



# Fall 2024 SAFECOM Bi-Annual Meeting

## Executive Summary | November 20, 2024

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village | Cape Coral, Florida

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support of interoperable emergency communications.

- D/EAD DeLaurentis welcomed SAFECOM members and emphasized the importance of these meetings to exchange ideas to advance national level emergency communications missions, and provided updates on the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP), SAFECOM Nationwide Survey (SNS), World Cup planning efforts, and border programs
- Mrs. Reeves provided an overview of CISA SED, whose mission is to secure the nation’s critical infrastructure through partnerships with federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and international stakeholders. She reiterated the

### Welcome and Opening Remarks

**Speakers:** Chief Gerald Reardon, *SAFECOM Chair*  
 Assistant Chief Chris Lombard, *SAFECOM First Vice Chair*  
 Chief Jay Kopstein, *SAFECOM Second Vice Chair*  
 Mr. Vince DeLaurentis, *Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Deputy Executive Assistant Director (D/EAD) for Emergency Communications*  
 Mrs. Custrina Reeves, *CISA Stakeholder Engagement Division (SED) Partnerships Section Chief*

**Session Description:** SAFECOM members were welcomed to Cape Coral, Florida, for the Fall 2024 SAFECOM Bi-Annual Meeting. Members received opening remarks from SAFECOM and CISA Leadership. Legacy SAFECOM Member, Mr. Michael Murphy, was presented as the fourth recipient of the Marilyn J. Praisner Leadership Award.

### Key Outcomes:

- Chief Reardon thanked SAFECOM members for their contributions to recent efforts and encouraged collaboration between SAFECOM and SED to continue the important work in

### WELCOME NEW SAFECOM MEMBERS!

#### Since June 2024

**Assistant Chief Michael Baltrosky** | At-Large, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue – MD  
**Sergeant Jason Matthews** | At-Large, Lake County Sheriff’s Office – FL  
**Mike O’Connor** | Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International (Alternate)  
**Executive Assistant Chief Rodney Reed** | At-Large, Harris County Fire Marshal’s Office – TX  
**Stuart Sanz** | At-Large, County Interoperability and Radio System Manager, Arlington County Public Safety Communications and Emergency Management – VA  
**Jonathan Whitham** | National Emergency Management Agency (Primary)

importance of collaborating with SAFECOM to ensure emergency communications concerns are included in CISA efforts and priorities.

- Mr. Murphy was awarded the Marilyn J. Praisner Leadership Award for his leadership and dedication to SAFECOM and the public safety communications community.



**Figure 1:** Mr. Michael Murphy was presented as the fourth recipient of the Marilyn J. Praisner Leadership Award.

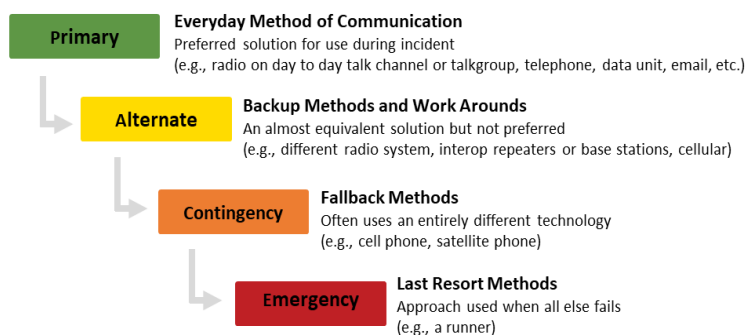
## SAFECOM Interactive Icebreaker: The Great PACE Race

**Speaker:** Mr. Brandon Smith, *CISA Emergency Communications Coordinator, Region 10*

**Session Description:** Developing and practicing your Primary, Alternate, Contingency, and Emergency (PACE) plans will help improve your organization's resiliency and preparations for the next disaster. PACE produces strategies and redundancies that maintain communications despite disrupted communications networks. Members participated in an icebreaker activity in which they created and practiced a PACE plan. At the end of the game, players shared lessons learned.

