



Fall 2023 SAFECOM Bi-Annual Meeting Summary

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Contents

Exploring the Role of the Emergency Communications Center in Public Safety Communications	2
Public Safety Communications Legislative Update	3
SAFECOM Member Spotlight: ARRL The National Association for Amateur Radio	3
FirstNet Authority Update	3
Cyberattacks on Public Safety	4
SAFECOM Information Sharing	5

Welcome, Opening Remarks, and New Member Introductions

SAFECOM Leadership—Chief Gerald Reardon, SAFECOM Chair; Assistant Chief Chris Lombard, SAFECOM First Vice Chair; and Chief Jay Kopstein, SAFECOM Second Vice Chair—as well as Billy Bob Brown, Jr., Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Executive Assistant Director (EAD) for Emergency Communications, welcomed members. Chief Reardon noted the passing of longtime SAFECOM member, Paul Szoc, representative for the International Municipal Signal Association on SAFECOM and retired Chief of Fire Mutual Aid and Retired Call Deputy Chief of the Keene Fire Department in New Hampshire.



Figure 1: In Memoriam, Paul Szoc: July 13, 1951 – October 16, 2023.

Chief Reardon introduced new SAFECOM members:

- Brandon Abley, National Emergency Number Association (NENA) (Alternate Representative)
- Nicolas Briseño, At-Large, Story County Sheriff's Office Communications Commander
- Jeremy Dunkley, American Radio Relay League (ARRL) (Alternate Representative)
- Richard Fiske, Massachusetts Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety & Security
- Matthew Flagler, International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) (Primary Representative)
- Lance Gumbs, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) (Primary Representative)
- Josh Johnston, ARRL (Primary Representative)
- Richard LaSaracina, At-Large, Manager of IT Telecom Engineering, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (CT)
- Michael Mahony, At-Large, Wireless Technician/Senior Systems Administrator, City of Cambridge Emergency Communications (MA)
- Stephen Martini, Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) (Alternate Representative)

- Phil Nichols, National Governors Association (NGA)
- Peter Rogers, At-Large, Deputy Director, Tennessee Advanced Communications Network
- Eric Rossmeisl, National Association of State EMS Officials (NASEMSO) (Primary Representative)
- John Schrader, At-Large, Radio Communications Network Administrator, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- Tim Tran, All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association (Primary Representative)

Chief Reardon also acknowledged members who have recently resigned from SAFECOM:

- Brooks Shannon, National Emergency Number Association (NENA) [Alternate]
- Justin Kates, At-Large, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency
- Jason Kern, APCO [Primary]
- Tom Ling, At-Large, Kalispel Tribal Public Safety Department
- Steve Staffier, At-Large, City of Chelsea (MA)
- Tyrell Morris, At-Large, Orleans Parish Communication District (LA)

Chief Reardon announced Assistant Chief Chris Lombard was voted to continue his role as the SAFECOM First Vice Chair. Chief Reardon expressed his gratitude towards members and the work being done to address the current challenges in the public safety environment. EAD Brown detailed the level of success that SAFECOM has achieved and thanked members for their continued support towards developing products and implementing change throughout the public safety industry.

SAFECOM SCHOOL

December 5, 2023

New members learned about SAFECOM's history, goals, objectives, and mission. Discussions also included protecting the SAFECOM brand, member responsibilities, and code of conduct. Members were introduced to CISA's role in SAFECOM and received an overview of CISA resources and key federal staff who support SAFECOM.

Exploring the Role of the Emergency Communications Center in Public Safety Communications

Mr. Mark Buchholz, SAFECOM At-Large, Washington County Consolidated Communications Agency (WCCCA), Oregon, and Mr. Greg Holcomb, Director/E911 Coordinator, Lake County Public Safety Communications, Florida, discussed the evolution of 911 technology and how the roles and responsibilities of public safety telecommunicators have expanded to address these new technologies. Across the nation, there are more than 5,000 Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs) with diverse structures ranging from one and two seat centers to mega centers. Presenters discussed the relationship between ECCs and field responders, as public safety telecommunicators are now involved in incident management and making quick decisions to provide first responders with as much information as possible before arriving on scene. Mr. Buchholz and Mr. Holcomb discussed how Next Generation 911 (NG911) will impact ECCs. Also, ECCs are beginning to look at ways to use artificial intelligence (AI) to assist with staffing shortages, call handling, and quality assurance by using methods such as keywords to process emergency and non-emergency calls. Mr. Buchholz discussed WCCCA's regional system and how ECCs can partner with neighboring jurisdictions to address funding challenges and maximize resources.

