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Presentation by Major Mike Sauter, Office of Technology and Communications, New Orleans Police Department, to the FCC's Panel on Hurricane Katrina Impacts on Communications

Pre-Katrina the City of New Orleans and the parishes of Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines had undertaken a project, supported by a Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Grant, to establish communications interoperability within the region; however, the project was eighteen months from completion when Hurricane Katrina struck. Pre-Katrina the New Orleans Maritime Interoperability Committee (NOMIC), which was an outgrowth from the federally funded PSWN project, was the primary means to accomplish interoperability. The project connected seventeen local, state and federal agencies through ACU 1000 bridging technology. Direct console patches linked the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office and the New Orleans Police Department. Regionally, the City of New Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes were attempting to leverage all available federal and local funds to eliminate the number of disparate voice radio systems and upgrade others to improve day to day operability and build interoperability; however, the funding was not there to support the requirement.

During Hurricane Katrina, the City of New Orleans lost two primary tower sites and had to evacuate the police and fire communications centers because of flooding. Associated with the loss of the communications centers was the loss of all 911 capabilities and the NOMIC interoperability bridging capability. Over 2000 police, fire and EMS personnel were forced to communicate in a single channel mode, between radios, utilizing three mutual aid frequencies. There was no voice radio contact with surrounding parishes or state and federal agencies. Lives were put at risk and it created a direct operational impact on their ability to maintain control of the rapidly deteriorating situation within the city, carry out rescue efforts and control the evacuation of those people who had failed to heed the call for evacuation.

Post-Katrina we are working diligently to restore voice radio communications, but it still not up to pre-storm levels. Attempting to move toward regional and statewide interoperability, the State has installed 700 MHz antennas and repeaters; however, FEMA has denied funding for subscriber radios, which are needed in order to take advantage of the state architecture and tower sites. FEMA has provided St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes with 700 MHz subscriber radios, yet they can not talk to the 800 MHz systems in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. From an interoperability perspective, we are in worse shape today than we were before the storm. The storm has left the City of New Orleans and the parishes of St. Bernard and Plaquemines without funding. The parishes are unable to meet the cash match for the COPS grant and will ask for a waiver to the requirement but the overall value of the grant will be reduced by \$ 1.8 million and this will further impact our ability to establish interoperability. FEMA funding and the COPS grant provide the only funding source for restoration of our communications system for interoperability at this time. Based on our regional plan, we are moving forward but, from an interoperability perspective, we will be less prepared for the 2006 hurricane season unless we receive immediate funding support from outside sources.