

Communications Committee

Purpose Statement

The ITTF Communications Committee is charged with developing short- and long-range interoperable communications strategies to support the implementation of the Illinois Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan and related policies and procedures, thereby enhancing the state's ability to respond to and recover from both natural and man-made disasters. The committee also provides technology recommendations to the State Interoperable Executive Committee to support the use and expansion of statewide voice, data, and video communications systems and provide oversight of the state's strategic technology reserve.

2008 Key Activities

- The committee continued to oversee the implementation of Phase 6 of the Emergency Management Network (EMnet) system in Illinois. The Phase 6 expansion included the installation of EMnet terminals in prioritized fire departments throughout the state. In 2008, Illinois initiated the installation of EMnet terminals in Emergency Medical System (EMS) Region 8 hospitals (Northeastern Illinois). Both of these projects will continue into 2009, thereby enhancing the state's capability to provide statewide warning and information sharing among public safety officials.

The vendor for the EMnet system, Comlabs, has released an upgrade to the terminal software that will be implemented in Illinois. The upgrade will provide a number of significant benefits to EMnet host agencies in terms of local notification (message forwarding) and message initiation.

- Illinois Transportable Emergency Communications System (ITECS) trailers were deployed several times in response to local, regional and statewide incidents in 2008. ITECS is the name for Illinois' system that provides a robust communications capability to ensure communications interoperability (surge) at the site of a major disaster upon the request of a public safety organization. The suites are sophisticated mobile communications packages with multiple systems that are housed around the state and are available to deploy anywhere in Illinois to enhance or replace local emergency response communications following any disaster or incident. In addition to a number of local deployments, seven ITECS teams participated in the flood response in the summer of 2008. In February, the ITECS 3 team (Will County) responded to the Northern Illinois University shooting and again for the campus memorial service, and five ITECS units were deployed for the Obama Presidential election rally in Chicago Nov. 4-5.



In 2008, the ITTF Communications Committee supported the procurement of mobile video-conferencing hardware and enhanced Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), automatic failover, and load-sharing equipment to expand the capabilities of the ITECS.

ITECS teams continued to train and exercise in 2008. Two combined ITECS/Unified Command Post (UCP) teams participated in the IEMA Region 8 (Metro East area) communications exercise in June. Three teams participated in the statewide I-Quake exercise in October, working with UCP teams and in support of the technical rescue team. The first semi-annual combined ITECS/UCP team meeting and training was held in



October, and another meeting has been scheduled for April 2009. Several individual ITECS team members and Communications Committee members participated in U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) COML training (All-Hazards Type III Communications Unit Leader Training). Illinois was selected by DHS to host the highly sought-after regional training event, which was held in Chicago.

- The Statewide Radio Communications for the 21st Century (Starcom21) network, which provides first responders throughout the state with a single interoperable communications system, was formally accepted from Motorola in 2008. By accepting the system, Illinois agreed that Motorola had met the specifications listed in the state contract, including the establishment of 20 dispatch centers and 187 tower sites and field testing requirements. The ITTF Communications Committee also collaborated with the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) on the procurement of \$485,000 in Starcom21 radios for requesting local public safety agencies. Also, in 2008, the committee worked with Motorola and Nextel to plan, coordinate, and initiate the rebanding (reprogramming) of all Starcom21 radios in the state, in compliance with FCC requirements.
- The committee received and distributed \$36.4 million in federal preparedness funds to state and local public safety agencies under the Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grant (PSIC) program. The PSIC grant was awarded in conjunction with federal acceptance of the state's interoperable communications plan. Illinois utilized the funding to support the development or expansion of multi-discipline, multi-jurisdictional voice communications networks to operate on Illinois' 700/800 MHz interoperability platform in high population and risk locations. The Chicago Urban Area received \$16.2 million through the PSIC program.
- In April 2008, DHS notified Illinois that the Statewide Communications Interoperable Plan (SCIP) had met the SAFECOM standards and was approved. Additionally, the SCIP was officially accepted by the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, Illinois State Police, Illinois Terrorism Task Force, Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois Emergency Services Management Association, Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm System, Mutual Aid Box Alarm System, and Chicago/Cook County Urban Area.



- The Communication Assets Survey and Mapping (CASM) tool is a secure web-based tool developed by the U.S. Navy that enables first responders to instantly identify and coordinate the use of all available communications equipment in a specified geographic area. In March 2008, two CASM training sessions were held in Illinois: one in Springfield and one in Chicago. Through CASM, Illinois will inventory all communications systems used by state and local public safety agencies. When the CASM inventory is complete, Illinois will be able to develop interoperability strategies to support state, regional, and local communications interoperability planning prior to and during events.

2009 Initiatives

The Communications Committee's goals for 2009 will focus on the continued improvement of interoperable communications for first responders throughout Illinois.

- Training: Continue semi-annual ITECS/UCP team meetings, COML training, team-member cross training, and exercise participation. Also, continue training sessions on the SCIP.
- Equipment: Continue to build and enhance the EMnet and Starcom21 networks by providing more equipment to communities, hospitals, and schools throughout Illinois. Complete rebanding of Starcom21 radios and infrastructure.
- Sustainment of systems: Develop and implement a plan for sustainment of systems already in place, such as EMnet.
- Interoperability and integration: Continue to improve and increase interoperability and integration of statewide communications assets through use of the SCIP, SOPs, Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan, CASM, EMnet, and Starcom21.