### Key Outcomes:

- Pre-coordination within an organization is critical.
- Consider that just because two entities may use the same carrier, it doesn't always mean there is connectivity.
- Put as much detail in your PACE plan as possible and practice it before you need it.



**Figure 2:** PACE: Primary, Alternate, Contingency, Emergency Planning

## SAFECOM Association Spotlight: National Governors Association

**Speaker:** Mr. Phil Nichols, *National Governors Association (NGA)*

**Session Description:** NGA is the voice of the nation's governors and a leading forum for bipartisan policy solutions. Through NGA, governors work together to confront common challenges and shape federal policy. Members heard about NGA's mission and ongoing initiatives relevant to the public safety community.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Through NGA, governors identify priority issues and deal with matters of public policy and governance at the state, national, and global levels.
- The NGA Office of Government Relations works to ensure that governors' views are represented in shaping federal policy by maintaining regular contact with congressional leaders and key administration officials; the Government Relations team supports three governors' task forces: Education, Workforce and Community Investment; Economic Development and Revitalization; and Public Health and Disaster Response.
- The Governors' Homeland Security Advisors Council was founded in 2006 with the purpose of providing an organizational structure in which homeland security advisors can share best practices and inform the development of homeland security policies/strategies that affect states, commonwealths, and territories. Top Governors' Homeland Security priorities in 2024 included, among others: cybersecurity, natural disasters and extreme weather events, school safety, border security and critical infrastructure protection.
- Mr. Nichols answered audience questions to include NGA's stance on FirstNet, in which NGA has no established position on FirstNet but advised governors' support efforts to improve emergency communications and would take back the question to the association for any additional clarity. The NGA indicated that governors have worked closely with FirstNet to provide input and support for implementation and deployment of public safety communications since its inception. A second question was posed on the composition of NGA and if all 50 states were represented and it was confirmed that work by the organization is meant to represent all 50 states and five territories.



Figure 3: SAFECOM Members, Fall 2024 Bi-Annual Meeting, Cape Coral, Florida

## Navigating Federal Grant Guidance

**Speakers:** Mr. Kerry L. Thomas, *Director, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Homeland Security Programs Division*

Assistant Chief Chris Lombard, *SAFECOM First Vice Chair, SAFECOM At-Large (Seattle Fire Department)*

**Session Description:** Maintenance of the federal grants guidance on interoperable communications is one of SAFECOM's larger, more consistent efforts. In Fiscal Year 2024, Congress reduced the funding available for certain grant programs like the [Homeland Security Grant Program](#) (HSGP) by 10 percent. As a result, fewer projects, to include interoperable communications projects, can be implemented by the states, territories, and high-risk urban areas that receive these funds. This discussion provided an update on the status of FEMA's preparedness grants, highlighted potential challenges in a constrained budgetary environment, and solicited input from SAFECOM membership on additional strategies FEMA might use in the Notice of Funding Opportunity documentation considering this.

### Key Outcomes:

- Attendees received a refresher on FEMA's mission and the HSGP. Mr. Thomas described how the 9/11 Homeland Security Act remains the guiding framework for HSGP.
- There are three components of HSGP: the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP), Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), and Operation Stonegarden. Under HSGP, funding is awarded based on a specific risk calculation. FEMA is required to give minimum percentages to every state via the SHSP; with 16 states receiving additional funds. There are currently 41 high risk urban areas that receive funding via the UASI program.
  - The federal government is currently operating under a continuing resolution and new grant programs will not be funded until full-year congressional funding is appropriated. Mr. Thomas reiterated FEMA's support of interoperability and commitment to understanding and communicating each state's emergency communications needs.
- Attendees inquired about additional funding for equipment services and maintenance. Mr. Thomas reminded attendees that maintenance costs may only be applied within the period of performance of the grant award.
- Considering changing presidential administrations, stakeholders are encouraged to check back regarding policy changes that may impact HSGP funds.

