

NECP Spotlight: Aligning Emergency Communications in Preparation for the Super Bowl

INTRODUCTION

The Super Bowl, the annual championship football game hosted by the National Football League (NFL), is considered a National Special Security Event by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that requires federal, state, local, and private sector agencies across many jurisdictions to collaborate on emergency planning, preparation, and security. In February 2020, Super Bowl LIV in Miami, Florida brought together 50 separate emergency response entities from different jurisdictions and levels of government.¹ To ensure emergency communications operability and interoperability for the event, participating agencies worked together to conduct joint trainings and exercises, make incremental updates to operations and response plans through the use of after action reports (AARs) from previous years, improve resilient communications, and establish governance structures that support secure information sharing.

The National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) is the Nation's strategic plan to strengthen emergency communications. It provides the emergency response community with recommendations on incorporating risk management strategies to protect against and mitigate disruptions to mission-critical communications. This spotlight examines how emergency response agencies from all levels of government collaborate to plan and train for security operations at the Super Bowl every year. This planning involves development of risk management strategies to ensure emergency communications interoperability on Super Bowl night.

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

Every year, emergency communications planning and preparation continues to evolve ahead of the Super Bowl. Due to the scale of the Super Bowl and the numerous celebrations before and after the game, all collaborating agencies begin participating in both tabletop and field exercises 18 months before the event. In 2020, Hard Rock Stadium and a fan festival in downtown Miami drew more than 60,000 fans resulting in more than 2,000 square miles that required security coverage—an area larger than the State of Rhode Island. For an event this large, private sector partners along with federal, state, and local government agencies all had to collaborate

to effectively communicate and ensure the highest level of security for the events.

Before the event, third-party crisis management evaluators—consisting of security and consulting firms and specialized federal and state agencies—examine and evaluate AARs from the previous year and the findings from tabletop exercises. The AARs expose gaps in emergency communications capabilities and present an opportunity to examine and apply advanced or emerging technological solutions.² For example, FirstNet furnished emerging technology like 5G and spectrum bands available exclusively to first responders. First responders were also equipped with FirstNet-ready devices to ensure connectivity and utilize additional tools like location-based services and indoor mapping.³

To mitigate risk, align resources, and coordinate communications on the day of the event, various agencies such as the Miami Police Department (MPD), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and DHS report to a single command post—the joint operation center (JOC). All information is routed to the JOC and projected for the leads of each organization for situational awareness. If the JOC flags an incident, a tactical operational center, where leaders of different agencies collaborate and communicate for the duration of the event, is notified and the situation is assessed. Sharing video recordings across all organizations is permitted and 5G technology is used to collect data on the crowd's behavior including suspicious activity.



Super Bowl LIV was held in Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Florida.⁴



NECP ALIGNMENT

In 2022, Super Bowl LVI was held at SoFi stadium in Inglewood, California. Similar to the 2020 Super Bowl in Miami, hosting the event in a large city once again required significant preparation by numerous agencies that were required to evolve and adapt to emerging technologies as well as new threats and concerns.

NECP Goal	Objective	Objective Description	Real World Example
Goal 1: Governance and Leadership	1.1	Formalize governance through policy, documentation, and adequate funding	Federal, state, local, and private sector agencies such as the MPD, USCG, FBI, and DHS worked together in an established JOC to coordinate, collaborate, and evaluate emergency communications threats and hazards and perform resiliency assessments to mitigate these vulnerabilities.
Goal 3: Training, Exercises, and Evaluation	3.1	Update and ensure the availability of training and exercise programs to address gaps in emergency communications	Following tabletop and field exercises and the development of an after-action report (AAR), third-party evaluators with communications expertise assessed both the report and performance data to identify communications gaps. As a result, training and exercises were updated to close the gaps before Super Bowl LIV in 2020.
Goal 4: Communications Coordination	4.4	Strengthen resilience and continuity of communications throughout operations	Prior to Super Bowl LIV, multiple tabletop and field exercises were performed to ensure sufficient tests of all interoperable primary, secondary, and backup communications systems. All agencies followed standard operating procedures by collaborating with the JOC.
Goal 5: Technology and Infrastructure	5.2	Ensure communications and information sharing systems meet public safety's mission-critical needs	Leveraged cutting edge technology in 5G small cell deployments and a dedicated spectrum band to provide first responders with reliable and interoperable communication solutions to avoid potential delays due to crowded cell towers. They also positioned five deployable assets throughout all Super Bowl events to serve as a redundant resource.

RESOURCES

Super Bowl events bring together hundreds of thousands of fans over the course of one week each year. This gathering will continue to require federal, state, local, and private sector agencies from across many jurisdictions to collaborate in emergency planning, preparation, and security and evaluate how to integrate of improve interoperability and incorporate new technologies. To learn more about emergency planning and preparation, visit: cisa.gov/ncsp.

Want to share your organization’s successes and alignment to the NECP? Email us at: ncsp@cisa.dhs.gov.

For more information on Tabletop Exercises, visit: cisa.gov/cisa-tabletop-exercises-packages.

For more information on FirstNet, visit: firstnet.gov/about.

1.“Security and Law Enforcement Agencies Coordinate Their Super Bowl Game Plan.” Security Info Watch, 1 Feb. 2020, <https://www.securityinfowatch.com/critical-infrastructure/article/21123755/security-and-law-enforcement-agencies-coordinate-their-super-bowl-game-plan>.
2. Flores, Rosa. “Behind the Scenes of Securing the Super Bowl.” CNN, Cable News Network, 1 Feb. 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/01/us/miami-super-bowl-security-challenges/index.html>.
3. Plautz, Jason. “AT&T Spends Big on 5G, FirstNet Ahead of the Super Bowl.” Smart Cities Dive, 22 Jan. 2020, <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/att-spends-big-5g-firstnet-super-bowl/570824/>.
4. Staff, NBC Sports. “Super Bowl 2020: Kickoff Time, TV Channel, Halftime Show, How to Watch Live.” NBC Sports, 4 Feb. 2020, <https://sports.nbcsports.com/2020/02/02/super-bowl-liv-time-date-tv-channel/>.