighters could get ahead of the game," Patten said.

Although the U.S. Navy has significant resources and equipment, they are "very expensive" and can only be deployed when it does not jeopardize the military organization's primary mission.

"Anything we do in a disaster is not planned for on our side and will interrupt somebody's training schedule or somebody's deployment cycle," Patten said. "We have to weigh that very, very heavily against the national defense of the country about what units we send."

In addition, state and local agencies should note that Navy participation in some disaster-recovery efforts may be limited by laws prohibiting the Navy from taking law-enforcement action domestically, Patten said.

"For example, if you have to escort people into an area, we probably wouldn't deploy on that mission ... because we would probably be doing law enforcement on U.S. soil," he said.

###

## **Authorities on Track to Meet Most Early Milestones of NECP, Official Says**

April 27, 2009

*TR Daily*

URL: Not Available

Officials are on track to meet all but one of the first 20 milestones included in the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP), the director of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) told TRDaily today.

"We really are accomplishing a lot of the milestones on time and within budget," Chris Essid said. "But there's still a lot of work to do. I don't want to give you a false sense of hope like we're going to accomplish everything on time. We knew that this plan was forward-leaning and that we were being aggressive, but this issue deserves that."

DHS issued the NECP in July 2008. The 83-page plan has 92 milestones to meet three broad strategic goals to achieve minimum levels of interoperability for communities in urban and other areas by 2010, 2011, and 2013. The document, mandated by Congress, is the nation's first strategic plan designed to improve emergency communications.

Mr. Essid reiterated that 11 of the 12 six-month milestones were met. The one still outstanding involves the establishment of a NPSPAC channel naming guide - a process slowed up by the time it takes to get a standard approved by the American National Standards Institute. "We totally misjudged how long that takes," Mr. Essid conceded. In all, he said, officials are on track to complete all but that milestone among the first 20.

Mr. Essid said that last week's first National Conference on Emergency Communications in Chicago provided a valuable opportunity for federal, state, local, and tribal officials to interact

and figure out what's working and what's not in implementation of the NECP and state interoperability plans. About 450 people attended the event, but Mr. Essid said he hopes to boost those numbers for next year's conference by webcasting it, which could allow public safety officials tuning in remotely to ask questions. "We think that next year, there's a huge opportunity to really take this message mainstream," he added.

He noted, however, that his staff sent Twitter updates of this year's conference, allowing people around the country to follow the activities. "It's almost like building an army of first responders to actually go out and drive this stuff to implementation," he said of the momentum he hopes last week's event helped produce.

Mr. Essid said that attendees said they wanted to follow progress in meeting each of the NECP milestones so his office will either post information online or otherwise distribute it.

He also said that OEC's work has not been slowed up by the arrival of new senior-level political appointees at DHS. "As new folks come in and new political leadership [arrives], you have to ramp them up and get them educated on everything you do," he said. "But, in the meantime, we've been able to just move forward, get our mission done and we were told, 'Hey, keep doing what you're doing.'"

He noted that DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano "communicated that one of her priorities is to increase coordination with state, local, and tribal governments. That's kind of music to my ears because those are . . . most of our biggest customers."

First responders have also told OEC officials that they want the office to get involved in 700 megahertz band issues, Mr. Essid said, adding that any such involvement must be defined. He noted that the NECP touches on the use of the 700 MHz band, but more detail can be added once decisions are made. "Once some things are decided, then we can amend the national plan to be more specific," he said. "We kind of have some general language in there. It's almost like a placeholder." - Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

###

## **FCC approves Thales multiband radio**

April 23, 2009

*Urgent Communications*

By Donny Jackson

URL: [http://urgentcomm.com/mobile\\_voice/news/fcc-approves-thales-multiband-radio-20090423/](http://urgentcomm.com/mobile_voice/news/fcc-approves-thales-multiband-radio-20090423/)

Thales Communications announced Wednesday that the FCC certified its multiband, software-defined Liberty portable radio.

"This is the first multiband radio covering the full public-safety spectrum to be FCC-approved," Thales spokeswoman Sheila Gindes said during an interview with Urgent Communications.

