



Emergency Interoperability Consortium
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The Hon. Susan Collins
Chairman
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

The Hon. Joseph I. Lieberman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Dear Sen. Collins,

On behalf of the Emergency Interoperability Consortium (EIC), I am pleased to write to you in support of S. 1725, the "Assure Emergency and Interoperable Communications for First Responders Act of 2005." We are certain it will achieve swift approval on the Senate floor.

The EIC is in the forefront of that effort. As a coalition of about 40 companies, EIC shares your goal of interoperability. We work closely with the emergency response community and the Department of Homeland Security to determine what technical needs can be addressed and how we can best address them. The end of that process is an open, formal standard-setting mechanism that produces technical specifications that can be adapted to any number of products by advocating the creation of industry-wide standards for emergency communications. Working with the standards group, Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS), EIC companies have pressed for the adoption of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), a now-existing standard to which companies can write different product using these standards as a fundamental building block.

For example, working with the standards group, Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS), EIC companies have pressed for the adoption of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), a now-existing standard to which companies are using to create different products. The Office of Management and Budget has required government agencies to be CAP-compliant, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is making significant use of the standard in issuing warnings. The standards can work on any technology, whether on fiber-based computer networks or on wireless networks, for example.

As your legislation goes to the floor for consideration, EIC finds much that we can support. We were pleased with the findings, and with the definition of interoperability. However, we would like you to consider one simple change. The bill now restricts purchases to equipment. We of course recognize the need to have mobile interoperability

so emergency response staff from different agencies can communicate wirelessly at the scene of incidents. But wireless is not the only form of interoperability.

In addition, the bill as currently drafted would disallow expenditures for systems and tools to share and manage data between emergency agencies.

We suggest, therefore, that emergency information technology and services be added to Sec. 1801 (b) as an eligible use of grant funds. The recognition and emphasis that such an addition would achieve would go a long way to making the types of improvements you desire.

We are reminded that during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, city officials cobbled together a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service using but one working Internet line, and that a Wi-Fi network was set up in the SuperDome. Either of those networks could be used to transmit vital information using our alerting and messaging protocols. This was necessary as the city's 9-1-1 system crashed during the flooding, and all types of communications were needed.

Thank you again for your attention. I am enclosing a recent article on the EIC's work. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Matt Walton

enc.: CNET piece