

Commonwealth of Virginia

2010 Annual Report

Prepared by the
Office of Commonwealth Preparedness
November 1, 2010



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

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Assistant to the Governor
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November 1, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Bob McDonnell

FROM: Terrie Suit, Assistant to the Governor for Commonwealth Preparedness

SUBJECT: Virginia Interoperability Annual Report for 2010

On behalf of the Office of Commonwealth Preparedness (OCP), I am pleased to provide to you with the Annual Report for the 2010 Commonwealth of Virginia Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP).

In 2010, OCP worked alongside partners at the local, state, and Federal level to improve emergency response communications and interoperability.

We would be pleased to discuss any questions or comments you may have regarding the Annual Report at your convenience. Please feel free to contact me if I may be of further assistance.

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Executive Summary

Although Virginia has been at the forefront of national efforts to improve emergency response communications, there is still a significant amount of work to be done to achieve voice and data communications interoperability.

Virginia realized long ago that emergency response communications and interoperability cannot be solved by any one entity and requires a partnership among local, state, and Federal public safety organizations. That understanding led to the development of the *Commonwealth of Virginia Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan* (SCIP), which identifies the Commonwealth's strategic initiatives and Vision for improved public safety communications in Virginia. The Commonwealth's interoperability Vision states that:

"By 2015, agencies and their representatives at the local, regional, state, and Federal levels will be able to communicate using compatible systems, in real time, across disciplines and jurisdictions, to respond more effectively during day-to-day operations and major emergency situations."

This year, the State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC)—the primary practitioner-based steering group for interoperability efforts—worked to make progress toward achieving the seven initiatives identified in the SCIP. The SIEC provides communications interoperability recommendations to the Governor's Office of Commonwealth Preparedness (OCP).

OCP is committed to the improvement of statewide public safety interoperable communications through effective governance and stakeholder management and coordination, and continues to engage local leaders in a regional approach to interoperability planning and implementation.

This Annual Report highlights Virginia's interoperability successes in 2010.

Major achievements in 2010 include:

- Annual update of the SCIP to introduce new and prioritized interoperability initiatives that will move Virginia closer to its 2015 Vision for interoperability.
- Facilitation, organization, and support for the ongoing governance structure of seven Regional Preparedness Advisory Committees for Interoperability (RPAC-Is) and two SIEC Subcommittees (Operations and Policy).
- Ongoing stakeholder engagement to ensure the most relevant voices in the interoperability community are included in important planning and problem-solving discussions at the regional and state levels.
- The SIEC Grants Working Group (GWG) evaluation of 19 grant applications for the 2010 State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) grant funds, resulting in the award of \$4.9M toward local equipment, planning, training and exercises.
- Collection of local input to the *Interoperability Baseline Survey* designed to assess the state's current interoperability capabilities. In total, 106 of the 134 localities submitted responses.
- Deployment of all five of Virginia's communication caches to assist with both planned events and/or emergency situations, including the devastating January 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

With continued support from the Governor, the General Assembly, and Virginia's public safety community, Virginia will continue to make strides towards achieving the 2015 vision and serve as a national model for interoperability planning and progress.

Background

Interoperability is the ability for key public safety personnel to talk with one another via communication systems – to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand and in real time, whenever necessary. The lack of interoperable wireless communications systems has plagued public safety organizations for decades.

Despite heightened visibility and attention from national emergencies, there are still significant interoperability obstacles ahead that require solutions from local, state, and Federal leaders. Since interoperability is a complex issue, the solution requires a multifaceted, holistic approach and is therefore a shared responsibility of public safety leaders, elected officials, and local and state governments.

Even with years of attention, some public safety personnel still struggle with outdated technology and insufficient radio spectrum. More importantly, they continue to face the challenge of overcoming the cultural and human barriers that impede the progress of interoperability. This includes stovepiped planning, a lack of integrated standard operating procedures, too little training on communications equipment or exercises to practice response at a multi-jurisdictional or regional level. Without support and resources, emergency responders are unable to communicate or share critical voice and data information with other jurisdictions or disciplines on a day-to-day basis or in the event of emergencies.

To measure the level of interoperability on a local, regional, and state level, Virginia uses the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) SAFECOM *Interoperability Continuum*. See Figure 1 below. DHS created the *Interoperability Continuum* as a tool for improving emergency response communications and interoperability.¹ The following information is from the DHS Interoperability Continuum brochure.

Interoperability is a multi-dimensional challenge. To gain a true picture of interoperability, progress in each of the five interdependent elements must be considered. Optimal interoperability is contingent on an agency's and jurisdiction's needs. The Continuum is designed as a guide for jurisdictions that are pursuing a new interoperability solution, based on changing needs or additional resources.

