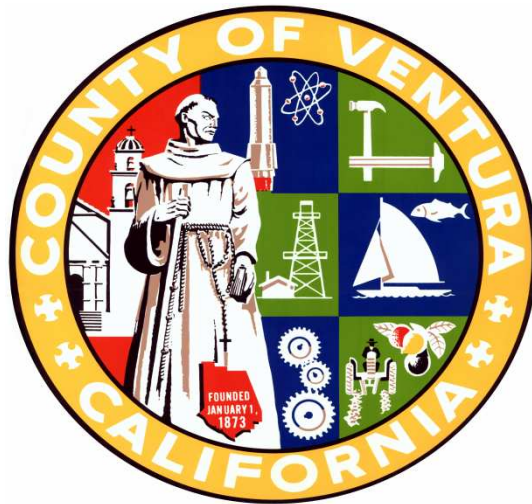


Ventura County Grand Jury 2010 - 2011



Final Report

Emergency Communications Interoperability

June 2, 2011

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Emergency Communications Interoperability

Summary

The 2010-2011 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted an investigation of emergency communications interoperability in Ventura County (County).

Emergency communications interoperability is the ability of all emergency responders to communicate. It is of paramount importance in effective response to emergencies on a day-to-day basis, as well as to major emergencies or disasters. Communications are vital to the management and tactical operations of emergency responders and supporting agencies.

The County's Emergency Planning Council provides leadership in planning and preparing for emergency response to major events. The Sheriff serves as vice-chairman of the Emergency Planning Council and is the Director of Disaster Services. The Sheriff is responsible for the administration of the Ventura County Office of Emergency Services (OES).

The County Emergency Telecommunications Committee (ETC) is a standing committee of the Emergency Planning Council. The ETC has been charged with a number of responsibilities, including the improvement of communications interoperability as it applies to telecommunications before, during, and after local emergencies.

The County has responded to direction from the federal and state governments calling for the development of a tactical interoperable communications plan (TICP). The County's TICP, prepared by the ETC, was completed in October 2010. It is intended to be a plan subject to continuous updating and improvement.

The Grand Jury finds that the County has made significant progress towards improving emergency communications interoperability and is on course to timely TICP implementation. Interagency cooperation and participation has been emphasized and encouraged. The Sheriff's OES has been strongly supportive. The co-chairs and members of the ETC have demonstrated dedication and enthusiasm. The Emergency Planning Council and the County Board of Supervisors have provided leadership in pursuing solutions to an issue that continues to present problems to all emergency responders.

The Grand Jury recommends that the approach employed to date in improving interoperability be continued and that all participating agencies remain engaged. The Grand Jury recommends the early completion of a pending "gap analysis" to determine what remains to be accomplished to complete the TICP. The Grand Jury also recommends that the ETC develop a comprehensive first responder training program that includes assessment of the level of competence of participants.

Background

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001 (9/11) presented an unprecedented challenge to the responding emergency service agencies. The New York Police Department, Port Authority Police, Fire Department, and emergency medical services experienced great difficulty with interagency communications. In the aftermath of 9/11, assessments were made of the interagency communications problems that had occurred. These assessments led to the adoption of Title III, Section 301, of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Act), that, in part, charged the Department of Homeland Security (Homeland Security) with developing a program to improve interagency emergency communications at federal, state, and local government levels.

The 9/11 Act made grant funds available to states and local emergency services agencies to be used to enhance first responder emergency communications interoperability. The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services responded by charging the California Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee with overseeing the development of the California State Communications Interoperability Plan. This plan was implemented in 2008. It called for the development and implementation of a local TICP by 2017.

To be eligible for grant funds, counties must develop a TICP that is in compliance with a template developed by Homeland Security. It is expected that the plans will be subject to frequent and even extensive modification and improvement during the implementation process and thereafter.

Ventura County's history of destructive earthquakes, wild fires, landslides, high tide events, and day-to-day emergencies make the importance of effective emergency communications paramount. The Grand Jury elected to investigate the status of the County's TICP development and implementation.

Methodology

Federal and California legislation enacted to support improvements in emergency communications interoperability was researched on the internet.

Involvement of Homeland Security and the California Office of Emergency Services in implementing emergency communications interoperability was researched on the internet.

The Grand Jury examined the Ventura County TICP.