Introduced in 2008, the Thales Liberty portable radio operates on analog, P25 conventional and P25 trunking systems in all public-safety frequency bands — UHF, VHF and 700/800 MHz. In addition to trade-show demonstrations of these capabilities, security personnel used the Liberty portable during the presidential inauguration and the Academy Awards early this year, said Liberty product applications specialist Scott Glazer during an interview with Urgent Communications at IWCE last month.

But arguably the most comprehensive field testing is being done in collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security's science and technology directorate, along with the testing necessary to achieve FCC certification.

"This approval from the FCC further validates the capabilities, performance and maturity of the Liberty multiband radio," Steve Nichols, Thales' director of homeland security and public safety, said in a prepared statement. "This is an important advancement for the public safety industry."

Delivery of the first mass-produced Liberty portables is scheduled for the fall, Glazer said at IWCE. Thales plans to have a mobile version of the Liberty — a prototype of which was displayed at IWCE — commercially available.

###

## **Regardless of incident type, advance planning is the key to response**

April 23, 2009

*Urgent Communications*

By Glenn Bischoff

URL: [http://urgentcomm.com/policy\\_and\\_law/news/advance-incident-plan-20090423/](http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/advance-incident-plan-20090423/)

Imagine trying to convince 80 officials of various kinds — including the mayor — to drop what they're doing to participate in a multi-day tabletop exercise. Now imagine trying to convince them to travel to a remote mountaintop more than a thousand miles away to attend this exercise. While that might seem like a mission bordering on the impossible, it's exactly what the city of Minneapolis did in 2000, with crucial results.

"It showed the politicians that should something big happen, the city's communications infrastructure wouldn't be adequate," said Scott Wiggins, director of the state's Division of Emergency Communications Networks.

Something big did happen when the Interstate 35 Bridge that spans the Mississippi River in Minneapolis collapsed on Aug. 1, 2007. Wiggins showed slides from the incident during the National Emergency Communications Conference, which is being presented this week in Chicago by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications. The images were startling. Within seconds, the entire bridge was in the river. A total of 104 vehicles were affected, some of them landing in the water or getting pinned under the structure. Thirteen people were killed and another 145 were injured.

"Watching those clips brought back the tightness in my chest," Wiggins said.

As a result of the tabletop exercise held seven years earlier, the state made changes to its communications infrastructure, including the incorporations of the city's 800 MHz trunking system into the statewide ARMER (allied radio matrix for emergency response) system and deploying an updated computer-aided dispatch system (CAD) with GIS and regional coordination of frequencies. All of the efforts contributed to a solid response effort, Wiggins said, adding that the network handled 114,000 push-to-talk transmissions in the first six hours of the event, with only 1% encountering a busy signal.

Wiggins is a fan of tabletop exercises, though he pointed out that "you can't simulate a bridge falling into the water." Another fan is Jim Vlassopoulos, deputy chief of Washington D.C. Fire and EMS, who was in charge of communications for a completely different type of event. Where Wiggins had no time at all to prepare for the bridge collapse, Vlassopoulos had five months to get ready for the inauguration of President Barack Obama.

While big events are nothing new in the nation's capital, this particular event had some unique characteristics, Vlassopoulos said. First, there were heightened concerns regarding the potential for civil disturbances. Second, 1.8 million people and 3,000 tour buses descended on the National Mall. "We squeezed the equivalent of the populations of Boston, Miami and Atlanta into that area," he said. Third, a plethora of responders ranging from volunteers to the U.S. Coast Guard had to be coordinated. "There were a lot of moving parts," Vlassopoulos said. Finally, the day was cold — by Washington standards — with temperatures staying below the freezing mark. The crowds arrived far earlier than normal, well before 6 a.m., which increased hypothermia instances.

Nevertheless, all of the planning paid off, Vlassopoulos said. A special CAD system was put into place to monitor and coordinate the activities of the dozens of federal, state, district and local agencies that had a hand in keeping order. Neighboring Arlington, Va., contributed two talk-group channels, which allowed Vlassopoulos to put the Washington public works department onto the communications plan for the inauguration; typically public works communicates using a commercial P2T network. Arlington also contributed its cache of radios, each of which was programmed with the talk-group channels, which made it easy to get public works personnel onto the network.

A big help was early adoption of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). "That will help you get through a lot of challenging situations," Vlassopoulos said.