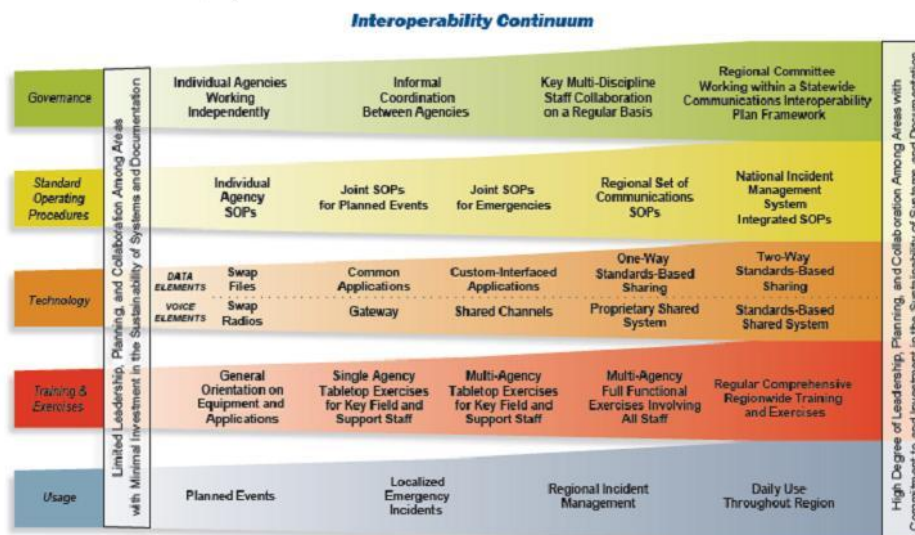


Figure 1: DHS SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum

¹ The Interoperability Continuum brochure is available at: http://www.safecomprogram.gov/NR/rdonlyres/54F0C2DE-FA70-48DD-A56E-3A72A8F35066/0/Interoperability_Continuum_Brochure_2.pdf

2010 Accomplishments

Statewide Interoperability Governance

At its core, interoperability is about collaboration. Moreover, collaboration is most successful when it occurs within an organized system of people working together, developing plans, making decisions, and taking action—this is governance. Collaborative governance promotes transparency, encourages active participation, fosters strategic resource sharing, and helps build consensus for the path forward.

OCP continues to foster a strong interoperability governance structure by sustaining and supporting the seven Regional Preparedness Advisory Committees for Interoperability (RPAC-Is) that were created in 2008. These committees work together at the regional level to identify interoperability project priorities, how to best utilize available grant funds, and address other local level challenges that might benefit from a regional or state perspective.