Following the presentation, attendees noted challenges with incident notification, as policies varying across jurisdictions. Mr. Buchholz noted that each jurisdiction works with their field personnel but there is no single manual that goes to every center. Regionalization has helped at his center since they manage a Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD)-to-CAD hub for seven different CAD systems. This effort has encouraged them to use consistent terminology and call types. As a follow-up item, CISA can share information about CISA's CAD-to-CAD projects.

Attendees also inquired about events where ECCs may need to move to an alternate center and whether ECCs should move personnel. Mr. Buchholz noted in the future ECCs may have the ability to establish agreements with neighboring jurisdictions to better utilize resources such as designating what percentage of calls may be transferred to each center to help ensure one center is not overwhelmed.

Public Safety Communications Legislative Update

Assistant Chief Chris Lombard, SAFECOM At-Large, Seattle Fire Department, led participants through a discussion about what Congress is discussing with regards to public safety communications. Mr. Thomas Shull provided comments from the perspective as Director of Legislative Affairs for the FirstNet Authority, and Mr. Roberto Mussenden provided a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulatory update. Efforts toward the reauthorization of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) FirstNet Authority continued this year with the education of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Communications and Technology Subcommittee—which will provide oversight on the matter—on its history, such as reexamining a report submitted by the General Accountability Office in February 2022, entitled “Public Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity. Earlier in 2023, Representative Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX.) reintroduced a bill to renew the nationwide public-safety broadband network’s FCC license to eliminate a potential sunset in 2027. The Communications and Technology Subcommittee held a hearing in May 2023 to examine a number of programs administered by NTIA and the FCC, including FirstNet and broader topics on broadband, AI, and spectrum management.

In September 2023, the Senate confirmed the final commissioner to complete the five-member full board necessary to run the FCC. With final confirmation of Anna Gomez on September 7 and her swearing-in September 25, the FCC Commission holds a democratic 3-2 majority. The FCC continues to follow a reactionary pattern of identifying problems prior to the solution, seeking resolution, and then passing and implementing bills to fix it (e.g., T-Band). Spectrum issues remain a high priority (e.g., working with Congress to utilize 4.9 GHz and 6.0 GHz spectrum—a mid- to low-range option—to improve 5G radio frequency in cars). Mr. Mussenden noted that legislation is often spurred in reaction to concrete problems. Understanding the problem from an objective perspective to come up with an effective solution is often the greatest challenge; for instance, the FCC was witnessing dueling narratives on band use (i.e., who was using it, how much, and for what).

NG911 funding continues to remain in the overall spending bill, coordination of which has been led by Senator Pat Murray (WA), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Senator Maria Cantwell (WA), Chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation. Other salient topics recurring at hearings and in consideration of funding include AI and its future impacts on public safety.

SAFECOM Member Spotlight: ARRL The National Association for Amateur Radio

Mr. Josh Johnston shared insights on one of SAFECOM's newest associations, The National Association for Amateur Radio® (ARRL), including their current public safety communications priorities. ARRL was founded in 1914 and is headquartered in Newington, CT, with over 160,000 members across the country. ARRL's mission is to advance the art, science, and enjoyment of amateur radio through effective partnerships in emergency disaster response with a focus on providing citizens and public service partners with communications expertise, situational awareness, and technical capabilities of professional communicators. The five pillars of ARRL include public service, advocacy, education, technology, and membership: all offered services and programs are directly associated.

One of ARRL's most notable services is the Ham (Amateur Radio) Aid program. The Ham Aid program was created in response to events during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and provides amateur radio equipment for loan across the United States. The Ham Aid program not only responds to equipment request with a 24-hour window, but also has pre-staged/pre-deployed “go-kits” located across the nation near hurricane prone areas. These kits are available to be used for any disaster or emergency, underway or anticipated, as well as approved trainings and education missions, expos, and demonstrations. Go-kits are equipped with, but not limited to, radio, power supply, coaxial feed line, antenna tuner, two VHF repeaters, two HF amplifiers, an email- via radio systems with laptop computer, and tools. For further information on ARRL and its services and offerings, please visit www.arrl.org or contact Josh Johnston at jjohnston@arrl.org.