One lesson learned from the experience, according to Vlassopoulos, is that anticipating needs and leveraging outside infrastructure in advance of an event pays great dividends. "All we had to do was pick up the phone," he said. "If you're not partnering, you're going to be behind the eight ball."

Despite the extensive planning, not everything went smoothly for Wiggins and Vlassopoulos. In Minnesota, agencies from as far away as 30 miles were listening to transmissions even though they had no involvement in the bridge-collapse response. Tying up their frequencies in this

manner affected the operations of those agencies, Wiggins said. "If you're not part of the event, stay off the talk groups," he said.

In Washington, people arrived for the inauguration far earlier than officials expected; as a result, not enough emergency medical system (EMS) personnel who were assigned to the event were in place when hypothermia began to set in. EMS personnel from stations throughout the city were sent to fill in the gaps — but they lacked the proper credentials to enter the highly secured area.

Busy signals also were a bigger-than-expected problem. "We had more than 12,000 busies and that affected operations," Vlassopoulos said. "We now know we need to enhance our system, become P25-compliant and perhaps add some 700 MHz frequencies."

###

## **Open Discussion Leads to Details and Answers**

April 22, 2009

*Signal Online*

By Maryann Lawlor

URL: <http://www.afcea.org/signal/signalscape/index.php/2009/04/open-discussion-leads-to-details-and-answers/>

CHICAGO – Both federal and local emergency response leaders opened the first formal session of the National Conference on Emergency Communications by inviting attendees to share openly their success stories as well as the challenges they face. More than 450 representatives from emergency response organizations are attending the conference, including personnel from the military as well as large and small U.S. communities and Guam, Hawaii, the United Kingdom and Canada.

Although technology was on everyone's mind, Raymond Orozco, director, Chicago Office of Emergency Management, emphasized that interoperability is about more than radios and computer systems. "We need to make sure that operations drive the technology and not the other way around," Orozco said. Theodore O'Keefe, deputy superintendent, Chicago Police Department, added that "sometimes interoperability can present daunting challenges for us, challenges that we face every day."

The primary focus of the two-hour afternoon session was the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP). The plan was released in July 2008, and includes three goals for communications improvements during the next three years. The goals focus on establishing response-level communications within hours of an incident. According to Chris Essid, director, Office of Emergency Communications, DHS, implementation of the plan is going well. Of the 93 milestones that comprise the plan, nearly 20 already have been met.

Essid also emphasized that the NECP is not a federal plan but rather one that includes the input and ideas from first responder organizations throughout the United States and its territories. Consequently, it is up to all of these organizations to make the plan work, he said. Most

importantly, the goal is to make the NECP more than just a document; it is meant to be a roadmap for the future and remain viable and current.

“The NECP will help us focus on priorities. These are not all of the priorities. I like to think of it as the first five to 10 miles of a marathon. You can’t complete a marathon without the first five to 10 miles,” Essid said. In addition, he emphasized, the activities outlined in the plan must be completed; the NECP is not just a book to put on the shelf.

Both DHS and the OEC are well aware of the economic challenges that cities and regions face; however, because missions must still be completed, they will simply have to be done more efficiently and effectively, Essid said. Grant programs have been restructured to meet some of these needs, he noted. Using social media tools also can help facilitate communications, he added.

After the initial presentations, Chris McGoff, discussion facilitator, stressed that the conference belongs to the attendees, made sure that everyone had a copy of the NECP and directed audience members at eight-person tables to discuss the plan. After introductions, they were to dig right in and converse about the plan, ask each other questions and determine if someone at the table had the answers. Those questions that the team could not answer were then answered “by the most knowledgeable person in the room” rather than designated panelists.

Attendees were invited to e-mail their questions to [oc@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:oc@hq.dhs.gov), and the e-mailed were then read aloud; many of the answers were provided by OEC leaders. Questions can continue to be sent to this e-mail address by conference attendees as well as emergency personnel unable to attend the event throughout the conference.

###

## **Assistance to Firefighters Grant Now Open**

April 21, 2009

Gant Daily

By Patrick Creighton

URL: <http://www.gantdaily.com/news/43/ARTICLE/49378/2009-04-21.html>

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Representative Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson announced today that The Department of Homeland Security has posted the FY2009 Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) Program Guidance on the AFG Web site. Applications for these grants must be received by May 20, 2009, at 5:00 p.m.

