

**The Critical Role Of  
Statewide Interoperability Coordinators  
“Interoperable Communications: Assessing Progress  
since 9/11”**

**Statement of**

**Mark A. Grubb, Director**

**Delaware Division of Communications,  
Department of Safety and Homeland Security**

**Chairman, National Council of Statewide  
Interoperability Coordinators**

*Presented to the*

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY’S  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS**

U.S. House of Representatives

November 18, 2014

**Mark A. Grubb**

**Director, Delaware Division of Communications,  
Department of Safety and Homeland Security**

**Chairman, National Council of Statewide  
Interoperability Coordinators**

**November 18, 2014**

**“Interoperable Communications: Assessing Progress since 9/11”**

Chairman Brooks, Ranking Member Payne and distinguished members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on this important topic. My name is Mark Grubb, I serve as the Director of the Delaware Division of Communications in the Department of Safety and Homeland Security, and I am also the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator or SWIC for Delaware. In addition, I am honored to serve as the Chairman of the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators. I am also Delaware’s First Net State Point of Contact and I am an appointed member of Delaware’s Enhanced 911 Services Board.

As the emergency response community and State executives prepare to work with the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) on the build-out of the National Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN), we are also simultaneously coordinating the transition from 911 to Next Generation 911, as well as maintaining existing Land Mobile Radio systems that provide mission critical voice. These efforts will all enhance emergency communications for public safety, government officials, and the public, but they have also created a fast-evolving and more complex emergency communications landscape. With this evolution taking place, States and Territories have a great opportunity to leverage their Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC) to ensure these capabilities are built out in the most efficient and effective manner. Since 9/11 and the implementation of the SWIC Program, there are numerous examples of increased coordination intra and inter-state. There have been significant improvements in statewide communication systems, training and education of first responders and communications staff and most importantly on-going coordination by the SWICS at every level, but our work is certainly not finished. I think this point is certainly driven home by a recent quote from the Massachusetts SWIC Steve Staffier:

*“As I witnessed during the Boston Marathon Bombings, even though we have all made significant investments in equipment and systems around the country, we still need help in education/training/outreach to the end users and key decision makers...and this requires a SWIC and funding.*

*These radios and systems don’t talk on their own and the coordination doesn’t happen without the SWIC and a COMU (Communications Unit) Team of COML’s (Certified Communication Leaders) and COMT’s (Certified Communication Technicians).*

Or the statement from Oklahoma SWIC Nikki Cassingham after the tragedy of the Oklahoma Tornadoes:

*“In conjunction with the Statewide Interoperability Governing Body (SIGB), the SWIC built the Statewide COML & COMT Credentialing program from the ground up and has made significant efforts to expand and improve the program since its inception. The success of Oklahoma’s COML/COMT program was demonstrated most notably in the aftermath of the EF5 tornado that tore through the city of Moore, Oklahoma on May 20th, 2013. 2 state-certified COMT’s were among the first to arrive on the scene to assess infrastructure damage, while the lead COML issued cache radios, requested additional resources, and drafted the ICS-205 Communications Plan. The knowledge and experience of Oklahoma’s certified COML’s and COMT’s played an enormous role in the success of the communications response to this event.”*

These are real life examples of improvements since 9/11 and are direct results of the investments made by this committee. However, Interoperability requires much more than just equipment--it's really about people in disparate agencies and jurisdictions including each other in their planning processes. In other words, it's about relationships, lines of communications. As administrations change and people switch jobs, those relationships must be re-built, which requires education and training. It's an ongoing process, a very human process that must be maintained, year in and year out. It requires attention and dedication and, yes, funding. If we don't have all those things, we will not be able to maintain, much less improve upon, the interoperability progress we have made since 9/11. With the current absence of SWIC funding, we are losing ground.

SWICs play a central role in a State’s emergency communications and interoperability efforts by working with first responders across all levels of government, acting as a central coordination and outreach point, and guiding efforts around the creation and implementation of Statewide Communications Interoperability Plans (SCIP). Because of their wide-angle view of communications across a State, SWICs can bring a vital perspective and strategic vision to a State’s efforts, as well as guide thoughtful spending decisions, plan needed training and workshops, and improve preparedness statewide. The Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Emergency Communications has supported the development of SWICs, assisted with the creation and updates of statewide plans, and helped States and Territories form Statewide Interoperability Governance Body or Statewide Interoperability Executive Council to coordinate emergency communications. These existing structures and plans can and should be leveraged as States prepare for broadband and Next Generation 911.

