Homeland Security

Office of Emergency Communications

Emergency Communications Forum

Volume 16
2015

In This Issue:

A Note from OEC Leadership

Cascadia Rising: Catastrophic Earthquake and Tsunami Functional Exercise

DHS Office of Emergency Communications & Outreach to Western Tribes

Emergency Communications Planning for the 50th Anniversary of the Bloody Sunday Civil Rights March

OEC's Engagement with the Utilities Telecom Council (UTC)

Recap of Admiral Ron Hewitt's Utilities & NECP Webinar

OEC Team on the Road

A Note from OEC Leadership

Ron Hewitt, Director, Office of Emergency Communications

In January 2015, the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) leadership team launched a 100-day plan to jumpstart implementation of the 2014 National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP), the most recent update to the Nation's overarching strategic plan for enhancing emergency communications capabilities and interoperability nationwide. In addition to initiating implementation of the NECP, the 100-Day Plan sought to actualize OEC's center of gravity (i.e., ensuring the Nation's emergency communications), institutionalize cross-branch collaboration, establish a fresh approach to OEC operations, and enhance OEC's value to its stakeholders.

The leadership team developed 16 action items to guide the plan to fruition. These included: developing an approach to align Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs) to the NECP; creating a strategy to improve support for federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial public safety agencies operating along the northern and southern borders; developing a marketing strategy to enhance external stakeholder awareness of Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP), a program that authorizes national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) organizations to receive priority treatment for vital voice and data circuits or other telecommunications services; and many more activities to ensure the successful implementation of the 2014 NECP and improve intra-governmental and stakeholder collaboration.

The 100-Day Plan concluded on May 8, 2015, marking a significant milestone and new direction for OEC. The activities we completed in support of the plan produced tangible results contributing to the continued success of OEC's mission. Further, they helped us define the current state of the emergency communications environment and better understand how emerging trends will influence OEC's future work. For example, we identified and developed a list of NS/EP standards – a living, comprehensive repository of sorts – that will keep OEC better informed about these standards and their potential impact on OEC's stakeholders. The Office will leverage this information to enhance its service offerings.

The Plan's success notwithstanding, we must remain focused and committed to maintain momentum moving forward. In the coming weeks, I look forward to conversing with my colleagues who contributed to the 100-Day Plan and learning

how their efforts will continue to shape OEC's work. Perhaps more than anything, I look forward to seeing their efforts translated into new and improved programs, services, and operating procedures to provide OEC's stakeholders with the support they need to ensure the Nation's emergency communications.

Cascadia Rising: Catastrophic Earthquake and Tsunami Functional Exercise

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Coordinator Bruce Richter has been involved in Cascadia Rising, a functional exercise intended to test federal, state, local, and tribal governments', as well as select private sector and non-governmental organizations' ability to jointly respond to a Cascadia Subduction Zone (CSZ) [1] 9.0 magnitude earthquake and tsunami along the West Coast of the United States. The exercise scenario is based on the historical precedent that earthquakes along the fault separating the Juan de Fuca and North American plates, between Vancouver Island and California, are thought to occur every 200-500 years. With the knowledge that the last major earthquake and tsunami along the CSZ occurred in 1700, regional emergency management personnel have begun a series of workshops to prepare for the multi-state catastrophic earthquake and tsunami functional exercise.

The planning sessions focus on the roles and coordination of response agencies. The sessions will culminate in the four-day exercise scheduled for June 7-10, 2016, during which emergency response centers at all levels of government and the private sector will coordinate and execute simulated field response operations. "When a significant seismic event does occur along the Cascadia fault, the impacts to the region will be significant. Working through some of those consequences, and what our response might look like so we can identify gaps and improve the response plan, is timely and the basis of this exercise," said Mr. Richter, who has attended initial state exercise planning meetings in Oregon and FEMA Region 10 Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Working Group meetings. The exercise is intended to help train and prepare coastal communities along the subduction zone for the anticipated natural disaster. Along with OEC, participants include dozens of county public safety agencies in Washington and Oregon, the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, Washington Emergency Public Information Network, FEMA, and major military commands.

