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Emergency Communications Case Study: **TRIBAL COMMUNICATIONS PARTNERSHIPS— THE MISSING PIECE IN THE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS LANDSCAPE**

OEC TRIBAL OUTREACH PROGRAM

With 566 Federally-recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Natives, tribal nations represent a unique and important sector of the emergency communications landscape in the United States. In an effort to assess the comprehensive nationwide interoperability for emergency communications, the DHS Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) has spent the last year coordinating with tribal nations and their neighboring counties and States to share knowledge, create plans and build partnerships that will strengthen the Nation's homeland security and emergency management system as a whole.

As part of this, OEC's Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) has been leading a data collection effort to document and gain a better understanding of the emergency communications capabilities of tribal communities across the country. The data provided by tribes has helped OEC develop technical assistance offerings focused on strengthening tribal communications and relationships between the tribe and the State. This Case Study will provide an overview of how OEC's communications assessment and workshop facilitated partnerships between the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe and its Federal, State and local public safety community to support interoperability across the Southeast Massachusetts region.

One of the tribal nations that participated in OEC's data collection survey was the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe. The tribe consists of more than 2,600 enrolled members and is located primarily in Cape Cod, MA. The Wampanoags are most well-known in U.S. history for their role in the first Thanksgiving, for which they are accredited with befriending the Pilgrims of Plymouth. Hundreds of years later, the Mashpee Wampanoag tribal members still live in and around Cape Cod Bay and maintain good relations with their neighbors in Barnstable County.



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOCUSED ON COMMUNICATIONS

Through their participation in OEC's tribal data collection survey, the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe was one of the tribes that partnered with OEC to receive technical assistance from the office's Tribal Outreach Program. On May 8, 2013, OEC facilitated the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Communications Workshop at the Centerville, MA main fire station. The main goal of this workshop was to assist the tribe in building and utilizing relationships with

its neighboring regional and State jurisdictions to develop solutions to current, near and future communications needs and challenges. For example, Cape Cod is subject to many weather-related incidents, such as flooding, hurricanes and nor'easters. When high winds occur, the bridges to the mainland are normally closed to traffic and Cape Cod counties and communities must become self-sufficient. This has produced a great deal of self-reliance and close working relationships amongst local agencies and the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe.

Although the tribe has a strong relationship with some of their neighboring counties, they are not included in the regional or statewide communications plans. With the creation of the tribe's new Emergency Operations Center (EOC) within their Government Center and the planned development of a casino, the tribe and the surrounding communities were interested in incorporating the Mashpee Wampanoags into the comprehensive communications plan for the Southeast Massachusetts area.

OEC designed the Tribal Communications workshop to support the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe in strengthening its existing relationships and building new ones to enhance the readiness and ability of tribal, State and local first responders to communicate efficiently and effectively during a multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline major incident.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Nineteen individuals attended the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Communications Workshop, representing tribal, local, State and Federal agencies, including: the Barnstable County Sheriff's Office, Mashpee Police Department, Barnstable County Regional Emergency Planning Committee, Americorp, Barnstable County Health Department, Mashpee Fire Department, Barnstable County Auxcomm, and FEMA Region 1 Tribal Outreach. Also in attendance was the Massachusetts Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), who is responsible for implementing the statewide strategic vision for interoperability outlined in the Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP). The workshop was an opportunity for SWIC Steve Staffier and the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe's Emergency Manager, Robbie Hendricks to meet and identify

next steps to have the tribe part of the process in developing the plan to support the new emergency communications center. This connection between the tribe and the MA SWIC is a vital step in establishing the tribe's inclusion in statewide planning and operating procedures.

During the workshop, OEC subject matter experts (SMEs) led a facilitated discussion to identify commonalities within the group of participants and what is needed to establish the tribe's emergency operations center or EOC. The group worked together to answer some questions such as: who does the tribe need to communicate with, how will they communicate, how can they expand existing capabilities, what equipment will be needed, what operating procedures are in place and which ones need to be established?



Through this discussion, participants learned about some of the unique tribal needs and offered assistance in addressing them within their capabilities. From assessing these current and future needs with public safety representatives from the area, the tribe learned more about existing and potential resources.

By the close of the workshop, participants had identified some challenges as well as opportunities to address them through coordination. Participants also expressed a willingness to continue engaging with their counterparts to integrate the tribal communications into the statewide communications system. Additionally, the State representatives extended to the tribe an invitation to the Massachusetts Security Southeast Council meetings, and agreed to assist with determining the best location for the equipment within the new EOC building and which equipment to purchase.

CONCLUSION

After OEC facilitated the workshop, the SMEs also conducted a walkthrough of the new EOC building and provided the tribe with suggestions and recommendations for continuing coordination with State and local representation to establish a thriving interoperable emergency management center. Tribal members were pleased to receive the suggestions and commit the effort needed to establish the necessary communications capabilities. On May 22nd, only two weeks after the workshop, the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council passed 2013-RES-021 “Establishment of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Public Safety Commission.” The tribe communicated on their website that “the commission will be responsible for gathering information and making recommendations regarding: Police, Fire, Emergency Medical, Emergency Preparedness and general security matters at the Tribal, Federal (Bureau of Indian Affairs) and State Level.” The tribe also indicated that the commission will collect and review all required law enforcement and fire needs of the Tribe, as well as assess current available resources of Mashpee, Barnstable, Plymouth, New Bedford, Massachusetts Commonwealth and other neighboring municipalities.

The creation of this commission indicates that OEC’s Tribal Outreach Workshop was successful in coordinating the relationships and necessary foundation for the tribe to begin developing a robust and interconnected emergency management system. The workshop also demonstrates the value of on-site tribal technical assistance in developing communication capabilities and partnerships for an area with newly emerging needs.

Along with the establishment of the Tribal Public Safety Commission, another particularly valuable outcome from the workshop was the MA SWIC’s offer to provide the tribe with radios capable of communication with the other EOCs throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The enthusiasm of the workshop’s participants to continue working together to ensure the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe is included in all local plans, meetings and organizations illustrates the success that can result from bringing together multiple jurisdictions and disciplines to work towards a common goal.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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