“The AFG program provides a critical and vital service to fire companies across America,” said Thompson, a 30 year veteran of the Howard Volunteer Fire Company. “As a volunteer first responder of 30 years, I know firsthand the financial struggles that many companies encounter. This program, while very competitive in nature, enables fire departments to purchase equipment, receive training, and conduct fire safety and prevention programs in the community. A worthy investment of taxpayer dollars.”



Nationally, the AFG awards, which are distributed in phases, will provide approximately \$510 million to fire departments and nonaffiliated emergency medical service organizations throughout the country. AFG awards aim to enhance response capabilities and to more effectively protect the health and safety of the public with respect to fire and other hazards.

An applicant tutorial is available through the [www.firegrantsupport.com](http://www.firegrantsupport.com) website. The tutorial provides valuable grant information and assist in the preparation and submittal of applications. In addition, the applicant tutorial will provide an overview of the funding priorities and evaluation criteria. Applicants who have questions regarding the Assistance to Firefighters Grants opportunity should contact the help desk at 1-866-274-0960 or via email at [firegrants@dhs.gov](mailto:firegrants@dhs.gov). During the application period, the help desk will operate Monday to Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

“Along with the professionals at FEMA, my staff and I are prepared to assist emergency service organizations and fire companies in the Fifth District throughout this process,” continued Thompson. “I strongly encourage each qualified organization to pursue these grant opportunities and to contact my office with any additional questions.”

The AFG Program is administered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Grant Programs Directorate in coordination with the U.S. Fire Administration.

###

## **Department of Homeland Security Recognizes VoiceInterop as BSI Implementer**

April 20, 2009

*TMCNet*

By Jayashree Adkoli

URL: <http://voipservices.tmcnet.com/feature/articles/54514-department-homeland-security-recognizes-voiceinterop-as-bsi-implementer.htm>

United States Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS’s) Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) has identified VoiceInterop as a Bridging System Interface (BSI) implementer.

BSI is an interface between two bridging or gateway devices that can be used to connect disparate radio systems and are widely implemented in public safety agencies.

The growing demand for VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) technology from manufacturers has raised questions and confusion around the use of the technology in public safety communications. In order to address this, the U.S. DHS’s Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology’s (NIST’s) Office of Law Enforcement Standards gathered key stakeholders from both the public safety and industry communities, and formed a new group called “Public Safety VoIP Working Group.”

Now, the VoIP Working Group includes Department of Homeland Security (DHS) OIC, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the Office of Law Enforcement Standards; and the Institute for Telecommunications Sciences (ITS).

Primarily focusing on improving emergency response interoperability through the use of VoIP technology, the VoIP Working Group defines and clarifies the expectations for VoIP - in the public safety environment. In addition, it discusses VoIP's strengths and limitations, defines the requirements for its effective use, and recognizes the need for specifications to improve VoIP's value in public safety communications.

Currently, OIC, NIST, and ITS together are working with emergency responders as well as industry representatives to define a common connection for bridging devices using VoIP, regardless of the manufacturer, said the company.

The VoIP Working Group's first specification is the September 2008 finalized BSI (Bridging Systems Interface). The BSI will be providing basic voice interoperability when implemented in bridging equipments, said the Group.

Apart from specializing in standards-based UC middleware application development and integration of IT/Telecom systems, Boca Raton, Florida-based VoiceInterop ( News - Alert), a subsidiary of Cleartronic, also manufactures and sells its series of patent pending AudioMate360 IP gateway devices.

Larry Reid, CEO of VoiceInterop, said, "We are pleased that DHS included VoiceInterop along with Twisted Pair Solutions (News - Alert), Cisco, Raytheon, and Motorola to name a few."

###

## **Surge Capacity: Is your system prepared for the victims of a large-scale incident?**

April 20, 2009

*EMS Magazine*

By Raphael M. Barishansky and Jessica Langan

URL: <http://www.emsresponder.com/publication/article.jsp?pubId=1&id=9372>

The attacks of 9/11, the anthrax incidents that followed, SARS, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and other events have shaken our nation's healthcare infrastructure, including EMS systems. Every day we face the possibilities of further disasters, outbreaks and terrorist acts. As first responders to incidents of all sizes and varieties, EMS systems are heavily impacted by these events. We can easily be thrown into chaos through a lack of ability to respond.