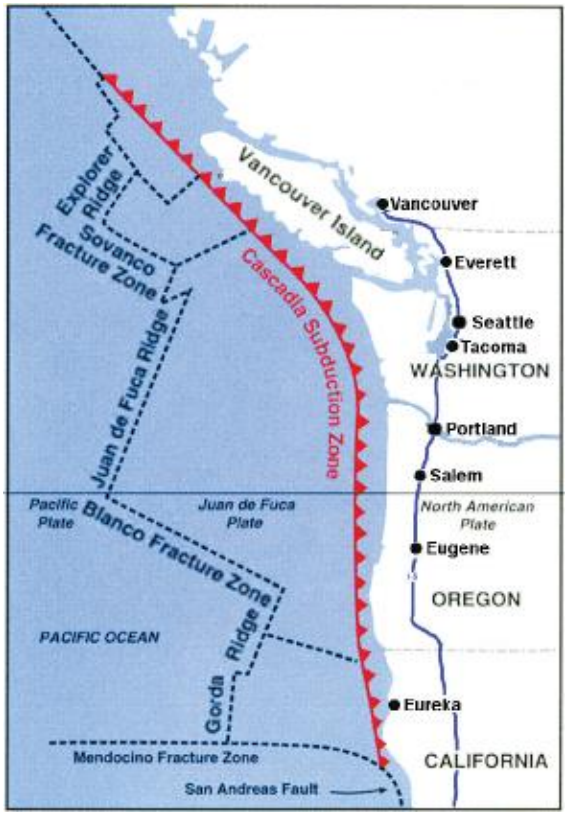
Cascadia Rising affords OEC a unique opportunity to participate in a large scale exercise with a variety of different stakeholders from all levels of government. A series of ramp-up seminars and workshops have been planned to convene emergency management and response officials to share information on disaster plans, procedures, and processes in preparation for the culminating exercise. These include a Cascadia Rising Situational Awareness and Common Operating Picture Workshop series, as well as a FEMA Emergency Support Function (ESF) #2 Operational Communications Working Group. OEC is one of the primary agencies that coordinates ESF2, which provides emergency communications support to federal, state, local, and tribal governments when their systems have been impacted, along with the restoration of public communications infrastructure. At the last ESF2 meeting held on May 6, 2015 at the FEMA Region 10 headquarters in Bothell, Washington, topics discussed included alerts and

warnings, response/recovery telecommunications services, restoration of communications infrastructure, and the role of federal communications providers.

One of the core capabilities being tested during the Cascadia Rising Exercise and in which OEC will have a role is operational communications. The overarching objective is to demonstrate the ability of emergency operations centers (EOCs) to establish and sustain voice and data communications with other EOCs and with the general public, to include basic restoration of communications infrastructure within the impacted area to support response operations. The idea is to ensure that EOCs can operate in a compromised communications environment by utilizing tactical voice and data communications, including OEC priority service programs such as Wireless Priority Service and Government Emergency Telecommunications Service. Another objective is to coordinate post-disaster assessments of communications infrastructure in order to assess system damages, and coordinate with infrastructure owners to prioritize basic repairs to the communications infrastructure.

A large magnitude CSZ fault earthquake and tsunami is perhaps one of the most complex and impactful disaster scenarios that emergency management and public safety officials in the Pacific Northwest could envision. Due to its potentially far-reaching effect, response operations would depend on effective coordination and integration of governments at all levels. As the entity charged with supporting and promoting communications used by emergency responders and government officials to keep America safe, secure, and resilient, OEC will continue to play a vital role during the Cascadia Rising exercise.

Cascadia Subduction Zone Map



DHS Office of Emergency Communications & Outreach to Western Tribes

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) strives to make tribal outreach a priority, and this is especially evident in the Office's Regional Coordination and Technical Assistance branches. Increased attention has been paid to Tribal Nations due to some of the unique issues these stakeholders face, such as lack of education and awareness of emergency management services and homeland security in Indian Country, the non-availability of tribal funding to match federal grant programs, and the continuity of emergency management personnel.

Established to strengthen emergency communications and response capabilities at all levels of government, the OEC Regional Coordination Branch (RCB) relies on trusted relationships, collaboration, and field awareness with its stakeholders. The OEC Coordinators are the actors on the ground, supporting the preparation, coordination, and improvement of stakeholder agencies' emergency communications capabilities and operations. In turn, the Coordinators provide OEC with feedback and assessments of emergency communications activities, accomplishments, and gaps across the Nation. Likewise, the Technical Assistance (TA) program serves all 56 states and territories and provides direct support to state, local, and tribal emergency responders and government officials through the development and delivery of training, tools, and onsite assistance to advance public safety interoperable communications capabilities. Often, the two branches work in hand-in-hand in their emergency communications assistance to OEC's broad stakeholder base.

