SAFECOM's Participation in ISART

Inadequate and unreliable wireless communications have been issues plaguing public safety organizations for decades. In many cases, agencies cannot perform their mission critical duties. These agencies are unable to share critical voice or data information via radio with other jurisdictions in day-to-day operations and emergency response to incidents including acts of terrorism and natural disasters.

According to a report done by the National Task Force on Interoperability (January 2003), the public safety community has identified the following key issues that hamper public safety wireless communications today:

- Incompatible and aging communications equipment
- Limited and fragmented budget cycles and funding
- Limited and fragmented planning and coordination
- Limited and fragmented radio spectrum
- Limited equipment standards

In short, the Nation is heavily invested in an existing infrastructure that is largely incompatible. The SAFECOM Program was established by the Office of Management Budget and approved by the President's Management Council to address these public safety communications issues.

SAFECOM's approach to addressing the needs of public safety agencies for interoperable wireless communications recognizes the following conditions:

- Local, tribal and State agencies will continue to own the vast majority of the public safety communications infrastructure.
- The priorities of local, tribal and State public safety communications systems are first and foremost to provide reliable agency-specific communications. Secondly, those systems should provide reliable local interagency communications. The requirement for reliable interagency communications between local, tribal, State, and Federal agencies is tertiary.
- The functional and technical requirements for public safety communications equipment vary across jurisdictions and disciplines and are determined at a local level.
- Public safety communications will continue to operate on a variety of technologies across fragmented spectrum bands.

Based on these conditions, SAFECOM will promote the development of a national architecture for public safety communications that will interconnect existing technologies and systems and allow for the development of new technologies and functionality in the future. That architecture would be based on mainstream technology, make use of open standards and allow for a wide variety of local operational and technical requirements. At a minimum, it must interconnect on demand elements of:

- Voice and data communications
- Analog and digital transmissions
- Multiple spectrum bands
- Simplex and duplex transmission systems

At the 2004 ISART conference, SAFECOM will present a tutorial, as well as moderate a panel of speakers who will present an outline of the proposed architecture and identify gaps in technology and systems development.

For further information on the SAFECOM program or if you would like to present a paper on this topic, please visit www.safecomprogram.gov or contact us at safecom@dhs.gov.