

**Regional Interoperability Advisory Board (RIAB)  
Meeting Minutes  
Monday, May 14, 2007  
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Gering Fire Hall, 1025 M St., Gering, NE**

**RIAB Members**

Present: Mike Jeffres, Al Berndt, Mark S. Conrey, Bob Brower, Timothy Loewenstein  
Absent: Sgt. Todd Beam

**Other Attendees (in sign-in order):**

Sherry Blaha, Scotts Bluff & Banner Emergency Management Director  
Dana Miller, Scotts Bluff Fire Chief  
Gary Ruegg, Interop-Solutions CEO  
Dan Hiller, NEMA  
Mark Robertson, NEMA  
Lynn Marshall, NEMA  
Capt. Russell Stanczyk, Nebraska State Patrol  
Lt. Bret Friesz, Nebraska State Patrol  
Alma Beland, Region 26 Director  
Eilene Brannon, Cherry & Keya-Paha Emergency Management Director  
Pam Kemper, Nebraska Office of the CIO, Network Services  
Steve Myers, NEMA  
Capt. Jason Rogers, Gering Police Department  
Larry J. Collins, Region 21 Emergency Management Coordinator  
Dexter Smith, Cheyenne County Emergency Center Communications Director  
Jerry Bretthauer, Scotts Bluff PD Emergency Management Coordinator

Mike Jeffres chaired the meeting. He pointed out that the *Nebraska Open Meetings Act* was displayed. Attendees signed-in and introduced themselves.

Handouts were distributed:

- Meeting agenda
- SAFECOM Questions to Consider for Standard Operating Procedures
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) [from DHS Guidebook]
- Homeland Security – Nebraska Communications Systems map
- MOU Regional PET map from NEMA

Mr. Jeffres announced that Governor Heineman reappointed the RIAB members effective April 10, 2007 and continuing until January 1, 2009.

Mr. Jeffres briefly reviewed the statutory roles outlined in LB 343 for the RIAB and the State Office of the CIO's Division of Communications.

**There are two main goals for this meeting:**

1. Update RIAB on the State of the State's Interoperable Communications
2. The Statewide Interoperability Plan is due to the Department of Homeland Security by October 1, 2007. Standard Operating Procedures are required. We want to set the tone for regional leadership to come forward and help the state

develop the interoperability plan. Regional interoperability plans are necessary for a state plan to be developed. We want to couple RIAB with regional leadership to move the plan forward.

### NEMA Review of Planning Regions

Steve Myers of NEMA reviewed the maps that were distributed to the attendees: the Nebraska Communications Systems and the NEMA PET Regions. Communications is a part of the Planning, Exercise, Training (PET) and Tactical Interoperable Communications Planning (TICP) process.

Al Berndt said NEMA will be working with the Sandhills on their TICPs in the August timeframe. In the next 6 months, the State will complete its statewide interoperability plan, then NEMA will work with the PET regions to complete their TICPs, and then the State TICP.

Mr. Jeffres pointed out that the TICP process leads into the interoperable communications plan.

Mark Conrey has been through the TICP process for the UASI area. He said some things worked and some things didn't. Communications is a support mechanism of the plan. He asked NEMA if they were migrating towards a regional response plan.

Mr. Berndt responded that they are not looking at a regional response plan at this point in time, but they are looking at regional support for events such as fires.

Mr. Conrey asked how much money do we pour into regional support mechanisms to support a response? We need the capability to support a regional response.

Mr. Berndt said that in a perfect world, you would go through the PET process and a result would be the identification of where we need to put the response capabilities. It's a circular planning process.

Mr. Conrey asked, should we plan for a regional response? We might have interoperable capability, but how does it work at a regional level when there's an actual incident? Is there a plan? Or do you just show up and take your directions?

Mr. Berndt responded that we will define how we work with the regions to carry out the planning.

Mr. Jeffres reminded the group about dividing the state into regions for interoperable communications planning, and the concept that the State itself is a region. The state needs to think about how it fits into the evolving regional picture across the state.

Mr. Conrey said it is a step in the right direction to encourage people to plan for a regional response.

Timothy Loewenstein said the formalization of regions is the foundation. The regions need to sit down and agree to work together. The focus is now on response, and not just communications.

Mr. Jeffres added that we're taking the focus off of the "stuff," and focusing on what we're going to do with it now that we have it.

Lynn Marshall, NEMA, commented that communications was the vehicle that got us to where we are today. Tim is right. Now we need to focus on the MOU Frequency Plan and Interoperability tied to the regional concept.

### Mutual Aid Plan

The Nebraska State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) adopted the State Mutual Aid Frequency Plan at the April 10, 2007 meeting in Lincoln Nebraska. It establishes a frequency scheme. The state will start licensing the frequencies.

It's not a plan unto itself. It adds a layer that supplements local level capabilities. It will be controlled locally and self-policing. It will be incorporated into the SOPs. We need to decide what the capabilities need to be, and then focus the grant money to accomplish them.

It's a piece of the statewide strategy that has 3 main pieces:

- Develop the regional interoperable communications systems
- Develop the Mutual Aid Plan
- Develop the State Interoperable System

We are also working with our neighboring states to flesh out the Mutual Aid Plan. We will be working with local officials to solve the connectivity issues. We have applied to and been approved to receive assistance from ICTAP (Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program), a free program offered by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Grants and Training. They are waiting to be funded to start. They will provide engineering assistance for the frequency re-use coverage, tower details and networking details.