One such example of the Coordinators' role in tribal outreach is Dan Hawkins's continued participation in the Montana Indian Nations Working Group (MINWG). Established as a sub-committee of the state's Homeland Security Task Force in January 2003 and now an independent group supported by the Montana Disaster & Emergency Services Division, the MINWG promotes inter-tribal collaboration in emergency management planning. The MINWG is also a participating member of the National Tribal Emergency Management Council (NTEMC). One of its major accomplishments has been the development of a memorandum of understanding among the participating Indian Nations for mutual aid and resource sharing in the event of a natural disaster or major incident. The Working Group's membership includes homeland security and emergency management points of contact for each of the seven participating Indian Nations (Blackfeet, Chippewa-Cree, Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Crow, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, and Northern Cheyenne), along with representatives from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and Montana Disaster & Emergency Services Division, among others. Since its founding in 2003, MINWG has welcomed OEC to participate regularly, and as a result, OEC has transitioned from guest to "partnering agency." In this role, OEC is further able to support and promote communications for participating emergency responders and governing officials during all hazards and threats.

In addition, OEC has provided technical assistance to some of the Indian Nations comprising the MINWG, including the Blackfeet Nation. During initial meetings with Mr. Hawkins and OEC's TA staff, tribal officials described the current communications problems and challenges facing the Blackfeet. OEC agreed to prepare draft standard operating procedures (SOPs) for their fire and law enforcement disciplines on how to conduct effective dispatch within tribal boundaries. During June 2013, ICTAP staff

conducted an SOP development workshop with the Blackfeet Tribal 911 supervisor, police chief, emergency manager, and tribal homeland security director to identify dispatch protocols and procedures and to obtain channel template and usage information. OEC then provided the Blackfeet a draft communications SOP for their law enforcement, fire, and EMS functions the following October, which enabled the Blackfeet to establish standardized policies and procedures governing the operation of the Blackfeet Nation Public Safety Communications Center.

OEC will continue its tribal outreach activities through regional Coordinator Bruce Richter's participation in the upcoming 12th Annual Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Conference, which is again partnering with the NTEMC to raise greater awareness of tribal emergency management programs. During the meeting, scheduled for August 10-14, 2015 in Spokane, Washington, Mr. Richter will discuss the 2014 National Emergency Communications Plan, provide an overview of Tribal Technical Assistance offerings, and inform participants of OEC priority telecommunications services to support emergency preparedness communications. This builds on OEC's previous work with Tribal Nations in the Pacific Northwest, including technical assistance to the Warm Springs Tribes of Oregon. In this case, OEC provided an assessment of their 9-1-1 capabilities and needs on the heels of the tribe building a new Criminal Justice Center, which will include an upgrade to their 9-1-1 center. Tribal officials requested that OEC assess their 9-1-1 needs and further assist with the development of a transition plan to the new Criminal Justice Center. Through continued collaboration and targeted engagements with the tribal nations, OEC strives to advance emergency communications and support Indian Country to achieve interoperability.

Emergency Communications Planning for the 50th Anniversary of the Bloody Sunday Civil Rights March

The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday civil rights march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital, Montgomery, was expected to draw crowds of more than 40,000 to Selma and surrounding cities during the weekend of March 6-8, 2015. The prospect of a large crowd descending on a town with an estimated population of 19,000 concerned the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) and Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) as they began collaborative emergency communications planning with local and regional partners in late 2014. In addition to these large crowds, members of the congressional delegation, key representatives from multiple federal agencies, former President George W. Bush, and current President Barack Obama also planned to observe the bloody clash between police and peaceful protestors that helped usher in the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The presence of these key representatives escalated the status of the event, leading Alabama's Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, Chuck Murph, to consult the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) for subject matter expertise from individuals experienced in the complexity of high profile Special Event Assessment Rating 3 or National Special Security Events. Together with state law enforcement, U.S. Capitol Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Secret Service, and the National Park Services, these federal, state, and local entities worked with OEC to create a comprehensive emergency communications plan to ensure interoperability.

Primary concerns for emergency communications planners included the potential for wireless network congestion (due to the high volume of traffic) and the absence of a unified interoperable communication system in Alabama, which relies instead on a combination of individual and shared systems in multiple frequency bands. Even though the state has enhanced these capabilities through a robust Strategic Technology Reserve[1], participating agencies still had to rely on alternate methods to ensure interoperable communications. These included: developing a communications plan to provide communications to Lowndes County and the cities of Selma, Marion, and Montgomery, through trunking and conventional channels in 700, 800, UHF, and VHF; and patching together multiple systems to complete a communications path between Montgomery and Selma.