Recently, States have been asked by FirstNet to appoint a State Point of Contact (SPOC) to assist with the planning and implementation phases of the NPSBN. In 18 States and the District of Columbia, the SWIC is also acting as the SPOC. In 12 States, the SWIC and SPOC both work within the same department, but in another 25 States the two roles are housed within separate departments. In addition, most States have a separate person responsible for 911 activities and the transition from 911 to Next Generation 911. With this structure, it is easy to see how the LMR, broadband, and 911 communication efforts can become separate programs with little

coordination.

We have a tremendous opportunity for States to increase coordination across these various efforts to improve communications for public safety. The SWICs who are not the primary point of contact for broadband should include the SPOC and 911 Coordinators in the statewide planning process while also expanding the existing statewide governance structures to include the SPOCs, Chief Information Officers, and State 911 Coordinators. This would allow collaboration across all these various communication projects and ensure the SCIP is truly a comprehensive statewide plan that addresses all elements of emergency communications.

For example, in Delaware, I have been asked to fill both the SWIC and SPOC roles and have also been asked by the Secretary and Governor to serve on the E911 board. This will enable me to look at the three elements in the most comprehensive, strategic, and public-safety focused way. It also allows Delaware to use the governance structure of its existing Statewide Interoperability Executive Council to address the design and use of a broadband system in the State.

In addition to keeping the SWIC involved in a State's work with FirstNet, States should consider the following to make the best use of this valuable position.

### **Continue to Provide Full Funding and Support to Your SWIC**

The SWIC position was created with support from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) and many States used funding from the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) to keep a SWIC on staff. With IECGP funding now expired, many States are struggling to continue to fund the SWIC position and even keep the interoperability body operating. OEC has been working to ensure applicable grant programs recognize SWIC support as an allowable cost to help States keep this vital position funded.

I would also urge States to find the funds to continue to support this position that both creates value and ensures efficiency. Among their vital roles, SWICs can be cost savers by ensuring a State spends its emergency communications grant funding and budgets effectively. Because the SWIC is able to take a comprehensive view of a State's communications systems, it's easier to ensure an agency doesn't go out and spend money on a system that is redundant with a solution available in the State or invest in something that is incompatible with other current or emerging technologies.

In addition, SWICs are able to help jurisdictions respond better to natural disasters, emergency incidents, and large-scale planned events by focusing on statewide planning and supporting broader training and coordination. A strong SWIC knows where each Communications Unit Leader is in the State, has them trained and ready, and can quickly deploy them to an incident commander for any type of response.

Mrs. Chairman, as you know, nothing in government gets done unless there is a champion, especially with communications interoperability, a problem that often seems to have no owner. The SWIC is the communications interoperability champion for the state and the nation.

### **Elevate the SWIC in a State's Structure**

For the SWIC to be most effective, the position must be placed high enough within the State structure. We have some SWICs who are really strong and knowledgeable, but they are not placed in a position to effectively coordinate efforts, prepare for emerging technologies, and help ensure wise purchasing policy.

As Delaware's SWIC, I report directly the Secretary of the Department of Safety and Homeland Security who chairs the Statewide Interoperability Executive Council and reports directly to the Governor. The Secretary chairs the council's monthly meetings and votes as one of the 15 council members. The other members represent State and county governments and first responder groups.

I'm an active part of the council, but, by design, I am not a voting member. That neutrality gives me the opportunity to study and present facts, and then step back from any politics and allows the board to make its decision.

### **Access the NCSWIC Network and OEC's Support**

SWICs play an important role, but we could not do it without the support of OEC. The office really helps us do our jobs--especially in environments where funding has been cut – by setting priorities, bringing together the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC), and providing guidance and training.

Before NCSWIC was created in 2010, SWICs didn't have nearly the bandwidth we have now because we couldn't reach across the country for ideas and support. We now have that deep bench and can get in direct contact with other SWICs who have faced similar challenges and scenarios. We can reach out and get really good answers and samples from other States' experiences and best practices. For example, Oregon worked with FirstNet to put together an incredible website on broadband for public safety. We got permission to utilize a lot of the framework from that website, and now Delaware has launched its State FirstNet site. The benefits of the NCSWIC came about because OEC helped set up the program and continues to support us in our joint efforts. In addition, by allowing each SWIC to request up to five technical assistance offerings each year, OEC empowers SWICs to bring additional training, education, and governance support to a State. South Dakota's SWIC, Jeff Pierce said it best:

*"I've been involved in providing communications for the State of South Dakota for almost 35 years, in that time the SWIC program and those initiatives implemented by OEC to promote interoperability have advanced public safety communications far beyond what technical developments have."*

## **Conclusion**

Robust communications are a must for first responders in every State. A strong SWIC and appropriate levels of funding can help make that a reality by bringing people together, developing a strategic vision for interoperability, and working toward the best solutions for a State's citizens. Let us not forget the painful lessons learned from a lack of interoperable communications during 9/11. It is in every State's best interest to make effective use of this crucial position.