FirstNet Authority Update

Mr. Jon Olson, Senior Public Safety Advisor (Emergency Medical Services) for the FirstNet Authority, and Mr. Tom Shull, Director of Legislative Affairs for the FirstNet Authority, provided an update on FirstNet's current initiatives and how they will more broadly affect the emergency communications community in 2024. Mr. Olson highlighted FirstNet Authority Fiscal Year 2023 accomplishments including:

34,000 stakeholders engaged with FirstNet Authority staff, 60 pre-planning engagements, such as Super Bowl LVII, and 1,300 engagements across the country. The FirstNet Authority continues to prioritize investments to expand and evolve the FirstNet network, continue to improve the network to evolve technology in the FirstNet Core for Fifth Generation (5G) network capabilities, and improve in-building coverage and resiliency. Mr. Olson also discussed innovation in eight areas, such as FirstNet MegaRange™ to expand the coverage footprint in response vehicles. Mr. Shull stated the FirstNet Authority is continually seeking stakeholder feedback on the network so that FirstNet can continue to improve for public safety users so that we can prioritize investments. FirstNet also discussed the expansion of programs to improve interoperability between FirstNet and state and local land mobile radio networks (LMR).

Following the briefing, attendees raised interoperability and operability challenges with Mission Critical Push-to-Talk (MCPTT) devices and emphasized the need to coordinate and plan to prepare for the 2026 World Cup. The FirstNet Authority is eager to be involved in planning and coordination and there was also discussion around establishing a naming convention, as well as governance understanding for this work. Attendees inquired if Compact Rapid Deployable (CRD™) devices will be sold nationally and one audience member had positive feedback regarding a FirstNet deployable being used in Utqiagvik (Barrow), Alaska, north of the Arctic Circle, to support public safety communications after a submarine cable was cut under an ice sheet. Mr. Olson shared the FirstNet Authority is improving education, so users have a better understanding of when and how to use CRD™ devices in the field. Attendees also encouraged the FirstNet Authority to participate in coordination work on developing national Broadband Long Term Evolution (LTE) Push-to-Talk channels.

Cyberattacks on Public Safety

Mr. Les DeFoor, Security Operations Center Manager for the State of Oregon, and Mr. William Chapman, Oregon Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), provided information about recent cyberattacks on public safety in the State of Oregon and how such incidents, such as ransomware, are mitigated and managed. They shared lessons learned and best practices for responding to cyberattacks in public safety organizations.

The Royal ransomware cyberattack that occurred on April 26, 2023, in Curry County, Oregon, prevented access to the county's computer systems, resulting in the loss of data access, and impacted information systems for all county resources, including the district attorney, county clerk, treasurer, and emergency management. The Royal ransomware attached itself in the county's servers for approximately six months, rerouting switches, however, the cyberattack was not able to access the 911 county radio systems. The 911 center was able to receive calls, as it was rendered into manual mode, but was unable to access the CAD system to enter calls for service and access criminal justice information services to run warrant checks and license plates as well as jail records and additional resources. The county law enforcement officers were not able to process individuals into the county jail. They were also not able to access juvenile records or parole and probation records. Citizens felt the interruptions in everyday life as well, such as inhibiting the ability to buy homes, obtain marriage licenses, or confirm county appointments. This was a lifeline-impacting cyberattack, ongoing for many months, and the county is still recovering.