As the commemoration approached, the systems were tested and evaluated. This testing was instrumental to the success of day-of emergency communications capabilities, and was further enhanced by the use of SouthernLinc, a commercially owned network used by state and local first responders, which provided vital push-to-talk capabilities for key Communications Unit personnel. OEC provided additional support through its Telecommunications Service Priority for AEMA's dispatch operations. Additionally, ALEA requested Government Emergency Telecommunications Service and Wireless Priority Service access for key individuals throughout the weekend. Due to the planning and testing, the commemoration occurred without major interruptions to communications. Federal, state, and local entities worked together ensuring that attention remained on the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday Civil Rights March.

OEC's Engagement with the Utilities Telecom Council (UTC)

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) has provided a series of briefings at Utilities Telecom Council (UTC) regional meetings over the past several months as part of the Office's effort to engage the Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources (CIKR) stakeholder community. Founded in 1948 to advocate for the allocation of additional radio spectrum for power utilities, UTC has since evolved into an organization that represents electric, gas, and water utilities; critical infrastructure companies; and other industry stakeholders. It is a technically-oriented organization that understands the public safety perspective, provides telecommunications services to its constituents, and is willing to assist OEC's efforts to improve operability and interoperability of emergency communications.

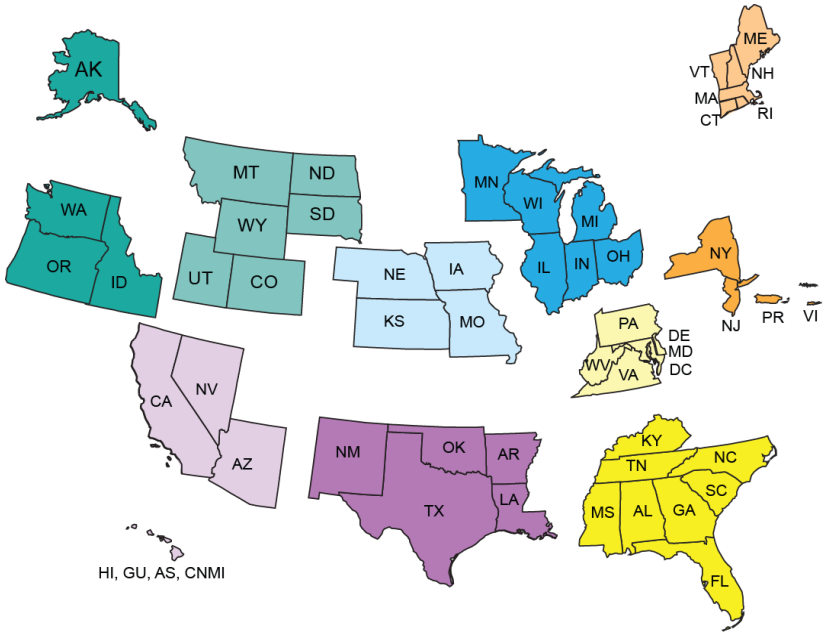
To date, OEC has provided briefings of the 2014 National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) to UTC Regions 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 (see Figure 1 below). Past engagements include those held at UTC Region 5 on April 20 in Milwaukee, as well as a presentation at the National UTC Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia on May 7. OEC Coordinator John McClain, whose main focus is CIKR, has led the Office's effort to brief utility stakeholders at these UTC regional meetings. He recently noted that the

[1] The concept of an STR was established as a requirement to the Public Safety Interoperable Communication (PSIC) grant program in 2007, where federal grant funds were specifically earmarked for the establishment of an STR capability in each state. The basic purpose of the STR, articulated in the PSCIC grant, was to provide communication resources that can be deployed in situations where there is a catastrophic loss of the existing public safety communication capabilities. (Minnesota Department of Public Safety)

engagements have proven mutually beneficial. OEC has been able to connect regional UTC leadership with OEC Coordinators to engage critical infrastructure partners in regional communications governance, planning, training and exercise opportunities. Meanwhile, UTC members have been able to communicate back to OEC the need to include utilities companies in emergency response plans. Ultimately, OEC has been able to foster closer collaboration with the utility community through relationship building, knowledge sharing, and regional program development.

