Communications Unit - Best Practices Panel
DHS Office of Emergency Communications (OEC)

AHIMTA Educational Symposium
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Mr. Dick Tenney
Deputy Branch Chief – Technical Assistance Branch
DHS Office of Emergency Communications

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Telecommunications Specialist – Technical Assistance Branch
DHS Office of Emergency Communications

Panelist Introductions

- **Bob Ridgeway**

  - Course Manager & Training Specialist – FEMA EMI

- **Mark Wrightstone**

  - Pennsylvania Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC) – Pennsylvania State Police

- **Dan Wills**

  - Communications Coordinator – Arizona State Forestry

- **Tom Clemo**

  - Deputy Chief – Santa Monica Fire Department

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Value of Communications Unit Training

- **OEC offers Technical Assistance Services to All 56 States & Territories**
    - Provided at no cost to address gaps in communications
    - Coordinated through SWIC, OEC Coordinator
    - Supports Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) implementation

- **OEC Communications Unit Training Workshops**

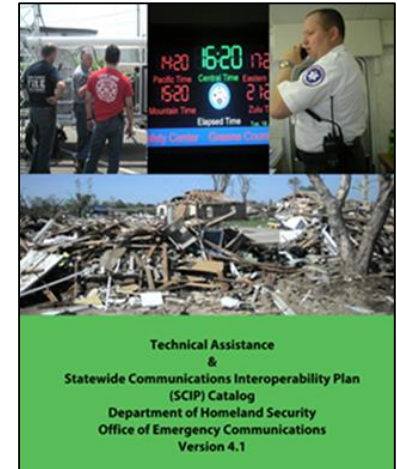   **COML (Communications Unit Leader) Workshops**
    - Training on leading the coordination of on-scene emergency communications during a multijurisdictional response

    COMT (Communications Technician) Workshops
    - Training on the technical capabilities of radios, gateways and other equipment
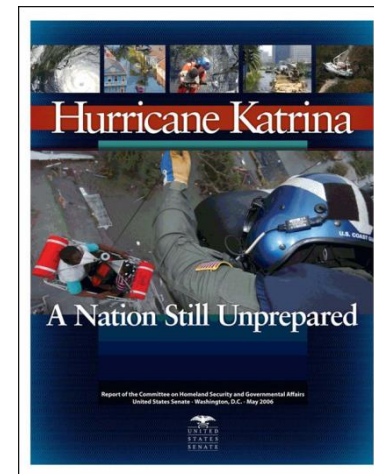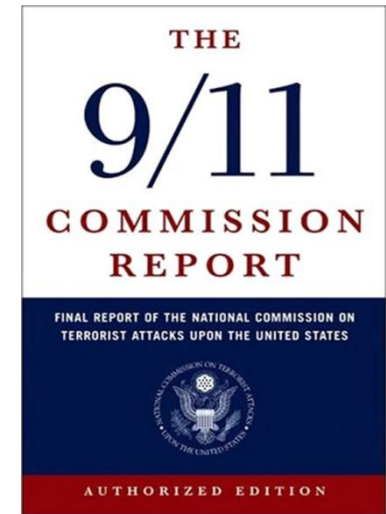
    COML TtT (COML Train The Trainer) Workshops
    - Training for COML instructors within the state, allows states to provide sate sponsored COML training

Closing the Gap

- Historically, the absence of an on-scene radio communications coordinator had compromised critical operations during disasters.

    - **9/11 Commission Report**

        - "Any attempt to establish a unified command on 9/11 would have been further frustrated by the lack of communication and coordination among responding agencies." - p. 321

    - **Hurricane Katrina Senate Report**

        - "The loss of communications resulted in significantly diminished overall command and control…"   - p. 25-3

All-Hazard COML Background

- DHS Homeland Security Grant Guidance – FY05

  - Required development of Tactical Interoperable Communications Plans (TICPs) in what eventually became 75 UASI regions

  - Required trained ICS Communications Unit Leaders

These plans included a COML position for multi-agency coordination.

At that time, a NIMS-certified All-Hazards COML course had not yet been created.

For many sites, the COML position had not been formally utilized.

