



NEWS The United States Conference of Mayors

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MAYORS MEASURE INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITIES, REGIONS, STATES AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Report Released During 72nd Annual Meeting Tracking Communication Capabilities in 192 Cities

Boston, MA – The United States Conference of Mayors Homeland Security Monitoring Center today released its *June 2004 Interoperability Report*, which measures the reliability and effectiveness of communications systems between local city agencies and federal, regional, state and other local entities in responding to disasters. While the survey findings include encouraging data, it also reveals several local challenges, including funding, to communication.

Survey responders from 192 cities address issues related to: 1) the level of interoperability communication across city, state, and federal public safety agencies; 2) obstacles to interoperability and whether the federal mechanism for distributing Homeland Security funds by states delayed city interoperable investment; and 3) investment required for a city to become fully interoperable and whether and how much federal funding is expected or has been made available to aid city interoperable implementation.

Baltimore (MD) Mayor Martin O' Malley and Co-Chair of the USCM's Homeland Security Task Force, explained the impetus of the survey saying, "As we learned in the days and nights immediately following 9-11, we must ensure that our nation's first responders are equipped and trained to talk to each other. Lives depend on it."

Specifically, the report shows:

- 77 percent of the cities report interoperable capability across police and fire departments and 74 percent report that they are interoperable with neighboring city police and fire departments.
- 80 percent of the cities say they do not have interoperable communications with the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Justice.
- 86 percent of the cities report that they do not have interoperable capability with the state transportation department and 94 percent do not have interoperable capability between the rail facility, police, and EMS.

The most glaring statistic is the lack of funding at the local, state or federal level. Interoperable systems are expensive and raising the needed revenue is an enormous challenge for our nation's cities:

- Cities under 100,000 report an average of \$4.7 million in interoperable funding is needed to achieve full interoperability.
- The average amount of interoperability funding needed to achieve full interoperability for cities of 100,001 to 400,000 is \$5.4 million.
- Cities over 400,001 report an average of \$30 million is needed to achieve full interoperability.
- 75 percent of the cities reported that they have not received or been notified that they will be receiving federal funds for interoperable communications.

Of the major city-to-federal findings, 58 percent of the cities cited the current federal mechanism for distributing the majority of homeland security funding through the states has delayed investment in interoperable communications equipment. Further, 54 percent of the cities report that the city has not been included as part of the state's interoperability assessment; and 75 percent reported that they have not received or been notified that they would be receiving federal funding for interoperable communications.

"The results of this survey underscore the role financial resources play in disaster-response preparation," said Sugarland (TX) Mayor David Wallace and USCM Homeland Security Task Force Co-Chair. "How best to get local first responders what they need tops our list of priorities and we believe this survey points to interoperable delivery improvements that need to be made to the current process," he concluded.

Mayors have been working very closely with the Department of Homeland Security and Secretary Tom Ridge, as well as key members of Congress, on homeland security issues. The Conference has lobbied for first responder and interoperable communications funding with the outcome being an increased federal commitment to interoperable communications.

Other significant key findings are below. The complete report is available on the U.S. Conference of Mayors website at www.usmayors.org.

City Interoperable Capability With Federal Public Safety Agencies

- 88 percent report that they are not interoperable with Homeland Security (FEMA, Customs, Borders...)
- 83 percent report that they are not interoperable with the Department of Justice (FBI, JTTF, ATF...).

City Interoperable Capability With State Public Safety Agencies

- 60 percent said they are not interoperable with the state emergency operations center.
- 57 percent said that they do not have interoperable capability with the state emergency management agency.
- 49 percent report that their city is not interoperable with the state police.

Interoperable Capability With Transportation and Critical Infrastructure

- 86 percent of the cities report that they do not have interoperable capability with the state transportation department.
- Cities with a major chemical plant, 97 percent report that they do not have interoperable capability between the chemical plant, police, fire and emergency medical service (EMS).
- For cities with a major rail facility, 94 percent do not have interoperable capability between the rail facility, police, fire and emergency medical service.
- 92 percent of cities with a seaport report that they do not have interoperable capability between the seaport, police, fire and emergency medical service.

Age of City Interoperable Communications Systems

- Cities with a population of 100,001 to 400,000 report a median communication system age of 11 years old, lacking many new technological features important to first responders.
- Seventy-five percent of the survey cities indicate that different radio frequencies hinder emergency communications between cities. Lack of common frequencies can impact the ability of multiple agencies to quickly and effectively communicate with each other during emergencies.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,139 such cities in the country today, each represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the Mayor.

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