The Grand Jury interviewed numerous individuals, including Sheriff's officers, representatives of municipal police departments, a representative of the County Fire Department, as well as County employees affiliated with the development of the TICP.

Facts

- FA-01.** The Congress enacted the 9/11 Act, which, in part, provides grant funds to be used to improve first responder emergency communications interoperability. [Ref-01]
- FA-02.** The California Office of Emergency Services charged the California State Interoperability Executive Committee with overseeing the development of the California State Communications Interoperability Plan to provide a statewide strategic planning framework for communications interoperability. [Ref-02]
- FA-03.** The California State Communications Interoperability Plan calls for all Operational Areas to develop a TICP. [Ref-02]
- FA-04.** Ventura County is an Operational Area within the California State Interoperability Executive Committee's Southern Planning Area. (Att-01)
- FA-05.** The Ventura County Emergency Planning Council was created by the enactment of County Ordinance Section 5321, et. seq.
- FA-06.** The Emergency Planning Council's 2010-2013 Strategic Plan, section 3.3, calls for the enhancement of communications capabilities and technologies. [Ref-03]
- FA-07.** According to the Ventura County Operational Area Governance Organization Chart, the ETC is a Standing Committee. It is required to report to the Emergency Planning Council at least quarterly.
- FA-08.** Documents indicate that the purpose of the ETC, in part, is to lead a unified effort on coordinating and improving interoperability of all telecommunications technologies before, during, and after a local emergency.
- FA-09.** Documents provided by the ETC indicate that the Operational Area TICP was completed in October 2010 in conformance with a template provided by Homeland Security.
- FA-10.** The TICP includes detailed inventories of the availability and capability of two-way radio equipment used and shared by all the participating agencies in the County. Instructions for accessing the equipment and contact information are also included. This equipment is also available for assignment to assisting agencies from outside the County.
- FA-11.** "Gateway devices" are those which make communication possible between emergency responders who do not share the same radio frequencies. These devices are part of the extensive TICP inventory.
- FA-12.** According to information provided by the ETC, the County and all cities in the County are represented on the committee. Some cities are directly represented and others are represented by the Sheriff's Department and/or the County Fire Department. Committee

participants currently include the following agencies and organizations:

- Amateur Radio Emergency Service
- California Emergency Management Agency
- California Highway Patrol
- City of Fillmore Fire Department
- City of Ojai
- City of Oxnard Police and Fire Departments
- City of Port Hueneme Police and Fire Departments
- City of Santa Paula Fire Department
- City of Simi Valley Police Department
- City of Ventura Police and Fire Departments
- County of Ventura
- County of Ventura Fire Department
- County of Ventura OES
- County of Ventura Sheriff
- United States Navy

FA-13. According to documents provided by the OES, that office administers two Homeland Security grant programs. Those programs are the Ventura County Homeland Security Grant Program, intended to enhance regional preparedness, and the Oxnard-Thousand Oaks Urban Area Security Initiative Grant Program, intended to provide regional preparedness in high-threat, high-density metropolitan areas.

FA-14. In fiscal year 2010, the County, through the OES, allocated \$734,329 from the Urban Area Security Initiative Grant Program to enhance interoperable communications. These funds were directed to the following projects:

- the purchase of radios for first responders and area hospitals
- the licensing and installation of a countywide radio frequency and related equipment in dispatch centers to facilitate interoperable communications among users not sharing the same frequencies
- an interoperable communications gap analysis

FA-15. According to documents provided by the ETC, the following improvements to emergency communications interoperability have been achieved in the County Operational Area:

- a TICP that complies with Homeland Security requirements has been prepared with the participation of all committee members
- a Standardized Interoperable Field Operations Guide complying with Homeland Security requirements has been updated with current and appropriate information
- a simulcast upgrade is underway that will provide 60% more wireless radio coverage and increased functionality for first responders
- a narrowband radio upgrade, mandated by the Federal Communications Commission, is in process; it is tied to the simulcast project and will require the upgrade of all emergency radios in the County
- a microwave upgrade that will increase microwave network sites from six to eighteen, to cover the entire County, is scheduled for completion in 2011
- radio traffic will run through the microwave network which will also handle current and future upgrades such as data and video transmissions

FA-16. The ETC has approved a Request for Proposal outlining the gap analysis requirements to be met by potential consultant contractors. The Request for Proposal has been approved by the County's purchasing authority and is awaiting distribution. The analysis is intended to guide future efforts to implement the TICP by the target date of 2017, as imposed by the California State Communications Interoperability Plan.