The populations we serve remain vulnerable because of our lack of surge capacity. Most EMS systems are stretched to their limits on a daily basis, and the additional stress of an unexpected surge from a catastrophic event can be overwhelming. Without proper planning, systems can fail. So what should EMS know about surge and surge capacity? How does it impact us, and what can we do about it?

## **SURGE CAPACITY**

A surge is a sudden or unexpected increase in patient volume that has the potential to severely challenge or exceed the capacity of the healthcare system. The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), in a 2004 policy statement entitled Health Care System Surge Capacity Recognition, Preparedness, and Response, defines surge capacity as "a measurable representation of a healthcare system's ability to manage a sudden or rapidly progressive influx of patients within the currently available resources at a given point in time." Surge capacity can also be defined as the maximum delivery of services a system can provide if all its available and potential resources are mobilized.

Surge capacity is a necessity. This was emphasized in the Institute of Medicine's 2006 Emergency Medical Services at the Crossroads report: In its recommendations for achieving its vision of a 21st century emergency care system, the IOM targets enhancing the disaster preparedness of EMS systems through increased funding and training of personnel.

A number of states have addressed EMS surge capacity and developed plans. One of the most comprehensive is the EMS Surge Capacity Planning Kit released in 2006 by the Georgia Division of Public Health, which includes planning worksheets for personnel and other resources, sample memoranda of understanding to utilize and various appendixes, including scenarios and a planning kit evaluation. Another example is the North Dakota Department of Health's Public Health and Medical All Hazards Plan, which, among aspects such as prepositioning of medical resources and hospital surge capacity, references EMS in regard to personnel training, development of mutual aid agreements, identification and use of nontraditional transportation (e.g., school buses), creation of regional equipment caches and development of regional response teams.

## **SYSTEM REALITIES**

Most EMS systems run at or above full capacity on a daily basis. Long waits for ambulances are common in many parts of the country. In some cases, patients with high-priority medical complaints must wait for available ambulances to be dispatched. This problem is compounded by full-capacity emergency departments diverting ambulances and long waits to turn over EMS patients to ED staff. Such circumstances are hard on personnel and potentially hazardous to patients. At the same time, we're dealing with understaffed EMS systems that are trying to find and keep employees, limited budgets and a shortage of providers to hire in many parts of the country. As well, demand for EMS continues to increase in many areas. The aging of our population, fragmentation of healthcare and lack of places to go besides EDs for acute medical issues will continue to result in increasing call volumes and turnaround times in many systems.

These are our day-to-day realities. So what happens when—during, say, the busiest time of the busiest day of the week, with all of our resources deployed—the unthinkable occurs? It could be any type of large-scale incident: terrorist attack, bridge collapse, building fire or multi-vehicle crash. How will an EMS system react? Will it be able to react at all? Where will it find that needed surge capacity?

There are no easy answers to these questions. The answers will also be system-dependent. Rather than looking outward for solutions, EMS systems must carefully examine their own internal organizational strengths and weaknesses. We've seen time and time again that waiting for state and federal assets to solve immediate problems in large-scale emergencies simply isn't realistic. Therefore, EMS systems must make heavy investments in their own personnel, policies and equipment. This means making arrangements in advance, establishing MOUs and solid mutual aid agreements. It means stockpiling key equipment. Older vehicles no longer in service can be transformed into MCI vehicles, loaded and ready to go with the supplies staff will need to care for large numbers of patients. Larger systems may need to invest in additional equipment such as triage tents and MCI command vehicles to aid in managing large-scale incidents. These preparations can also entail taking equipment you may have previously discarded and keeping it around for surge events.

But surge capacity not only means amassing stuff, it also means making more of the resources you have now. Providers need to be well trained and supervised to function efficiently. Training should include an emphasis on multicasualty scenarios: rapid and effective triage techniques (including the use of tags, tarps and other system-specific adjuncts), field treatment, communications and interagency cooperation.

### **SURGE CAPACITY PLANNING**

The concepts of surge capacity and what your agency, in concert with mutual aid agencies, hospitals and public health entities, will be doing during an incident where surge capacity is required needs to be consistently drilled under a variety of conditions. A critical element of this planning is your supervisory staff being well versed in the incident command system and their own roles and responsibilities in a major incident, as well as how their roles relate to others in the larger incident command structure. This can be done by ensuring that staff employ ICS in their day-to-day activities, so they'll be comfortable with it during a major incident.