Presenters highlighted their response efforts and made appropriate notifications to investigate the 911 call delivery. Presenters emphasized that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) does not see cyber as a major incident; although this attack disabled major lifeline services to American citizens and critical infrastructure services, the Curry County cyberattack did not qualify for a FEMA response. They also recommended training information technology personnel in cybersecurity immediately. One key point was the lack of organized response, or response at all, from CISA Cyber Services Section. The CISA support which was on ground and engaged was from the Communications portion of CISA.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Royal Ransomware Cyberattack, April 26, 2023

- Ask your SWIC, or Emergency Communications Coordinator if needed, who will serve as your support and guidance in recovering from a cyberattack
- Know what resources to ask for and do not assume the local jurisdiction knows what that includes; scope requests and find common vocabulary
- Get stabilized first; ensure mission critical needs are addressed in order to focus on the recovery
- Ensure Incident Command System (ICS) training exists for personnel and include telecommunicators
- Prepare a continuity of operations plan (COOP) in advance and include your cyber incident response plan along with an IT disaster response plan

Following the presentation, attendees inquired if the whole state of Oregon was impacted and if alerts and warnings were used to leverage information sharing. Curry County Commissioners declared an emergency, ECCs were deployed, and CISA supported virtually. Alerts and warnings were not utilized but there was a press release through the public information office. Additional questions centered around ransom payments, where the breach occurred, insurance coverage, or the county's responsibilities for remaining cybersecurity challenges. There is an ongoing investigation and presenters were not able to comment on specific cyberattack information.

SAFECOM Information Sharing

SAFECOM committee and task force chairs provided updates on each of SAFECOM's committees, working groups, and task forces.

Chief Cody Worrell, Education and Outreach Committee Chair – The E&O Committee held their last virtual meeting October 25, with the next virtual meeting scheduled for January 31. The Committee is focused on completing the analytics portion of the *SAFECOM Membership Questionnaire*, which is intended to collect updated information on association representatives and at-large member's experience and expertise as well as identify membership gaps while also functioning as an internal networking and information sharing tool. The E&O Committee met with the Governance Committee December 5 to analyze and discuss feedback from the Questionnaire and to determine a path forward. The *SAFECOM Membership Spotlight*, which highlights the background and experience of SAFECOM members, is ongoing with its most recent spotlight featuring Major Darryl Anderson, SAFECOM At-Large, Stark County Sheriff's Office. This iteration will be posted to the SAFECOM website as well as included in the *SAFECOM Quarterly Newsletter* once finalized. Most recent publications for the E&O Committee include the [SAFECOM Fact Sheet](#) update (April 2023), a SAFECOM Membership Spotlight ft. Keith Victor (May 2023), updates to the [Introduction to SAFECOM](#) presentation (June 2023), *Catching Up with SAFECOM: An Education and Outreach Committee Quarterly Newsletter* (August 2023), and an update of the SAFECOM School curriculum (December 2023).

Major George Perera, Governance Committee Chair – The Governance Committee last met December 4, and finalized committee recommendations for new SAFECOM members, as approved by the SAFECOM Chair. The Committee also reviewed and assigned interviewers for recent SAFECOM applicants as well as reviewed members who are potentially at risk due to lack of participation. The [SAFECOM Recommended Guidelines for Statewide Public Safety Communications Governance Structure](#), which is intended to provide guidelines to encourage uniformity throughout approaches to statewide public safety communications governance, is currently being updated. Recently, the Governance Committee proposed the *SAFECOM Recognition Award Criteria & Nomination Form* as part of an initiative to showcase SAFECOM members and recognize their achievements, accomplishments, or actions on behalf of SAFECOM. The Executive Board approved the form November 30, which is now under CISA review.

- **Cybersecurity Working Group** – The SAFECOM Cybersecurity Working Group held its most recent meeting on November 1, where members received a briefing on CISA's Protected Critical Infrastructure Information (PCII) Program. The *Data Backup Considerations for Public Safety* document is in the approval process, with the group also adjudicating feedback received from the SAFECOM Executive Board on the *Public Safety Cloud Adoption Considerations* document. The next Working Group meeting is scheduled for January 10.

Lloyd Mitchell, Funding and Sustainment (F&S) Committee Chair – The Committee last met December 4 and had a productive meeting to develop its 2024 strategic plan. The Committee discussed 2023 priorities that were not completed this calendar year but will continue into 2024 as well as products to develop. They also agreed to evaluate their published products to scope and review potential updates. F&S also worked to identify funding risks and barriers and how to mitigate those to have continued success in 2024. As next steps, the Committee will finalize the Emergency Communications Systems Lifecycle Planning Guide suite refresh and continue to develop the Grant Applicant Resource Hub. The Committee's next meeting will be held January 17.

