



Emergency Interoperability Consortium
1701 K St. Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20006
Contact: Matt Walton
mwalton@eic.org
(818) 621-0660

The Hon. Jim DeMint
Chairman, Subcommittee on Disaster Prevention and Prediction

The Hon. Ben Nelson
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Disaster Prevention and Prediction

Dear Senators. DeMint and Nelson:

On behalf of the Emergency Interoperability Consortium (EIC), it is my pleasure to congratulate you and Sen. Nelson on the Commerce Committee passage of S. 1753, the "Warning, Alert and Response Network Act." This is a piece of legislation that will make significant progress toward saving lives in emergencies.

We appreciate the fact that the legislation recognizes that there are many ways in which to convey a warning to the public. As Sec. 102 (b) (4) makes clear, warnings should be provided through the "greatest possible variety of communications technologies."

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 products.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) uses CAP now for warnings, and the Office of Management and Budget last year mandated the use of CAP throughout the government. Further development of the standard continues, making the standard more useful and comprehensive. Through CAP, first responders are able to transmit data through any type of network, using varied types of software and any transmission media. Our member companies all have different products, but they are all built around the CAP standards.

We are concerned, however, because the legislation, while it cites the need for multiple technologies, seems to concentrate on spectrum-based technologies, whether broadcasting or cellular radio, and on voice communications. We are also concerned about legislation that sets the direction from Washington, rather than allowing local agencies to take the lead. With open standards, the local agencies have the ability to find their own priorities and to implement them without direction from Washington. If there is to be direction from Washington, it should, at a minimum, require the use of standards-based technology, such as the CAP or Emergency Disaster Exchange Language (EDXL).

EIC would like to work with you as you prepare the bill for floor action to make certain that the entire bill reflects the spirit of the sections on function and capability – that all types of communications networks and all types of messaging should be considered by the bill for Federal support.

We also suggest that the concept of, and support for, warnings include those transmitted among agencies and first responders. Sending warnings to the public is a vital function, but it is equally vital to make certain that hospitals, hazmat teams, police, fire, National Guard and other agencies and institutions are also part of the system. Those agencies are often the transmittal point for reverse 9-1-1 information, a valuable tool in an emergency.

As we saw with the calamity in New Orleans, city officials were able to cobble together a Voice of Internet Protocol (VoIP) system using just one Internet line and a router. We saw that the impromptu construction of wireless Wi-Fi networks aided communications around the Superdome. These are systems over which standards-based communications can be transmitted, and as such should be recognized in your legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Matt Walton

Enc.: CNET piece