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All-Hazard COML Utilization

Hurricane Irene Support in North Carolina (2011)

Prior to storm:

- 16 trained Communications Unit Leaders (COMLs) on alert days before storm statewide

- COMLs checked and assembled critical communications equipment at multiple coordination centers/communications units throughout state

During storm:

- NC land mobile radio system unreliable

- COMLs coordinated and established redundant communications using satellite phones, data and IP telephone capabilities, and amateur radio

- Provided direct communications links to EOCs using amateur radio

Result of OEC's Role

"We were able to assemble full communications packages within hours."

Greg Hauser, OEC-Trained COML

Deployment Procedures

- **In your organization, what factors determine if or when the COML is deployed?**

- **Can you provide an example where the COML was deployed on a recent incident in your jurisdiction?**

- **What was the benefit of deploying a COML to the incident?**

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PA State Police Shooting Manhunt - 2104

PA State Police Shooting Manhunt

Friday, Sept. 12:

- **Pennsylvania State Police Cpl. Bryon K. Dickson II, 38, and Trooper Alex T. Douglass, 31, shot by unknown person at Pennsylvania State Police barracks at Blooming Grove, Pike County.**

Thursday, Oct. 30:

- **Alleged Shooter taken into custody sometime after 6 p.m. near Birchwood-Pocono Airpark in Pocono Township.**

PA State Police Shooting Manhunt - Comms

- **Heavy portable radio use in challenging terrain in a local police department's primary jurisdictional area**

- **Large concentration of law enforcement in a relatively small area competing for the same resources**

- **Pennsylvania State Police resources from across the state respond**

  - **High demand for bandwidth**

  - **Heavy use of deployable assets to augment coverage and capacity**

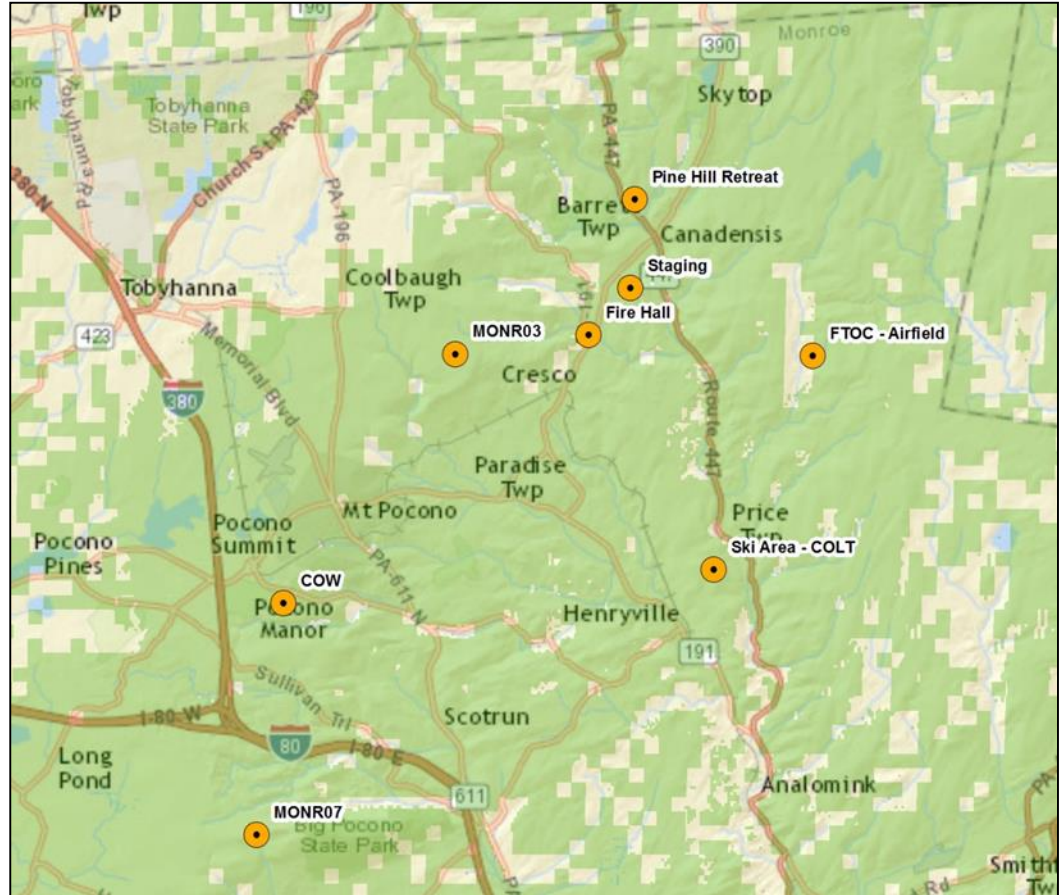# PA State Police Shooting Manhunt - Results