Philip Mann, Technology Policy (TP) Committee Chair – The TP Committee met virtually in November to discuss 2024 strategic planning. Committee objectives for 2024 included a speaker series to discuss grants/funding, encryption, and LMR/LTE; the development of a case study focused on the Maui wildfires; a refresh of the Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Guide; and hosting a webinar on AI. The Committee will hold its next meeting January 23.

- **NG911 Working Group** – The NG911 Working Group held their last meeting in person on December 4. During the meeting the Working Group received briefings from Department Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate and the National 911 Program on current initiatives related to 911 and NG911. The Working Group discussed 2024 strategic planning and continued the development of the [911 Cybersecurity Resource Hub](#), a one-stop shop for ECCs to find

cybersecurity resources. Users will be able to leverage resources to report a cyber incident, enhance cybersecurity awareness and training, discover lessons learned from real-world cases, and learn about best practices and resources for conducting risk assessments. The Working Group will hold its next meeting January 25.

- **Project 25 (P25) User Needs Working Group (UNWG)** – The P25 UNWG met in-person October 2023 in Savannah, Georgia. During the meeting, members met with the APCO Project 25 Interest Group (APIC) to discuss user needs around the development of link layer encryption (LLE) P25 standards. They also focused on developing recommendations addressing the Encryption Task Group’s efforts in developing the P25 standard for LLE around vehicle repeaters and pagers, developing P25 user outreach outside of the United States and scheduling use case interviews for the *LMR in the Cloud* white paper. The group also held an in-person meeting December 4 to develop its 2024 strategic plan.

Assistant Chief Chris Lombard, Communications Section Task Force (CSTF) Chair – The CSTF last meet in November 2023 for a two-day, in-person meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, where members made recommendations to prioritize 2024 CSTF activities and initiatives which included updating the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) curriculum, supporting the development of the national standards for qualifications, certification, and credentialing for ICT personnel, and continuing to promote the alignment of the ICT function beyond the branch level and influence its inclusion as a section within the Incident Command System (ICS) structure. The CSTF is developing a subgroup comprised of four “action teams” to accomplish ICT implementation priorities and support auxiliary communications within ICS. The group is actively recruiting and will host its kickoff meeting in January 2024 to identify expected outcomes, determine goals and objectives, and assign tasks. The CSTF is also working on the development of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document for the ICT Functional Guidance that will be drafted by the action teams.

Chief Gerald Reardon, P25 Compliance Assessment Program Task Force (CAPTF) Chair – The CAPTF last met virtually in November 2023 to discuss strategic planning for 2024. Some of the work items and objectives for 2024 included continued responses to DHS S&T requests on current and emerging topics, engaging with the P25 UNWG as needed to share newly-identified public safety user needs standards and recommendations, and the provision of guidance to DHS S&T Commercialization Accelerator Program (CAP) on Interworking Function (IWF) and LMR/LTE interface compliance testing.

Sheriff Paul Fitzgerald, Information Sharing Framework Task Force (ISFTF) Chair – The ISFTF continues to work with the Iowa Department of Public Safety on developing technical, operational, and interoperable roadmap requirements for their request for proposal (RFP) development of greater CAD-to-CAD information sharing within the state. The task force is also shifting towards the Technical Proof-of Concept (POC) and full engagement with industry as the team secured DHS research and development funding and posted a request for information (RFI) with numerous technical questions. The RFI closed September 15 and the team received and ranked over half a dozen responses. The ISFTF is working with DHS S&T to ensure a holistic RFP is provided to industry. The RFP will be more about information sharing framework objectives as opposed to strict operational, functional, and performance requirements to give industry more flexibility on how to design, build, and test the service platform, similar to the FirstNet RFP. It is anticipated that the final RFP will be posted in January 2024.

SAFECOM SUB-GROUP MEETINGS

December 4-6, 2023

In addition to the SAFECOM and Joint SAFECOM-National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) Bi-Annual Meetings, members of the NG911 Working Group, P25 UNWG, CSTF, Joint SAFECOM-NCSWIC Funding and Sustainment Committee, Joint SAFECOM Education and Outreach Committee-SAFECOM Governance Committee, SAFECOM Governance Committee, and SAFECOM Executive Board met to further collaborate on identified work products. Separate meeting summaries are being developed to capture major action items and outcomes from those meetings.