



DEFEND TODAY,
SECURE TOMORROW

Enhancing Interoperable Communications

Emergency Communications by the Numbers

OVERVIEW

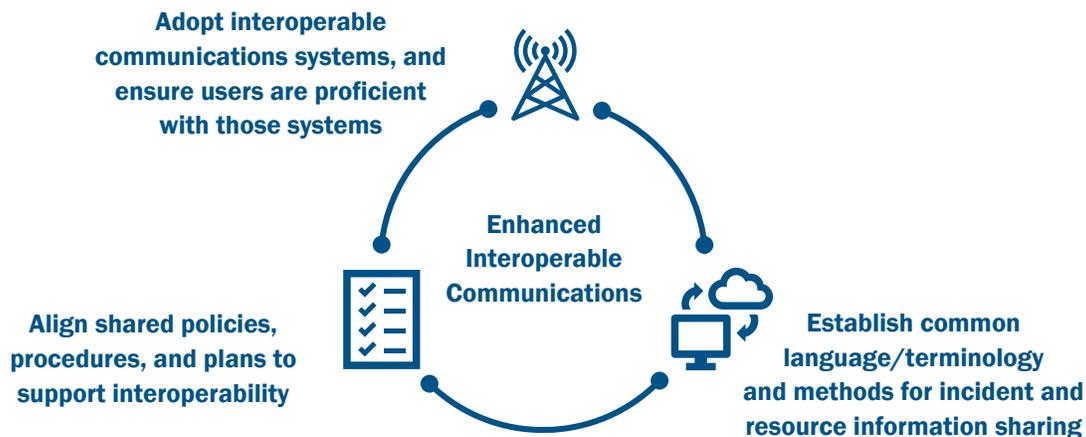
Emergencies can occur in remote areas, on or near jurisdictional boundaries, or across entire regions containing multiple jurisdictions. Effective and efficient response to these incidents often requires coordinated effort by personnel from multiple agencies, jurisdictions, and levels of government. According to results from the [SAFECOM Nationwide Survey \(SNS\)](#),¹ 94% of public safety organizations respond to emergency situations that require them to establish interoperable communications with agencies outside their jurisdiction. However, during out-of-the-ordinary situations, such as large-scale emergencies that stretch or exceed capabilities, almost half (43%) of organizations are unable to achieve any interoperable communications within the first hour after their units arrive. More than 11% are unable to achieve interoperability at all. This document describes interoperability preparedness activities organizations can take to improve their interoperable communications, as well as an overview of findings from the SNS on the benefits of interoperability preparedness. This document also provides recommendations from the [National Emergency Communications Plan \(NECP\)](#) for public safety organizations on enhancing multiple jurisdiction interoperability capabilities.



In out-of-the-ordinary situations, **15%** of public safety organizations are unable to establish interoperable communications with agencies outside their jurisdiction **within 8 hours** of their units arriving

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENHANCING INTEROPERABILITY

Public safety organizations can enhance their ability to achieve interoperable communications by undertaking preparedness activities in coordination with neighboring jurisdictions before emergencies arise. Organizations should include neighboring agencies in their strategic planning to ensure that all partners adopt interoperable/compatible communications systems and that all personnel are proficient in using the interoperability features and functions of their equipment. Building end user proficiency includes both cooperative training and exercises among neighboring agencies and regular use and/or testing of interoperable systems to communicate with personnel beyond one's own organization. Preparation activities should also align standards, policies, procedures, and plans to support coordinated emergency response, including the National Incident Management System Incident Command System (NIMS ICS); and establish common language/terminology and methods for sharing comprehensive information regarding the features, functionality, and capabilities of operable and interoperable communication resources.



¹ The SNS is a nationwide data collection effort to obtain actionable and critical data that drives our nation's emergency communication policies, programs, and funding. The survey is conducted every five years. Its findings are reported in the National Communications Baseline Assessment (NCBA) and reflected in the NECP.

BENEFITS OF INTEROPERABILITY PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES

SNS findings confirm that undertaking preparedness activities in advance improves the timeliness of establishing interoperable communications during emergencies. During out-of-the-ordinary situations, organizations with the most rapid achievement of interoperable communications² are:



54 percent more likely to build end user proficiency through regular use/testing of their interoperable voice capabilities with personnel beyond their organization



75 percent more likely to have formal policies/practices/procedures in place with agencies outside their jurisdiction that enable out-of-the-ordinary situations' interoperability



Twice as likely to have established emergency communications interoperability agreements in place with most nearby agencies and to review those agreements every 3-5 years and after system upgrades or incidents that test capabilities



60 percent more likely to use fixed infrastructure-based technology solutions that use compatible equipment for interoperability



53 percent more likely to share Common Operation Picture data with agencies outside their jurisdiction

INTEROPERABILITY IN THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The NECP Communications Coordination Goal provides the following guidance for public safety organizations regarding interoperability preparedness in the areas of standards alignment, personnel proficiency, and equipment testing.

Goal 4: Communications Coordination

- ✓ Possess primary, secondary, and backup communications capabilities aligned with the National Incident Management System Incident Command System and share appropriate forms (e.g., Incident Command System 205) illustrating the status of an agency's capabilities
- ✓ Leverage training, exercises, and real-world events to test capabilities and update standard operating procedures
- ✓ Periodically assess personnel proficiency in using communications systems' features, functions, and capabilities
- ✓ Establish sufficient testing and usage observations of all operable and interoperable primary, secondary, and backup communications systems

RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING INTEROPERABILITY

- [National Emergency Communications Plan](#)
- [SAFECOM Nationwide Survey](#)
- [SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum](#)
- [CISA Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program](#)
- [Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans](#)
- [National Incident Management System](#)

For more information on the SNS or NECP, contact necp@cisa.dhs.gov.

² As described in the SNS, this includes organizations able to establish interoperable communications with agencies outside their jurisdiction within the first hour of their units arriving.