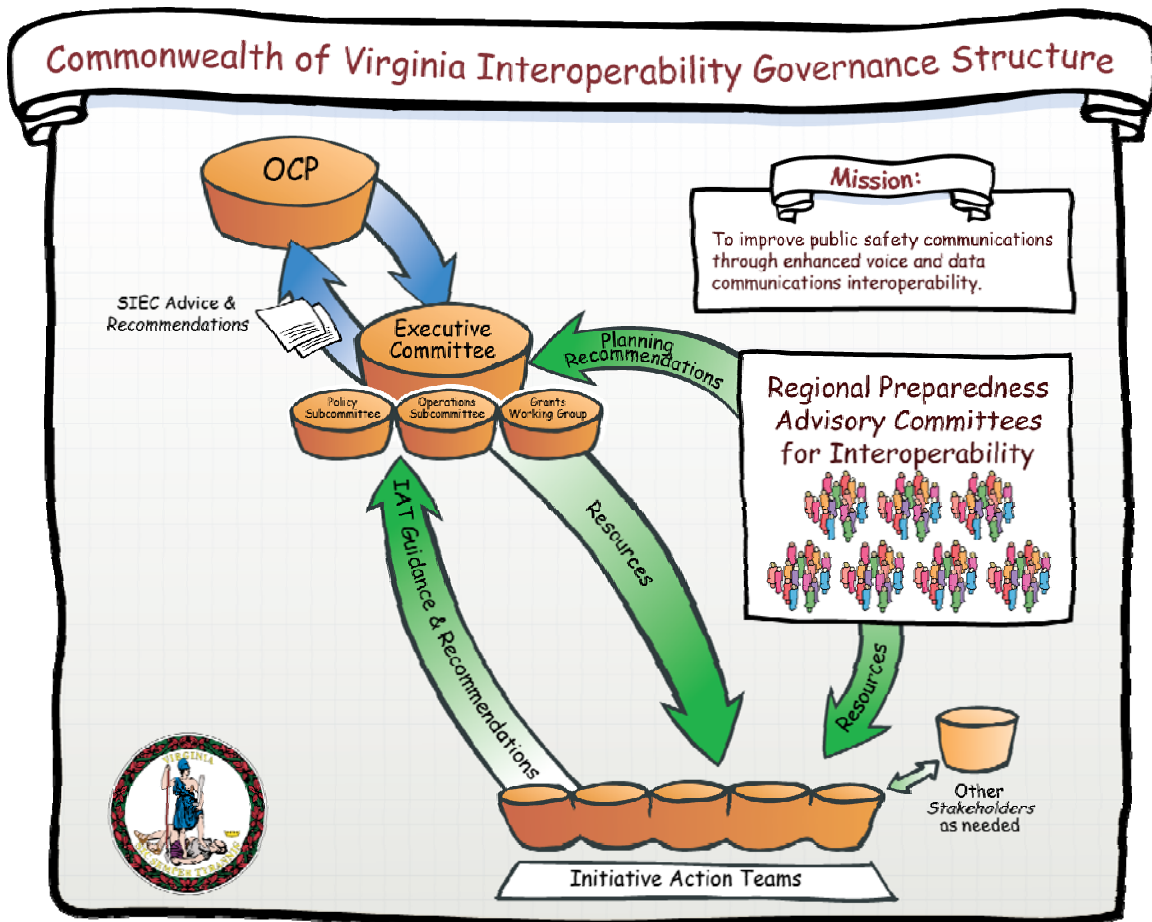


Figure 2: Virginia Interoperability Governance Structure

OCP and the SIEC also continued to host SIEC Subcommittee meetings for the two standing subcommittees (Operations and Policy). When established, there were originally three Subcommittees, which included a Technical focus area, but the Technical Subcommittee rolled into the Operations group to improve collaboration on issues of a similar nature. Each Subcommittee met several times this year to discuss the following items:

- The Operations Subcommittee worked closely with leaders from the Virginia communications cache teams in 2010 to create a plan for providing coordinated and targeted statewide Communications Unit Leader (COML) training across Virginia. COML training prepares emergency responders to be communications unit leaders during all-hazards emergency operations, significantly improving communications across the multiple disciplines and jurisdictions responding to an incident. To date, 87 individuals have expressed an interest
- The Policy Subcommittee works closely with the Operations Subcommittees when needed to review and provide guidance and input to strategies and documents. The Policy Subcommittee is responsible for reviewing current legislation and making recommendations to OCP regarding interoperability policy and procedures in the Commonwealth. .
- In hopes to educate Virginia's public safety community, the Technical Subcommittee developed an educational video which describes the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) mandate to become narrowband compliant by January 1, 2013. This video presents the responsibilities of the mandate, the deadlines, and consequences for not complying, etc. A letter was also written and distributed to every County Administrator's Office which details similar information.

Baseline Survey

In FY 2009, OCP conducted another Baseline Survey to help catalog communications equipment, document governance structures and standard operating procedures, and measure Virginia's level of interoperability against the SAFECOM *Interoperability Continuum* (see figure 1 on page 5). The Baseline Survey will assist the Commonwealth with future communications interoperability planning, and will increase Virginia's competitive advantage for Federal grant funds. Through targeted outreach, OCP engaged each of the 134 jurisdictions in the Commonwealth, to ensure equal representation from all disciplines. By September 2010, 79 percent of the cities and counties in Virginia had responded to Part I of the survey.

The survey was divided into two parts. Part I of the survey asked questions pertaining to governance, standard operating procedures (SOPs), usage, and training and exercises (four of the five lanes of the SAFECOM *Interoperability Continuum*). It was sent to one representative from each of the 134 jurisdictions in the Commonwealth, and asked questions about interoperability across disciplines and local borders. Due to changes within OCP, Part II of the survey -- the portion designed to help catalog technology capabilities -- was not completed. Once a new Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator (CIC) is appointed, this initiative will be re-visited for discussion.

Virginia Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP)

The Commonwealth of Virginia SCIP is the guiding document for all interoperable communications activities in Virginia. In 2010, OCP worked with the SIEC to draft SCIP initiatives designed to improved interoperable communications throughout the Commonwealth. These initiatives build upon initiatives from the previous years and expand the breadth of our overall interoperability efforts. Further, OCP worked closely with its Project Management Office (PMO) support staff to redesign and reorganize the layout and information contained in the SCIP, improving the way stakeholders access this important information, and bringing a higher level of understanding to the public safety community of the Commonwealth.

The FY 2011 SCIP is currently in draft form and under review by the SIEC for discussion and approval. This version of the SCIP includes both short and long-term initiatives to help improve and streamline interoperability planning and projects statewide, and improve information sharing and the technological capabilities of Virginia's emergency responders.

Grant Reviews

To further engage local and regional stakeholders, and ensure a fair and equitable grant review process, OCP established the Grants Working Group (GWG) in March 2009. GWG members play an instrumental role in evaluating interoperability grant submissions and provide recommendations to the SIEC and OCP for consideration.