**Action Item:** Attendees are encouraged to establish and maintain a relationship with State Administrative Agencies for information and access to HSGP funding. Active participation in Urban Area Working Groups is another method to stay abreast of funding opportunities and review processes.

## SAFECOM SCHOOL

November 19, 2024

New SAFECOM Members were welcomed to the SAFECOM School and New Member Orientation by SAFECOM and CISA Leadership. The session hosted 7 new members to include participants from Harris County, TX, Alsip Fire Department, IL, American Public Works Association (APWA) and the National EMS Management Association (NEMSMA). New members deep dived into discussion on the history, mission, vision, and goals of SAFECOM. An overview was given on membership requirements and expectations, travel and reimbursement policies, SAFECOM resources such as the SAFECOM website and HSIN, as well as protecting the SAFECOM brand. Current SAFECOM members shared personal accounts of their experience with SAFECOM to include length of service, resources/projects worked on, committee/working group/task force participation and provided suggestions on how to make the most of being a part of SAFECOM.

## Hurricane Helene Update

**Speaker:** Mr. Red Grasso, *SAFECOM At-Large (FirstTech, North Carolina Department of Information Technology)*

**Session Description:** Hurricane Helene caused widespread destruction and numerous fatalities across the Southeastern United States in late September 2024. In the days leading up to U.S. landfall, the storm experienced rapid intensification, reaching Category 4 intensity in a matter of days. In advance of Helene's landfall, states of emergency were declared in Florida and Georgia due to the expected storm surge and hurricane-force wind gusts. The storm caused catastrophic rainfall- triggered flooding, particularly in western North Carolina, East Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia, and spawned numerous tornadoes. Members received an update on ongoing Hurricane Helene response efforts from North Carolina.

### Key Outcomes:

- First responders faced many communications challenges in the wake of Hurricane Helene with damaged power lines and fiber connections and North Carolina relied on support from 39 states, territories, and federal partners to reach heavily affected communities.
- North Carolina restructured their Emergency Operations Center Emergency Support Function-2 (ESF-2) roles during the response to include functional roles for access and fuel to towers, support to wireless and wireline providers, and field communication personnel staffing
- ESF-2 personnel utilized their PACE plans and reviewed best practices from the Hurricane Katrina after action report to determine next steps.
- North Carolina documented areas for improvement which included developing detailed job aids, building a cache of low earth orbit satellite devices, improving communication between PSAPs on dispatch reroutes, and streamlining the flow of information between responding agencies.



**Figure 4:** Response efforts following Hurricane Helene

## “SOS Only” Capability and FirstNet Authority Update

**Speakers:** Ms. Jacque Miller-Waring, *Area Director, Public Safety Engagement, FirstNet Authority*

Chief Gerald Reardon, *SAFECOM Chair*

Assistant Chief Chris Lombard, *SAFECOM First Vice Chair*

**Session Description:** According to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules, all wireless service providers must transmit any 911 call to a public safety answering point, regardless of whether the caller is a subscriber or not. This is considered a “basic 911” requirement and ensures that anyone can access emergency assistance by dialing 911. Phones today are more likely displaying “SOS only” or “911 only” rather than “No Service” when their network is not available. Members heard technical and policy considerations about the “SOS only” or “911 only” feature, as well as an update on current FirstNet Authority initiatives, highlighting their reinvestment in Coverage Enhancement Prioritization. Members also learned about the FirstNet Authority and FirstNet Board’s communication with the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC).