During recent briefings, Mr. McClain provided an overview of the 2014 NECP, the changing emergency communications environment, current OEC programs, strategic priorities and outreach efforts with critical infrastructure, and discussion of governance structures and procedures for emergency communications. This aligns well with UTC's current focus as explained in a recent UTC Annual Review. UTC President Connie Durcsak noted that the transformation of the Nation's critical infrastructure is taking place with unprecedented speed and scale. "I have started to realize that the only way we are going to drive the scale of change we need in our industry is if we pull together some very unlikely partnerships with businesses, governments, and entrepreneurial people on the front lines."[2] Going forward, OEC seeks to be a key partner with UTC in helping to implement the NECP through its programs and services.

Figure 1: UTC Regions generally follow FEMA's national state breakdown



[2] Utilities Telecom Council. (2014).*UTC Annual Review*. Retrieved from http://data.utc.org/online/Annual%20Report%20lowres.pdf

Recap of Admiral Ron Hewitt's Utilities & NECP Webinar

On March 12, 2015, OEC Director Admiral Ron Hewitt presented a webinar on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) and the 2014 National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) at the law offices of Keller and Heckman in Washington, D.C. This webinar was attended by critical infrastructure entities from around the country, including investor owned electric utilities, electric cooperatives, municipal utilities, and oil and gas companies. Also in attendance were representatives from state and public safety organizations interested in the NECP's role in protecting the Nation's critical infrastructure. This engagement highlights the Office's continuing effort to engage the Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources (CIKR) stakeholder community to implement the NECP through its programs and services.

Director Hewitt began the webinar by discussing OEC's mission to help state, local, tribal, and territorial stakeholders prepare for emergencies and natural disasters. He reviewed the Office's stakeholder partnerships, emphasizing OEC's work with critical infrastructure owners and providers. He then discussed a key component of the 2014 NECP, the new emergency communications ecosystem. With the development of the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network, Next Generation 9-1-1 and Internet Protocol-based technologies, today's emergency communications networks are experiencing a wave of modernization. At the same time, emergency responders increasingly receive communications support from other stakeholders in the broader environment. The NECP characterizes the emerging communications landscape as an emergency communications ecosystem consisting of many inter-related components and functions, including reporting and requests for assistance; incident response and coordination; notifications, alerts and warnings; and public information exchange.

Utility companies use emergency management processes and procedures as described in the NECP to restore large-scale service disruptions. New technologies and capabilities such as alert and warning systems sent directly to cell phones have revolutionized the CIKR space in this respect. Utilities providers are also faced with increased demand from their customers as these technologies have heightened dependencies on electrical resources. In reviewing 2014 NECP strategic goals such as governance, Director Hewitt stressed that there are many shared communications systems used by utilities providers and public safety, as well as accompanying governance models. He provided a number of examples where utilities have partnered with emergency responders on both local and statewide shared systems, including Nashville Electric Service, Nebraska Public Power District, and Southern Company.

Director Hewitt then relayed to the audience how recommended NECP activities tie back to utility providers. For instance, understanding that many of the critical resources required to achieve true communications interoperability depend on power, OEC will work to enhance jurisdictions' ability to request communications assets during response operations. The NECP also encourages private industry-driven research and development efforts to engage with similar government initiatives to capture advancements available in the commercial marketplace, such as mobile applications for public safety.

The webinar concluded with a discussion of how NECP implementation will be conducted in coordination with utilities through various OEC programs. These include technical assistance offerings that establish robust contingencies in the event of a loss of power, and ensuring priority service programs are in place for critical infrastructure operators when phone lines are congested. In all, the webinar was well-received by the participants, as many were unaware of the important implications of the NECP to their industry.

OEC Team on the Road

As part of our stakeholder engagement activities, OEC will be participating in the following events:

National Emergency Number Association (NENA) 2015 Conference and Expo
June 27 – July 2, 2015, Denver, CO

National Congress of American Indians Mid-Year Conference
June 28 – July 1, 2015, St. Paul, MN

Southwest Border Communications Working Group In-Person Meeting
July 21, 2015, San Diego, CA

Integrated Justice Information Systems (IJIS) Institute Mid-Year Briefing
July 30 – August 1, 2015, Atlanta, GA

National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) Executive Council and Technology Policy Committee Meeting
August 4 – August 5, 2015, Boulder, CO