Coverage Enhancements:

- **COW / COLT**

Command Post:

- **Capacity**

  - **Computers**

  - **Telephones**

  - **Hot spots**

- **Interoperability**

  - **FBI to PSP_SWD**

  - **Out of state support**

Pope Francis Visit to Philadelphia - 2015

Pope Francis Visit to Philadelphia

- **On September 26 and 27 Pope Francis visited Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families**

- **The Pope had several events scheduled, including outdoor concert and outdoor Mass for millions**

- **It was estimated this event could bring as many as six million visitors to the Philadelphia area**

- **The event has been designated as a National Special Security Event (NSSE)**

Pope Francis Visit - Anticipated Issues

- **Large Volumes of Traffic**

- **Commercial Cellular Carrier Networks Overwhelmed**

- **Health and Welfare of large amount of attendees**

- **Street and Highway Closures to include Ben Franklin Bridge**

- **Limited Public Transportation**

- **Security Concerns**

Pope Francis Visit - Communications

- **Multiple LMR systems involved**

- **BC14 LMR coordination with the State of NJ**

- **Aviation Video**

- **Interoperability solutions planned**

- **Technical Communications personnel on the ground**

- **All available communications resources pre-deployed**

Pope Francis Visit - True Outcome

- **A well thought out communication plan, including interoperability, was key**

- **Extensive preplanning for communications requirements alleviated many problems**

- **Commercial Carrier Network did not fail**

- **Crowds did not reach anticipated number**

- **Plan for the worst and hope for the best**

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COML Expectations and Responsibilities

- **How has new technology (IT data systems, video systems, digital LMR systems, VoIP, etc.) influenced COML expectations and responsibilities?**

- **Should the COML be responsible for managing IT data systems in addition to traditional LMR systems?**

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COML Qualification Prerequisites

- **NWCG requires wildfire COML trainees to be qualified as a RADO, INCM and COMT before becoming qualified as a COML but most All-Hazards COMLs do not.**

- **Should an All-Hazard COML be required to meet the same prerequisite requirements to become qualified as an wildfire COML?**

COML Discipline Specific Endorsements

- **Some Command and General Staff positions utilize discipline specific endorsements for wildfire, HAZ-MAT, etc.**

- **At this time discipline specific endorsements are not utilized for most unit leader positions.**

- **Are discipline specific endorsements necessary for the Communications Unit Leader position?**

Logistics Section Chief Prerequisites

- **Within ICS, the Logistics Section Chief is responsible for communications in the absence of a COML, but COML qualification is not required to become a Logistics Section Chief.**

- **Should COML qualification be a prerequisite for qualification as a Logistics Section Chief?**

COML Involvement - C&G Meetings

- **Within your IMT is the COML typically included in C&G staff meetings?**

- **What are the pros and cons of including the COML in C&G staff meetings?**

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IMT Short Team

- **The IMT short team usually includes the Command and General Staff but not the COML.**

- **In the absence of a COML, who is responsible for surveying communications infrastructure and evaluating communications requirements?**

Operational Considerations

- **If your Incident Management Team (IMT) does not deploy a COML, who develops the ICS-205 Communications Plan?**

Moving the COML to the C&G Staff

- **Has there been any discussion among IMT personnel to create a Communications Section within the C&G staff?**

- **How would the creation of a Communications Section Chief impact your All-Hazards IMT?**

Communications Unit Personnel

- **Within your organization are Communications Unit Personnel assigned to a team or a pool?**

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of both?**

Communications Plans & Support

- **OEC provides programmatic support for various interoperability initiatives at the state and local level including the SIEC, the SCIP and the TICP.**

- **Does someone from your IMT participate in the Statewide Interoperable Executive Council (SIEC)?**

- **Has someone from your IMT participated in the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) or the Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP)?**

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Communications Unit Qualification

- **How does a COML become qualified within your IMT?**

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Communications Unit Recruitment

- **How does your IMT recruit Communications Unit personnel?**