In 2010, OCP distributed \$4.9 million in 2010 State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) funding to assist localities and regions in expanding their communications interoperability capabilities.

OCP also received \$1.2 million in 2010 Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) funding. This funding is designed to support the seven interoperability regions in Virginia and the Strategic Technology Reserves with planning, training and exercises, and help create or sustain local and state level governance structures.

Communication Caches

In light of the communication system failures during and following the events of 9/11, Virginia worked to develop tactical solutions -- communications caches -- that can be deployed to the site of an emergency within a few hours. All five communications caches in the Commonwealth were put to good use in 2010 for both emergency response deployments and training and exercises. The five Virginia communication caches are based out of:

- City of Chesapeake-Hampton Roads
- Fairfax County
- City of Harrisonburg - Rockingham County
- Lunenburg County
- Montgomery County

The Fairfax cache deployed with the Virginia Task Force I team to assist with search, rescue, and recovery efforts in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake. The Chesapeake/Hampton cache was used in June at both the City of Norfolk's Harborfest dock party, and the Tappahannock Rivahfest celebration. The fifth and final cache in development, the Lunenburg County Radio Cache, became fully operational on June 1st, 2010 and all equipment was procured by July 1st. All of the caches worked to increase their level of visibility and state readiness by demonstrating the cache capabilities at various conferences. Conference attendance helped the teams improve responder awareness and better understand resource availability and capability.

Statewide and Inter-Agency Coordination

OCP works closely with state agencies and organizations that are also committed to improving interoperability. This collaboration ensures that planning is coordinated across the Commonwealth, in all disciplines and aspects of preparedness and response. These agencies include the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), and the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) Integrated Service Program (ISP). OCP also works with VITA's Virginia Geographic Information Network (VGIN), as well as the VITA Public Safety Communications (PSC) agency. To best align interoperability planning and

data collection efforts, senior leaders from these agencies and organizations meet regularly to identify priorities and areas for collaboration.

Virginia Interoperable Communications Conference

In early November, Virginia hosted the seventh annual Virginia interoperable communications conference which annually convenes a record-breaking number of local, state, and Federal stakeholders to discuss interoperability issues. For the second year in a row, the conference was jointly hosted by the SIEC, the Virginia Association of Public-Safety Communication Officials (APCO), and the Virginia National Emergency Number Association (NENA). The conference helps members of public safety create a common understanding of interoperability and work to overcome some of the issues that are entrenched in the culture. The conference helps bring these cultural barriers to the surface, and provides the forum to work together to find common ground and move on despite differences.

Virginia Emergency Response Team Exercise

In June 2010, members of public safety, and the emergency response community collaborated and responded to a simulated catastrophic hurricane in the Hampton Roads area through the Virginia Emergency Response Team Exercise (VERTEX). This annual exercise helps response personnel from state and local governments and volunteer groups role-play their emergency operations functions in order to review and practice the skills needed during an actual emergency. This year, VERTEX participants addressed evacuation, shelter, and communication efforts related to a hurricane situation.

The Road Ahead: 2011 SCIP Initiatives

As previously mentioned, OCP annually updates the initiatives in *Commonwealth of Virginia SCIP*, which serves as the state roadmap for improving and achieving the desired level of interoperability year-to-year while staying focused on the 2015 Vision.

To achieve the 2015 Vision, the following draft initiatives are slated for inclusion in the 2011 SCIP to enhance data and voice communications interoperability, and address the other technology, outreach, governance, operations, and training needs of Virginia's public safety practitioners:

Governance

- Determine the Commonwealth's specific operational needs for voice and data communications, and identify regional operational gaps by March 31, 2011

SOPs

- Further develop and utilize the Commonwealth's program for credentialing designated communications personnel
- Implement Commonwealth-wide common channel naming and programming standards based on NPSTC recommendations

Technology

- Identify the localities without a COMLINC connection; determine the need for a COMLINC connection; and identify the challenges that must be overcome in order to establish a connection to STARS
- Work to achieve narrowband compliance in all seven regions by the FCC deadline of January 1, 2013 and ensure grant funded equipment purchases meet the appropriate higher standards.

- Continue to establish the Strategic Technology Reserve (STR) by bringing the three Type II communications caches up to Type I status
- Work to place national interoperability public safety frequencies on existing Land Mobile Radio towers statewide for VHF low band and high band, UHF, 700 MHz and 800 MHz with the goal of achieving statewide coverage for the interoperability frequencies.

Training & Exercises

- OCP, state agencies, and stakeholders will work together to formalize a training and accreditation process for Communications Unit Leader (COML) training
 - By June 2011, OCP will work with certified COML instructors who also serve as members of the communication cache teams to provide at least one COML training session in each region.
- By March 2011, OCP will coordinate with VDEM to develop a statewide Communications Training and Exercise plan