THE NECP
National Emergency Communications Plan

Issue No. 1

NECP Spotlight:

Working with Tribes to Achieve Interoperability

INTRODUCTION

Developing collaborative and trustworthy relationships between tribal communities and other local governments is key to advancing operable and interoperable communications. Because of their many cultures and often remote locations, tribes have their own unique emergency communications challenges and needs. To address these considerations, some tribes have formed their own Tribal Emergency Response Commission (TERC) to advise the Tribal Council or other governing body during emergencies. TERCs act as a liaison between the Tribal Council and the local emergency planning committee to identify local emergency communication gaps and develop interoperability plans, processes, and procedures that align to statewide and regional governance efforts. Through this relationship with local planning committees, many tribal public safety organizations have recognized their need for enhanced governance and coordination to promote the adoption of new technologies and further support tribal emergency communications.

The National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) serves as the Nation's strategic plan to strengthen and enhance emergency communications capabilities. The NECP recommends that tribal community representatives be included in state governing bodies and strategic planning conversations to provide firsthand input about the challenges facing tribal communities. In doing so, state governing bodies can gain valuable insights into the needs and challenges affecting tribal communities. This spotlight examines tribal emergency communications recommendations set forth in the NECP, illustrated through three different tribal organizations' actions.

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

There are 11 tribal reservations or communities in Minnesota, each of which has a representative on the state's Indian Affairs Council that then collectively sends a representative to the Statewide Executive Communications Board (SECB). With tribal participation on this SECB, elected officials and decision-makers can gain insight into the emergency communications requirements and tribal communities' priorities. Additionally, the participating tribal representative can speak directly to the elected officials making fiscal and policy decisions that impact their emergency communications operations.

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program, provides technical assistance to tribes in various forms such as:

- Emergency communications planning support
- Radio programming training
- Guidance for establishing an Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM) capability among multiple tribes
- Gap analysis and technical assessment support
- Special event planning/training
- Radio Frequency (RF) coverage analysis for a tribal territory
- COMU and Communications Leader (COML) training
- Standard Operating Procedures development support
- Assistance with establishing tribal dispatch capabilities

In preparation for adopting new technologies, tribes are taking steps to address the challenges often presented by their remote geographic locations, such as constructing broadband infrastructure on their lands to strengthen their communications infrastructure. For example, the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in Wisconsin were the first tribe to install a 300-foot, free-standing commercial AT&T FirstNet tower in May 2019, supporting 360-degree Band 14 broadband long-term evolution (LTE) cellular communications. The tower connects to the tribe's fiber network and serves as a relay point for microwave links, which use a beam of radio waves in the microwave frequency range to transmit information between fixed locations. Because of this new connectivity, the band will be primed to adopt many future technology systems to meet their mission-critical needs.

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK CONTINUED

Communication and resource procurement within tribal communities can be made easier through a working relationship with their Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), the state's single point of coordination for interoperable communications. For example, the San Felipe Pueblo tribe of New Mexico worked with their SWIC to request communications support and expand their emergency communications capabilities. Their collective efforts helped the San Felipe Pueblo tribe acquire communications equipment from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In addition to SWICs, CISA can also be leveraged as a resource for additional services.

NECP ALIGNMENT

To support tribal emergency communications, the NECP emphasizes the need to support tribal communications governance structures, technical response capabilities, and interoperable communications. The following chart illustrates specific NECP recommendations and aligns them with actions accomplished by tribal communities.

Goal	Objective	Objective Description	Real-World Example
Goal 1: Governance	1.1	Formalize governance through policy, documentation, and adequate funding	Many tribes have formed their own TERC that the Tribal Council will refer to in times of emergency.
Goal 1: Governance	1.2	Structure more inclusive governance by expanding membership composition	Tribal organizations in Minnesota are included in the SECB, allowing for a more diverse membership composition and providing them a platform to voice tribal concerns and challenges.
Goal 2: Planning and Procedures	2.2	Align emergency communications funding and investments with strategic and lifecycle planning	By working with the New Mexico SWIC and FEMA, the San Felipe Pueblo secured new emergency communications capabilities.
Goal 4: Communications Coordination	5.2	Ensure communications and information sharing systems meet public safety's mission-critical needs	The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in Wisconsin were the first tribe to install a FirstNet tower on their lands that will allow them to utilize LTE cellular communications.

RESOURCES

Tribal governments are implementing recommendations from the NECP to enhance their emergency communications governance, infrastructure and technology usage and capabilities, and interoperability structures.

For more information on the NECP, visit: cisa.gov/necp
To learn more about your SWIC, vist: cisa.gov/safecom/ncswic-membership

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

Additional Resources:

- CISA Tribal Emergency Communications Governance Support Tri-Fold: cisa.gov/publication/emergency-communications-fact-sheets
- Emergency Communications Technical Assistance and Planning Guide: cisa.gov/publication/ictapscip-resources
- CISA Services Catalog: cisa.gov/publication/cisa-services-catalog
- Tribal Emergency Communications Program: cisa.gov/tribal-emergency-communications-program
- SAFECOM Funding and Grant Guidance: cisa.gov/safecom/funding