### Key Outcomes:

- While there was a change in the FirstNet Authority Board, the Board retained six members and welcomed a new chair from Atlanta, Georgia. Additionally, representatives consist of first responders and business personnel



**Figure 5:** Ms. Jacque Miller-Waring provided updates for the FirstNet Authority

- FirstNet's PSAC was established in 2013; the PSAC is an independent group comprised of nominated public safety officials and personnel from across the country. This 42-member group conducts meetings bi-annually, along with agency visits, user group sessions, and conference engagements.
- Regarding 911 and SOS mode, all 911 calls will reach an emergency operations center regardless of carrier or SOS mode, but FirstNet needs assistance communicating 911 functionality to stakeholders. PACE planning is needed as sporadic connection issues may occur.
  - The FirstNet Authority recently signed a 10-year agreement with AT&T to expand mission critical services, upgrade deployables, and enhance coverage to include a 1,000 site build-out over the next two years. The reinvestment will also include 5G core, nationwide Band 14 updates, and an adjusted payment scheduled to align with 5G and 6G lifecycles. Attendees viewed the interactive First Responder Impact Model (FRIM) tool that displayed nationwide coverage data. Insights from the FRIM aide collaborative coverage improvements with states and localities.
- FirstNet is seeking to expand and improve coverage through low earth orbit satellites, long-term evolution service on aircrafts, coverage amplifiers, and more.
- Crowdsource data, which FirstNet is leveraging to identify areas of interest, is pulled from several data sources and separates commercial AT&T service from the public safety FirstNet service to ensure accuracy.

#### Action Items:

- Attendees were encouraged to reach to Chief Lombard or Chief Reardon for information on how to get involved with the PSAC.
- Attendees were also encouraged to continue reporting outages and coverage issues to FirstNet.

#### Jamming Update

**Speaker:** Mr. Russell Becker, *Director of the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility and Deputy Branch Lead of the Innovative Systems Branch of the Technology Centers Division, Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security*

**Session Description:** The FCC and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a (U//FOUO) Countering Jamming Threats Joint Paper to alert federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement and public safety agencies of the severe and evolving threats posed by radio frequency signal jammers. This Joint Paper provides an overview of jamming threats, evolving acquisition and use, and comprehensive recommendations to increase agency communications resilience against jamming, including critical incident reporting requirements and resources.

#### Key Outcomes:

- Attendees gained a better awareness of the ever-increasing threat that jamming poses to emergency communications. Interference with the radio frequencies that carry emergency communications impedes the transmission of information and data that law enforcement and homeland security rely upon to protect and save lives.
- Interference may be unintentional or intentional; however, "jamming" is the term used for intentionally causing interference to emergency communications. Jamming may target not only radio communications, but other devices that provide information to national security and emergency preparedness agencies such as systems that rely on global positioning system (GPS).
- Bad actors are increasingly using jamming devices to launch denial-of-service attacks against law enforcement while committing other crimes. Although it is illegal to sell, manufacture, import or operate, jamming equipment can be low tech and easy to obtain.
- The Customs and Border Patrol through the National Targeting Center leads an effort to enhance the interdiction on the illegal importation of jammers.
- The JAMX exercises help law enforcement and public safety organizations understand jamming interference and equip them with the tools they need to recognize, respond to, resolve and report jamming incidents. From those exercises DHS created a jammer impact matrix to illustrate how effective the jammers were in disabling certain frequency bands.



- FEMA's grants programs allow organizations to purchase radio frequency direction finding, detection and spectrum analysis tools from their approved equipment list.

**Action Item:** If you are interested in receiving a copy of the (U//FOUO) Countering Jamming Threats Joint Paper, please send an email request to [jamming.exercise@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:jamming.exercise@hq.dhs.gov). All requests should demonstrate a valid need to know and must come from an official government email address (preferably with signature block).

## High Frequency – No, It's Not Dead

**Speaker:** Scott Wright, SAFECOM At-Large (State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Connecticut Deputy Statewide Interoperability Coordinator [SWIC])

**Session Description:** Discuss high frequency (HF) systems and why they are an important resource, some existing use case examples, and thoughts for the future.

