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Emergency Communications Case Study: Super Bowl XLVIII: Emergency Communications Preparedness in Action

When hard work, practice, team-building, and a well-crafted playbook come together on the football field, the result is games won and fans on their feet. When the same elements go into emergency communications, the result is the steady hum of everything working as it should. The outcome may be less dramatic, but the effort behind it is no less demanding.

With the guidance of the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Region II Coordinator Chris Tuttle and support from OEC’s Technical Assistance (TA) program, the various agencies involved in planning for Super Bowl XLVIII were able to achieve interoperability and establish effective emergency communications plans for the big game.

A BIG CITY SUPER BOWL

Super Bowl XLVIII’s location at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, presented the challenge of planning communications for the enormous sporting event and upped the stakes.

The Super Bowl Interagency Communication Subcommittee was tasked with establishing and coordinating communications among State, Local, Federal, military, and non-governmental entities amid one of the largest concentrations of people and critical infrastructure in the nation.

In addition, hotels and ancillary events were sprawled across a two-state area that formed more than a 30-mile radius around MetLife Stadium. With dignitaries and other officials traveling to and from locations in New York and New Jersey, a seemingly simple trip required transferrings motorcades among three separate agencies (the New York Police Department, the Port Authority Police and the New Jersey State Police) operating on three different radio systems.

PLANNING AND FEDERAL COORDINATION

The location and scope of Super Bowl XLVIII required a layered and thorough planning effort with intensive coordination among agencies. Building on strong relationships that had developed through training efforts and operational periods during



A map showing Super Bowl events in New York and New Jersey leading up to Super Bowl XLVIII.



Region II Regional Coordinator Chris Tuttle at MetLife Stadium during a security briefing for Super Bowl XLVIII.

regional events, such as the reponse to Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, OEC's team, led by Region II Coordinator, played a key support role in the planning process.

Beginning in 2011, the New Jersey State Police, along with the FBI, took the lead in communications planning for Super Bowl XLVIII. To aid the planning efforts, the State Police asked OEC to identify the

additional Federal agencies that should be involved in the Super Bowl planning process, and then to act as the single communications contact for those agencies.

OEC personnel continued to support the communications committee as planning ramped up through the summer and fall of 2013. Staff from OEC's TA program joined the planning effort in August 2013, meeting with the communications subcommittee as it developed a communications plan (ICS 205) for the Super Bowl events. New Jersey crafted a uniform communications plan for each operational period beginning on January 26 and running through February 3, the day following the game. New York also crafted a plan to address events in within the State and New York City. In addition, the two States had collaborated extensively on mutual aid frequencies, channel assignments, and creating interagency teams.

COMMUNICATIONS CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS AND TRAINING

As game day drew closer, OEC's technical assistance staff, along with the Regional Coordinator, helped draft Communications Concept of Operations (ConOps) plans for both New York and New Jersey. While the communications plans, or ICS 205 forms, detail channel assignments, frequencies, and operational periods, the ConOps plans provided a playbook for communications and a guide to communications support.

OEC also developed training briefings designed for command, EMS, fire, law enforcement, transit, and Federal agencies. These trainings took information from the dense ICS 205 forms, which are created by and for communications leaders like Communications Unit Leaders (COMLs), and distilled it down to specific instructions for first responders. The briefings also provided details on how each agency was involved in the communications plan and how officers could connect to different agencies and back to command.

OEC staff took the information from these briefings and further simplified it into Communications Quick Reference Cards for the public safety responders coming in from various agencies to support the Super Bowl. These provided local law enforcement, New Jersey State Police, Port Authority Police, transit operations, Federal agencies, EMS, and fire with a portable, easy-to-use guide to channel assignments and operational instructions.

ADDRESSING INTERFERENCE

Super Bowl XLVIII's location also created a challenge for public safety radio communication. "The New York City metropolitan areas is the most RF (radio frequency) congested area in the United States," said Tuttle, who represents New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. To circumvent that congestion, the planning committee employed national interoperability frequencies; the New Jersey Interoperability Communications System (NJICS), the statewide interoperability network; and Federal interoperability assets.