### The State as a Region

The concept of the State as a region emphasizes how the state views interacting with the local areas. The state is going to try to catch-up to where you, the local regions, are. We're going to issue an RFP for the state system this year. The award will be made around January 2008. It will take about 18 months to put the system in place, then user training will take place.

### Moving Interoperability Forward

How do we start moving interoperability forward? Nobody has the answer for what works for everybody everywhere. You have to do what works for Nebraska. Do you know where you are with interoperability? Do you know where you are going with it?

Steve Myers will email the draft of the Statewide Communications Plan for your review. We need a designated group of regional leaders to develop the SOPs for interoperable communications.

### Gap Analysis

Mr. Conrey commented that total interoperability means you have to be connected and be able to talk. A simple thing that needs to be done is a Gap Analysis. Once you formalize the region, you need all public safety agencies (local, regional, state and federal) to come together to evaluate whether they can communicate with each other when they need to.

You need a template to start measuring what you can and can't do, and what you still need to do. Start with a graph. Put all agencies down one side and across the top. Then start going through it to analyze who can talk to whom. This will also help you to determine your equipment needs. CNRI (the Central Region) went through this process when they were putting in their ACU1000s.

Mr. Jeffres added that the focus shouldn't be what system it is, but rather, what do we need and what does the system do to meet those needs. We can learn a lot from the Central Region's experience. The gap analysis they went through is a useful tool for identifying all the parts and pieces to complete the interoperability puzzle. The NEMA TICP process that is going on will help the regions coordinate and communicate to find their capabilities and gaps.

Mr. Loewenstein cautioned that we should not just emphasize the gaps, but must demonstrate how we can share assets in the bigger plan. Ask ourselves: What do we already have that we can use?

Mr. Conrey said that NEMA and RIAB are going down parallel tracks. The communications planners have to be part of the region, but they are not the decision-makers for the region. They are going to represent the communications piece, not the governance piece. They are not a NEMA planner. It is important that the regional communications planners work with RIAB. They are the worker bees. They constantly have to go back and forth gathering, sharing and coordinating information to develop workable plans and procedures.

Mr. Berndt said that Mr. Conrey's UASI area was the first Nebraska area to write a TICP and exercise it. Then the DHS grant cycle required that the state do a TICP. It made sense to do regional TICP's first, and then transcend them into the state TICP. It's not the end-all, be-all, but once you do it, you identify the deficiencies. Then you can decide what to do about them.

### ICTAP Process Started

As mentioned earlier when we talked about the Mutual Aid Plan, we have been approved to receive assistance from ICTAP engineers to detail out the Mutual Aid Plan. They may also work out some operational protocols – taking a look at how you'd use such a system – working out the technical nuts and bolts. Then we will start talking about grant funding to support the Mutual Aid Plan.

## CASM Tool and How It Can Be Used

ICTAP developed CASM (the Communication Assets Survey and Mapping Tool) software to provide a Web-based tool that agencies can use to store interoperable communications equipment inventory and current radio communications infrastructure information. The data resides in a secure SPAWAR database that is accessible only by the participating agencies.

The CASM tool provides a geo-spatial representation of which agencies can communicate and the means of connectivity. The data can be revised by authorized users at anytime, making it a valuable ongoing tool for both agency assessments and urban area use. In addition, it can be useful in accessing and identifying an agency's resources.

Mr. Jeffres said the state has been approved to receive training on this tool. We'll have a number of people trained on it. Mr. Conrey said it's as good as the information you put into it. It's a very useful tool, but it has to be maintained so if a disaster or event caused a need for statewide communications, you could look at the CASM site and see what's available for communications in each area, and how to communicate there.

You can designate access by regions and by counties, etc. Different levels of access can be assigned. Mr. Conrey has access to it for the UASI view, and is willing to give it up to the State so the State can set the access hierarchy. Mr. Conrey feels the State should manage it.

The Central Region built a similar tool when they implemented their interoperable solution. Mr. Loewenstein said the big challenge was getting people to participate. Once they started coming to the table and talking, they grasped the end result and became enthusiastic. First each county did their planning at the county level; then they came together to do the I-80 corridor planning; and then the planning for south of the corridor. They put their plans in a database. They are using it every single day as part of their daily routine. They use it to figure out who they have to talk to each day, not just for the really big events. They have a user group that gives regular feedback as to whether the plans are working as expected.

## Regional SOPs and Interoperability Planning Direction

The key is to take the information that is gathered and what has been learned through these processes and tools, and take the next step. Our intent is to start putting together SOPs that will translate into the statewide interoperability plan.

Mr. Conrey stated the next step, if you haven't already done it, is to commit to a region, formalize it and make a plan. You cannot do it on your own. You need to know who else is in your region and what they are doing. The State cannot dictate what region you're in. You need to decide where you best fit for your communications SOPs development.

Leaders from the formalized regions will work with RIAB and the Office of the CIO-Network Services. They will examine data from the Regional Gap Analysis and identify priority areas that need to be addressed. They will identify SOPs that are required in support of the regional response plans, and develop a template for the SOPs.

Questions and comments were solicited from the public. None were made.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:00 p.m.