### Key Outcomes:

- HF radio refers to spectrum between 3 and 30 megahertz (MHz) and offers a cost-effective, resilient form of emergency communication. Despite requiring some technical knowledge and being affected by environmental factors, HF radio supports various programs for crisis communication.
- There are several examples of HF systems such as the SHARed RESources (SHARES) HF Radio Program, FEMA's National Radio System (NARS), the Alaska Emergency Frequency, and the Cellular Over the Horizon Radio Enforcement Network (COTHEN). Many of these programs, including SHARES, are managed by agencies like CISA.
- In Connecticut, HF radios are used in engineering and restoration vehicles, as well as base stations in permanent structures, and successfully supported Hurricane Helene response efforts in North Carolina when infrastructure was obsolete.
- Members inquired about the impact of installing ethernet over powerline. Mr. Wright recommended ensuring that equipment is compliant with FCC regulations as more foreign equipment has been causing frequency interference. Members requested examples of local HF radio use cases and were informed that Connecticut employs HF radio for backup communications between Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) and facilitating coordination with response organizations like the Red Cross to relay health and welfare information. Emergency managers and responders are expanding inter-jurisdictional coordination, conducting regular nets, and testing capabilities. Mr. Wright suggested consulting the FCC database to identify licensed areas and explore potential opportunities for collaboration and testing plan development.
- HF radio can be incorporated into PACE plans.
- The auxiliary communications (AuxComm) community can be a great resource for more information and training if desired.
- Members should consider getting licensed to operate radios.



**Figure 6:** Example of a HF system

## Encryption Update

**Speaker:** Scott Wright, SAFECOM At-Large (State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Connecticut Deputy SWIC)

**Session Description:** Hear an update on the June 2024 encryption panel with further education on encryption and progress on work items.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Following the June 2024 SAFECOM Meeting, more information was provided to attendees regarding encryption efforts to inform education and outreach efforts.
- Encryption for interoperable communications, including trunking equipment, does exist and is effective. Earlier understandings that such efforts were ineffective was inaccurate; limitations were corrected due to a configuration issue rather than a key compromise issue.
  - Encryption key storage location numbers 1-20 have been set aside for assignment to federal and state law enforcement use to avoid multiple permissions to the same location.
- Quantum computing has been used to crack encryption codes. In response, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has generated expansive encryption codes to mitigate this possibility. Agencies are encouraged to adopt these new standards.
- Over-the-air rekeying (OTAR) provides an easier solution to adding and updating encryption codes, including radios from neighboring jurisdictions with whom an agency may need to communicate via encrypted channels.

**Action Item:** Contact the National Law Enforcement Communications Center (NLECC) for interoperable encryption assistance.

## Closing Remarks

**Speakers:** Chief Gerald Reardon, *SAFECOM Chair*  
Assistant Chief Chris Lombard, *SAFECOM First Vice Chair*  
Chief Jay Kopstein, *SAFECOM Second Vice Chair*

**Session Description:** SAFECOM Leadership provided closing remarks, to include updates on the Spring 2025 Bi-Annual Meeting and encouraging members to provide feedback on the meeting via a feedback survey.

**Key Outcomes:**

- CISA is identifying dates and location for the Spring 2025 Bi-Annual Meeting; the save the date and additional information will be provided soon.

**Action Item:** SAFECOM members were encouraged to participate in the [Meeting Feedback Survey](#) as your input in the survey kicks off development for the next bi-annual meeting.

## SAFECOM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

November 19, 2024

In addition to the SAFECOM Bi-Annual Meeting, SAFECOM members and invited guests participated in breakout sessions, to include the SAFECOM School for new members hosted by the Education and Outreach (E&O) Committee, an interactive open discussion on emerging technology, as well as working sessions on the National Emergency Communications Plan, Governance Committee, Governance Structures Working Group, E&O Committee, Funding and Sustainment Committee, Communications Section Task Force, and Executive Board. Separate meeting summaries were developed to capture major action items and outcomes from those meetings.