Because of the increased concern of interference, planners also formed an interference task force comprised of staff from OEC, DHS Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The task force worked closely with the NYC Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT), New Jersey State Police (NJSP), and FBI to be ready to identify and address any issues.

In addition, Tuttle worked closely with Monty Graham, National Special Events Program Manager for the National Coordinating Center for Telecommunications. Graham worked directly with cellular providers to determine locations and quantities of cell on wheels and cell on light trucks

(COW/COLT) deployments throughout the stadium area to determine any potential interference issues with public safety 700/800 MHz sites.

“In past special events, we always recognized interference as a challenge but we never really made it part of the communications plan,” said Tuttle. “For the purposes of Super Bowl XLVIII, in both the New York City and New Jersey Communications Concept of Operations, there was a plan for just how we would deal with interference.”

GAME DAY SUPPORT

On game day, OEC staff supported the communications tables within the public safety complex adjacent to MetLife Stadium. Their primary responsibilities included supporting the COMLs assigned to the game; assisting with frequency testing and deconfliction; detecting, monitoring and eliminating sources of interference, and providing a central point to coordinate communications among Federal agencies.


During the game, personnel from all of the supporting agencies followed the communications plan and provided effective communications in

support of each operational period. First responders reported very few communications-related issues that had to be addressed and those that did surface were minor and quickly resolved.

“The leadership of the New Jersey State Police and the FBI ensured that everyone stayed on point and that everything from frequency requests to radio cache requests to gateways and patches were funneled through the communications committee,” said Tuttle. “It worked the way it was supposed to work.”

OEC’s support helped ensure seamless coordination and reliable communications among all entities and created plans to educate the first responders and ensure reliability across all networks.

On the football field, one team walked away victorious; the other disappointed. But for the entire team supporting emergency communications, Super Bowl XLVIII was a success.

SUPER BOWL XLVIII COMMUNICATIONS			
Fire Branch Quick Reference Card			
ASSIGNMENT		CHANNEL	
METLIFE COMPLEX		FLORHAM PARK VENUE	
Wide Area Command	Essex Co OEM-2	AFC Practice Field	PPFD
Local Area Command	VCALL10	NEWARK VENUE	
Stadium Fireground	VTAC14	Media Day Prudential Center	Newark Fire Channel 4
Stadium Decon	VTAC13	HOBOKEN VENUE	
Stadium Exterior Rescue	VTAC12	Roman Numeral Event	Hoboken Fire Dispatch
Meadowlands Fire	Fire Talkgroup	JERSEY CITY VENUES	
EXTERNAL SUPPORT / OPERATIONS		Jersey City Fire Dispatch	Dispatch 1 TG 7D0
Local Fire Dispatch	ERFD 160	INTEROP / MUTUAL AID	
Fireground-1	ERFD 235	Bergen Co Fire Interop	BC Fire 280
Fireground-2	ERFD 265	Morris Co Interagency Interop / Mutual Aid	MC OPS 12
Public Works	ERFD 880	State Interop	SPEN 4
BACKUP / FALLBACK CHANNELS		State Fire Coordinators Mutual Aid	TG1/TG3AE
Primary Channel	Backup	* Don't use radios for confidential / sensitive information *	
Essex Co OEM-2	LFD 370	* Report problems with radio interference to the PSC COML Desk immediately *	
Contact the FDOC or COML/Comm Unit for any communications needs or problems.	Use radio discipline, limit radio traffic, keep messages concise.	QUESTIONS? Call the FDOC: 201-833-9411	 DHS/OEC/ICTAP
For Official Use Only (FOUO) / Public Safety Sensitive			

Fire Branch Quick Reference Card developed by OEC for public safety personnel supporting Super Bowl XLVIII.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact OEC@dhs.gov or visit www.dhs.gov (keyword OEC).