FA-17. The OES has planned a countywide disaster exercise, scheduled for May 2011, that will, in part, stress communications interoperability.

FA-18. The Grand Jury was unable to locate evidence of a coordinated countywide effort to provide continuing interoperability training to first responders.

Findings

FI-01. The federal and state governments have acted to make emergency communications interoperability a priority in efforts to improve safety for first responders and to coordinate emergency response. (FA-01 through FA-03)

FI-02. The Emergency Planning Council has been actively engaged in supporting emergency communications interoperability. The standing ETC has been charged with developing the TICP and with advising the Emergency Planning Council on its progress. (FA-06 and FA-07)

FI-03. The ETC has completed initial preparation of the TICP. (FA-09)

- FI-04.** Emergency first responders and support agencies are well represented on the ETC. (FA-12)
- FI-05.** The OES has made important contributions to communications interoperability through its participation on the ETC and its assistance with grant funding, including funds to obtain a gap analysis for the TICP. (FA-13 and FA-14)
- FI-06.** Significant progress has been made toward improving emergency communications interoperability in the County Operational Area. (FA-15)
- FI-07.** A completed gap analysis will be important to the continued improvement and timely implementation of the TICP. (FA-16)
- FI-08.** While communications interoperability training will be a major component of a May 2011 disaster exercise, coordinated, continuing, interoperability training has yet to be implemented for first responders. (FA-17 and FA-18)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The Board of Supervisors, the Emergency Planning Council, the ETC, the OES, and all emergency response and support agencies should continue their support of improving emergency communications interoperability. (FI-02 through FI-07)
- R-02.** The ETC and OES should achieve an early completion of the gap analysis. (FI-07)
- R-03.** The Emergency Planning Council should direct the ETC to develop a program that would provide continuing communication interoperability training for first responders. (FI-08)

Responses

Responses Required From:

Ventura County Board of Supervisors (FI-03 through FI-08) (R-01 through R-03)

Ventura County Sheriff (FI-03 through FI-08) (R-01 through R-03)

Responses Requested From:

Ventura County Emergency Planning Council (FI-05 through FI-08) (R-01 through R-03)

References

- Ref-01.** The 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, title III, section 301, U.S.C. http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_reports&docid=f:hr259.110.pdf (accessed on April 19, 2011).

- Ref-02.** California's Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan
[http://www.oes.ca.gov/Operational/OESHome.nsf/PDF/One%20Pager%20CalSCIP/\\$file/One%20Pager%20CalSCIP.pdf](http://www.oes.ca.gov/Operational/OESHome.nsf/PDF/One%20Pager%20CalSCIP/$file/One%20Pager%20CalSCIP.pdf) (accessed on April 19, 2011).
- Ref-03.** Ventura County Emergency Planning Council Strategic Plan 2010-2013.
<http://portal.countyofventura.org/portal/page/portal/cov/emergencies/EPC/FINAL%20V2-STRATPLAN%2001-16-10.pdf> (accessed on April 19, 2011).

Attachments

- Att-01.** Ventura County OA-TICP, Preface, (page iv)

Glossary

<u>TERM</u>	<u>DEFINITION</u>
9/11	September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center
9/11 Act	The 9/11 Commission Act of 2007
County	Ventura County
ETC	Ventura County Emergency Telecommunications Committee
Grand Jury	2010-2011 Ventura County Grand Jury
Homeland Security	United States Department of Homeland Security
OA	Operational Area
OES	Ventura County Sheriff's Department Office of Emergency Services
TICP	Tactical Communications Interoperability Plan

Attachment 01

Ventura County OA-TICP, Preface, (page iv)

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Ventura County OA – TICP

Preface

This document establishes a Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP) for the California State Interoperable Executive Committee (CalSIEC), Southern Planning Area (SPA) and Ventura County Operational Area (OA). The State of California falls within FEMA Region IX.



Purpose

The TICP is intended to document the interoperable communications resources available within the designated area, who controls each resource, and what rules of use or operational procedures exist for the activation and deactivation of each resource.

October 2010

Page | iv