Department of Homeland Security
Federal Emergency Management Agency

SAFECOM Compliance Letter

Lessons learned from recent major disasters, unplanned events, and full-scale exercises have identified a need for greater coordination of emergency communications among senior elected officials, emergency management agencies, and first responders at all levels of government. Federal responders arriving on the scene of a domestic incident are not always able to communicate with SLTT response agencies, as well as key government officials. State and local first responders sometimes experience similar problems, particularly when the incident requires a multi-agency, regional response effort or when primary communications capabilities fail. This lack of operability and interoperability between federal and SLTT agencies—further complicated by problems with communications survivability and resilience—has hindered the ability to share critical information, which can compromise the unity-of-effort required for an effective incident response.

Departments and agencies at all levels of government have identified a need for improvement in several high-priority areas, including Governance, Planning, Training and Exercises, Operational Coordination, and Technology. In addition, communications resilience and continuity should be viewed as a critical component within each of these areas. These priorities are explained in detail in Section 2 of the SAFECOM Guidance. By addressing these priorities, which are reflective of proven best practices, emergency communications can be significantly improved at all levels of government. The end goal is to ensure operable, interoperable, and resilient communications that maintain a continuous flow of critical information, under all conditions, among multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary emergency responders, command posts, agencies, critical infrastructure sectors, and government officials for the duration of an emergency response operation, and in accordance with NIMS and the National Emergency Communications Plan, which describes goals and objectives for improving emergency communications nationwide.

To help meet this goal, the SAFECOM Guidance outlines requirements for grant applications, including alignment to national, regional, and state communications plans (e.g., NECP, Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP), Tactical

Interoperability Communications Plan (TICP), FEMA Regional Emergency Communications Plan (RECP)), project coordination, and technical standards for emergency communications technologies. SCIPs define the current and future direction for interoperable and emergency communications within a state or territory, while TICPs are designed to allow urban areas, counties, regions, states/territories, tribes, or federal departments/agencies to document interoperable communications governance structures, technology assets, and usage policies and procedures. In addition, FEMA's formal planning process has produced 10 RECPs and their associated state and/or tribal/territorial annexes that identify emergency communications capability shortfalls and potential resource requirements. Grant recipients are encouraged to leverage these planning resources as a source of input and reference for all emergency communications grant applications and investment justifications (IJ).

In addition, FEMA formally recognizes several statewide emergency communications governance bodies (e.g., SWIC, Statewide Interoperability Governance Board (SIGB), Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC), FirstNet State Single Point of Contact (SPOC)), and strongly encourages grant recipients to closely coordinate with these entities when developing an emergency communications investment to ensure projects support the state or territory's strategy to improve their communications capabilities with the goal of achieving fully operable, interoperable, and resilient communications. In addition, recipients should work with public and private entities, and across jurisdictions and disciplines, to demonstrate engagement with the Whole Community in accordance with [Presidential Policy Directive-8 (PPD-8](#)).

For regional, cross-border initiatives, FEMA requires recipients to coordinate projects with national level emergency communications coordination bodies, such as the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) and the Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Working Groups (RECCWGs). The NCSWIC promotes and coordinates state-level activities designed to ensure the highest level of public safety communications across the nation. RECCWGs are congressionally mandated planning and coordination bodies located in each FEMA Region and provide a collaborative forum to assess and address the survivability, sustainability, operability, and interoperability of emergency communications systems at all levels of government. Grant-funded investments that are coordinated with these bodies will help ensure that federally funded emergency communications investments are interoperable and support national policies.

All entities using preparedness grant funding to support emergency communications investments are required to comply with the [SAFECOM Guidance on Emergency Communications Grants (SAFECOM Guidance)](#). The SAFECOM Guidance provides current information on emergency communications policies, eligible costs, best practices, and technical standards for SLTT recipients investing federal funds in emergency communications projects. It is also designed to promote and align with the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP). Compliance with the SAFECOM Guidance helps ensure that federally funded investments are compatible, interoperable, resilient, and support national goals and objectives for improving emergency communications. Applicants should use the SAFECOM Guidance during planning, development, and implementation of emergency

communications projects and in conjunction with other planning documents (e.g., Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIP)). Specifically, Appendix D of the SAFECOM Guidance contains compliance instructions for FEMA grant recipients.

Emergency communications investments also will be reviewed jointly by FEMA and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to verify compliance with SAFECOM Guidance. FEMA will coordinate directly with the recipient on any compliance concerns and will provide technical assistance as necessary to help ensure full compliance.