



State of Louisiana

Office of the Governor

Statewide Interoperable Executive Committee

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Honorable Kathleen Babineaux Blanco
Governor of Louisiana
P.O. Box 94004
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Dear Governor Blanco:

On behalf of the Statewide Interoperable Communications System Executive Committee (SIEC) it is my pleasure to provide this report on the status of interoperable communications for first responders in Louisiana.

We also thank you for prioritizing interoperability during your administration, including the interim services of the Louisiana National Guard and the permanent resources for full-time staff in the Governor's office.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita reinforced the need for statewide interoperable communications. The provision of statewide infrastructure, with a bottom up approach from local entities, has become obvious to SIEC members. While there are disagreements between local and state entities, the SIEC provides a platform to nurture better communication and help establish better relationship.

Our research confirmed that Louisiana is not unique in facing difficulties in the implementation of statewide interoperability. With your vision and guidance, the SIEC developed a short term strategy and are now completing a long term plan for interoperability among all first responders. Thank you for providing the funding for this fiscal year to hire permanent staff and start our work on short term plan.

Louisiana's local communications systems are highly disparate. These systems range from recently deployed systems to aged and even out-dated systems. Local entities have been trying very hard to work within their means. There are some parishes that have succeeded in establishing better interoperability better than others who struggle with a lack of funding and other resources.

Prior to establishment of SIEC, there was no statewide guidance which resulted in individual parishes making decisions that best suited their needs and resources. This is the major cause of disparate systems.

Louisiana is challenged to develop an interoperable system among a landscape that is highly vulnerable to multiple weather events of catastrophic proportion. Further

challenges include federal regulations, mandates, and grant restrictions that limit our options. An example would be the current federal guidance provides that only Project 25 (P25) compliant products will be supported with federal funding, whether through appropriations or federal grants.

The SIEC, working through the member agencies which represent all disciplines of the first responder community, is addressing these challenges.

In a short period of time, the SIEC, with assistance from the Louisiana National Guard, has demonstrated progress in transforming interoperability challenges into focused objectives:

- Completed over 90% asset assessment to provide guidelines for the long term plan. The assessment refinement is also an on going process to accommodate new and retiring acquisitions.
- Established a short term plan for statewide interoperability. The plan was established with the help of the Louisiana National Guard and a number of SIEC members.
- Finalizing long term plan for statewide interoperability. The plan will be completed after attending the workshop provided by National Governor's Association in late March 2007.
- Policy and procedure sub-committee of SIEC is working to establish procedures for statewide system access, asset distribution, and system maintenance. The sub-committee will also be establishing standard language for MOU (Memorandum Of Understanding) to be signed by state and local entities.
- Visiting various local organizations to improve awareness of SIEC's initiatives and to obtain feed back.
- SIEC is providing guidance to local and state entities to plan for the future based on federal guidelines. An example would be P25 complaint products.
- SIEC is in agreement to establish statewide 700 MHz infrastructure as one of the first long term goals.
- Provided state funding for SIEC infrastructure requiring no recurring fee collection.

Following is the SIEC's accomplishments thus far:

- Phased development of single statewide communications system with multiple zones using P25 compliant 700 MHz system. Region 1 (Orleans, St. Bernard, Jefferson, and Plaquemines Parishes) and State Police cooperated with SIEC to ensure that statewide interoperability remains intact while local entities requirements are considered. Region 2 is also working closely with State Police and SIEC:
 - Provide voice interoperability along the I-10/I-12 corridor (map enclosed)
 - Over 6000 users on the system. Region 2 projects another 5000 users over the next two years in Region 2 alone
 - Back up of master site control provide by Zone 2
 - Current 800 MHz system will be maintained for redundancy through the life of the system
- Actively pursuing Internet Protocol (IP) based solution for short term interoperability for emergency communications throughout the state.
 - IP solution to be maintained as layer of redundancy when statewide communications system is completed thus investment will not be wasted.
 - BA7 funding for fiscal year 06-07 is in place
 - RFP development underway
- Assisted in the passage of *HB57*:
 - Establishes revolving account for SIEC;
 - Recommends IP Based Interoperability Solution;
 - Recommends all hazards emergency alert system including text messaging
- Funding:
 - Budget for SIEC and LSP support staff funded
 - Budget for IP Based Interoperability Solution funded: mutual aid repeaters, 3 new radio communications towers, two mobile communication units, 1500 P25 compliant radios to be distributed to all parishes
- Assessment of First Responder Communication Assets

- Only one parish remaining
- CASM database being deployed statewide to identify locations for bridge devices and other communications equipment
- Continued assessment process to cater for new acquisitions and retired equipments
- Creation of SIEC Website
 - The Louisiana National Guard staff created the web site with some assistance from Office of Information Technology <http://www.siec.la.gov>

The SIEC has identified the following long term goals:

- Continue implementation of single statewide communications system with multiple zones P25 compliant 700 MHz system. Start with creating statewide infrastructure.
- Identify funding sources and facilitate tailored grant guidance to maximize limited resources available for emergency response communications and interoperability.
- Promote pilot projects and methods as national models for emergency response at the rural, urban, state, and regional levels.
- Develop policies to promote efficiency in emergency response communications.
- Promote training and exercises at local, regional, and state levels.
- Multi state cooperation and exercise:
 - "Communications Check" with Alabama and Mississippi first responders during GOHSEP statewide hurricane functional exercise
 - '07 Homeland Security Grant application to include request for multi-state (Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana) communications exercise, development of MOU's, emergency protocols, and purchase of equipment.

The SIEC's current activities include the following:

- Establishment of nationally recognized interoperability/mutual aid frequencies for all first responder radios.
- Creating interoperability talkgroups among compatible first responder radios within the state interoperability/legacy talkgroups

- Recommending newly acquired systems meet P25 standards
- Pursuing sustainable funding
 - '08 Executive Budget to continue staffing and provide for maintenance, and equipment funding
 - Prepared federal earmark request to continue phased infrastructure development
- Identify requirements for participation in statewide communications system and incorporate into (MOA) Memorandum Of Agreement/ (MOU)Memorandum Of Understanding's for all first responder agencies
- Developing protocols for interoperability/mutual aid frequencies use
- Developing multi-state protocol for emergency communications

Achieving statewide interoperability for Louisiana's first responders is a massive undertaking. With your continued support, it can and will be accomplished. Together, we are building a more efficient, effective emergency response team for the citizens of Louisiana. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me, and please come and visit us again at the SIEC.

I have attached a map to state asset assessment and tower deployment.

Very truly yours,



Rizwan Ahmed
Chairman
SIEC

RA/SS/mhp

Attachment

c: Dr. Jimmy Clarke
Mr. Terry Ryder
General Hunt Downer
Ms. Doreen Brasseaux
Commissioner Jerry Luke LeBlanc
SIEC Members

