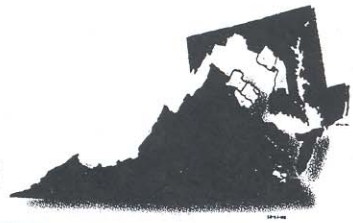
National Capital Region

Tactical Interoperable Communications Scorecard



Summary

Governance: *Advanced Implementation*

Standard Operating Procedures: *Advanced Implementation*

Usage: *Advanced Implementation*

The National Capital Region (NCR) Urban Area (UA) includes the District of Columbia. It also includes the Virginia city of Alexandria; and the Virginia counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William; and the Maryland counties of Montgomery and Prince George's.

Governance: *Advanced Implementation*

Interoperability in the NCR UA is overseen by a hierarchy of formalized committees, headed by the Senior Policy Group at the executive level. The Washington Council of Governments' Joint Police and Fire Communications Committee addresses specific technical and operational policies. Agreements among agencies are largely in place and are being compiled, and steps should be taken to ensure that these agreements are regularly reviewed. An established strategic plan for voice communications was developed and is currently being updated to incorporate wireless data communications, as well as to include additional state and federal agencies. The NCR UA has demonstrated success in using funding to address regional communications interoperability needs, most notably through the joint acquisition and implementation of a cache of 1,250 NCR radios. Given the sustained success of the UA in working together to attain interoperability assets through cooperated efforts, the area should consider the merits of documenting a regionwide funding strategy that comprehensively addresses regional interoperability fiscal needs for the next 3 to 5 years.

Recommendations:

- Investigate means to more formally involve federal agencies (in addition to communications working group membership) and define their roles and responsibilities
- Establish and/or identify the UA's systematic process to develop and review agreements (e.g., usage agreements, memoranda of understanding) at least every 3 to 5 years and after significant events or upgrades
- Build on the UA's success to support statewide interoperability throughout Virginia and Maryland

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP): *Advanced Implementation*

The policies for use of the NCR UA shared systems, as well as the Metropolitan Interoperability Radio System (MIRS) fixed gateway system and NCR radio cache, are long established and were effectively documented in Section 3 of the Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP). The UA used the TICP as an opportunity to enhance some of these policies and to disseminate them to all included agencies. The UA also undertook an aggressive effort to document communications assets in the area through the use of the CASM tool. National Incident Management System (NIMS)/Incident Command System (ICS) has been in place for more than 1 year and is proficiently used; particularly by the fire community. NIMS/ICS was effectively used during the TICP validation exercise, including a successful deployment of the Communications Unit and Communications Unit Leader (COML). The COML was able to efficiently deploy multi-agency resources and coordinated by radio and face-to-face with command and general staff.

The area is committed to integrating the COML position into its response structure and officials have indicated that they hope to be actively involved in the development of this training curriculum.

Recommendation:

- Continue basic and advanced training and exercises on SOPs (include communications unit implementation consistent with the TICP) to ensure that all participating first responder agencies attain and maintain NIMS/ICS compliance

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Usage: *Advanced Implementation* ●

The NCR UA conducts multidiscipline and multijurisdictional communications across the area on a daily basis. The well-established use of their shared systems by primary first responders as well as proficiency of using MIRS and the regional radio cache for outside agencies was seamlessly demonstrated during the TICP validation exercise. The UA specifically verified that its personnel could achieve interoperable communications using fixed gateways with responders from Prince George's County, which is the only county not currently using a 800 megahertz (MHz) system. Communication was also achieved with multiple state and federal agencies.

Recommendation:

- Consider adding communications interoperability as a component of all future exercises and include agencies outside of the defined UA

Below is a summary of the area's existing technology used to provide communications interoperability:

Technology Overview

The NCR UA has 25 separate communications systems in the area servicing public safety agencies in the District of Columbia, northern Virginia, and Maryland. The District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services, all of the suburban northern Virginia, and Maryland public safety agencies (except those in Prince George's County, Maryland) are using separate but interconnected 800 MHz Motorola SmartZone™ systems. Regional interoperability is primarily achieved through the use of shared systems, fixed gateways, shared channels, talk groups, and cached radios. The fixed gateways interconnect the NCR Police Mutual Aid Radio System, the Fire Mutual Aid Radio System, and National Public Safety Policy Advisory Committee channels (known locally as the regional Interoperability Network System). Mobile gateways are only used on an incident-specific basis.

The NCR UA anticipates migrating existing radio systems to a Project 25 (P25)-compliant system in the near future. Alexandria and Arlington, Virginia, are expected to upgrade their existing systems to become P25-compliant, and a new P25-compliant radio network will be deployed in Prince George's County, Maryland. Other jurisdictions in the NCR UA will have to make similar upgrades in order to ensure effective communications are maintained throughout the area.

In the long-term, the NCR UA is considering expanding to include the cities of Baltimore, Maryland, and Richmond, Virginia. The UA expansion will require extending the capabilities of regional radio systems and interoperability capabilities to these new areas.