### **POLICY ISSUES**

Policy issues likely to arise during a crisis must be considered and frequently revisited. These include how the communications center will handle the increase in call volume, and what happens if call-takers can't keep up or the system fails. Details related to calling in off-duty personnel and holding over on-duty employees should be resolved before an incident occurs.

For EMS systems with unions, labor representatives are a necessary inclusion in the planning process. Discuss with area hospitals an appropriate means for distributing patients based on the hospitals' capacities and resources. Mutual aid agreements with other EMS systems should be established and interagency drills conducted so that issues such as triage systems, overall interoperability and communications and command structures are worked out in advance.

### **SUPPLIES**

To meet surges, EMS systems must have adequate supplies, especially for BLS care. These include stockpiles of backboards and other spinal immobilization devices, trauma dressings, splints and blankets. Ample quantities of disposable gloves, gowns, facemasks and disinfectants should be available for response to infectious outbreaks, as well as appropriate protective

clothing and respirators for chemical threats. There should also be a mechanism in place to restock ambulances as they run out of equipment. This can occur in multiple locations.

In larger systems, strategies may include predeployment of caches at several locations as a way to minimize resupply times and keep transport vehicles in service. Most systems have at least some reserve vehicles to meet routine needs; however, if there's a marked increase in patients needing transport, this reserve may not be sufficient. Because purchasing additional backup vehicles may be cost-prohibitive, work at identifying alternative means of transportation, such as the use of local transit buses for lower-acuity patients. Highly regarded systems like Boston EMS have utilized this solution effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

It's critical to remember that surge capacity in EMS systems is about more than just having an extra few ambulances or the ability to recall personnel. It is about having a plan and a system in place, and being well-versed in them. Experience has shown the need for collaboration between EMS systems, hospitals, public health systems and health departments to build a realistic approach to surge capacity. The process involves needs assessments, curriculum development, training and outreach. This could mean thinking way outside the box—a paper published last summer in the *American Journal of Disaster Medicine*, for instance, suggested enlisting untapped medical resources like dentists to complement more traditional emergency responders.

Developing surge capacity is easier said than done. It involves a significant commitment of money and time, public support and political buy-in. The role EMS plays in disaster planning and response is tremendous—and one that every member of the EMS community must be aware of and speak out about to our local, state and federal leaders. EMS leaders must be prepared to demonstrate that surge capacity isn't just an EMS issue; it's a community issue. Developing it will ultimately benefit the public under busy conditions and in the case of disasters that threaten survival.

###

## **APCO Launches Study to Assess Human Resources in Public Safety Communications**

*APCO News*

April 20, 2009,

URL: [http://www.apco911.org/new/news/study\\_human\\_resources.php](http://www.apco911.org/new/news/study_human_resources.php)

Alexandria, Va. - The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International today announced their intent to study the current status of training standards and certification requirements, retirement options and other key human resource issues related to public safety communications professionals. The study will be conducted by APCO International's newly appointed Professional Communications Human Resource Taskforce (PRO-CHRT), symbolically approved during National Public Safety Telecommunications Week.

Specifically, PRO-CHRT will conduct a study to identify the professional certification levels and minimum training requirements for public safety communications professionals in the U.S. In

addition, the study will examine retirement benefits and the Fair Labor Standards Act as they pertain to public safety communications professionals' compensation and scheduling.

Several APCO International chapters are currently addressing these issues, encouraging a national review by APCO International. The Florida and Montana Chapters have been actively pursuing retirement benefits for public safety communications professionals commensurate with sworn officers in their states. In addition, the Florida and Virginia Chapters have been working on training and certification requirements and designations for public safety communications professionals in their states.

The PRO-CHRT study will lead to a toolbox intended to help APCO International members empower themselves to address these issues in their states and will include a synopsis of state labor laws, retirement benefits and training and certification requirements. In addition, the deliverables will include sample legislation and effective strategies to advocate for these issues.

"Last week we celebrated National Public Safety Telecommunications Week, which honors the usually overlooked and underappreciated professionals in the public safety communications community," APCO International President Chris Fischer said. "This effort will help us honor them everyday by ensuring the needs of these dedicated professionals are addressed locally and nationally."

###