

The E-Safety Program  
Statement by  
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On Behalf of  
The ComCARE Alliance  
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Subcommittee on Telecommunications  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Christopher A. McLean, counsel to the ComCARE Alliance. As a former staffer for Senator Jim Exon, it is a deep personal and professional honor to appear before this Committee.

ComCARE stands for Communications for Coordinated Assistance and Response to Emergencies. The ComCARE Alliance is a not-for-profit coalition of over 75 organizations in the medical, emergency response, telecommunications, transportation and technology sectors dedicated to advancing policy and technologies to improve emergency response in individual and mass events.

The ComCARE Alliance salutes all the American heroes in public safety who daily put their lives on the line for their communities as well as those who work with little recognition and fanfare to be the information bridges between those agencies, and between the public and public safety.

Our nation is engaged in a war unlike any other. In this war, America's greatest civil defense weapons are information and the ability to communicate.

The war on terrorism will be won or lost on information. It was one piece of information relayed to passengers in a plane over Pennsylvania on September 11<sup>th</sup> which brought heroic action to save the lives of many, many people in the nation's Capitol.

Police, fire, medical, public health and other emergency responders on the front lines of homeland security need information to do their jobs. It is their most important tool.

Indeed, every American has a role to play in making America safer. The vigilance of individual citizens and the emergency communications systems of the nation are valuable defensive weapons.

We would not send soldiers into battle without being well armed and well protected. Unfortunately, every day, we send first responders into harm's way without the information tools they need to save our lives and protect their own.

The emergency communications systems in many parts of the country are antiquated and, in some rural communities, they are struggling without even basic 9-1-1 systems.

Without change, the jobs of our heroic emergency responders get even more difficult.

In general, the emergency communications network is voice centric. It does not often utilize modern communications or information management tools which are so common now in industry. There are too often large disparities between the information capabilities of emergency agencies in the same jurisdiction, and between well funded urban and suburban communities and rural areas. Every day in large and small cities around the nation, emergency calls are being dropped, 9-1-1 operators are being overwhelmed with multiple calls, and responses are delayed for lack of location information. In mass emergencies, wireless and wireline communications systems can quickly become grid-locked. At the scene of an emergency, there is very little ability to share data among multiple emergency response and public health agencies, or to communicate securely across jurisdictional and agency lines in an emergency or in anticipation of an emergency.

What is needed is a coordinated and integrated approach to upgrading all emergency communications. We need to evolve current voice grade systems and civilian network capacity into modern, robust, networks capable of improving response to mass disasters and every day emergencies.

The ComCARE Alliance has been working in the field of emergency communications for more than four years. Immediately following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the Alliance convened a working group of our members to consider the lessons learned from September 11<sup>th</sup> and lay out an action agenda for a quick start program to enhance our emergency communications infrastructure. The E-Safety Program is the result of those efforts. It was developed with the help and guidance of experts in the field and adopted by the ComCARE Alliance Board of Directors.

The E-Safety Program proposes to enhance homeland security by helping bring 21st century capabilities, commonly used in e-Business today, to emergency response, deploying integrated, interoperable and interconnected wireline and wireless systems and applications. The E-Safety program is designed to address the nation's need in a mass emergency in a way that will significantly improve our ability to handle thousands of daily individual emergencies as well.

The E-SAFETY PROGRAM has eight essential elements. In short, they are:

- Increase the Capacity and Reliability of America's Wired and Wireless Communications Networks;
- Deploy Modern End-to-End Emergency Communications Systems;
- Deploy Enhanced 9-1-1 for Wireline, Wireless and PBX; Deploy Telematics for automobiles;
- Support State Planning and Deployment of Integrated Emergency Communications Systems in Model States;
- Provide the two basic E-Safety tools to All Emergency Agencies:
  - National Emergency Electronic Registry; and
  - Event Mapping Capability.
- Augment and Increase Emergency Response Training;
- Make a Commitment to Research, Develop and Deploy New Safety Applications and Devices;
- Support National Education and Outreach, Bringing Together All the Key Emergency Stakeholder Communities

I am pleased to discuss the specifics of each.

**Point 1. Increase the Capacity and Reliability of America's Communications Networks.**

Every effort must be made to ensure that sufficient fixed and wireless bandwidth is deployed to handle call and data volume in times of emergency. Enhancing the capacity, capability and reliability of our nation's essential telecommunications networks should be a matter of national security.

Imagine if a citizen needed to communicate information about subsequent terrorist attacks at twelve noon of September 11<sup>th</sup>. In all likelihood, that call would not go through.

Today, the wireless phone has become an indispensable safety device. Consumers carry wireless phone for convenience of conversation, but most often, "just in case of an emergency." On September 11<sup>th</sup> and increasingly in day-to-day life, our wireless networks reach their capacity. Enhancing that capacity through sound spectrum policy, new technology and cell site policy will enhance public safety. We need to ensure that the wireless safety net stretches broadly and with as few holes as possible.

In the war on terrorism, it could be a vigilant citizen on a cell phone or in a telematics equipped vehicle who observes and reports a hijacked truck, suspicious activity at an airport, or terrorist or criminal activity. And similarly, we must provide sufficient spectrum for public safety agencies' own use.

Providing adequate spectrum and cell site locations to meet needs in times of mass emergency also works to ensure that the phone works in instances of a crime, a crash or a medical emergency. Being connected saves lives. Now more than ever, we cannot afford to let wireless dead zones become deadly zones.

All carriers should be encouraged to invest in their networks. The availability of robust wireless, wireline and satellite networks enhance public safety and security.

## **Point 2. Deploy Modern End-to-End Emergency Communications Systems.**

We need to empower and tie all emergency response and public health agencies together with broadband connections and basic modern information technology. Every emergency response and public health agency such as police, fire, 9-1-1, hospital and health care facilities should have at least one broadband connection and one intelligent work station.

What worked on September 11<sup>th</sup> were broadband internet connections and wireless IP connections. Today many emergency responders do not have basic information infrastructure.

For example, one of our members, the American Public Health Association, reported that only about one half their members had broadband connections and about 10% did not even have e-mail.

High speed networks would connect responders to the tools of next generation emergency response such as a national emergency electronic directory, data sharing systems, incident mapping, and other applications. Responders need the ability to send, receive and move real time emergency information among and between multiple agencies.

## **Point 3. Deploy Enhanced 9-1-1: Wireline, Wireless and PBX; Deploy Telematics**

Knowing location is critical to emergency response. The most effective and efficient methods of Enhanced 9-1-1 deployment must be used, including overall state planning and organization. The deployment of telematics safety systems in cars should also be strongly encouraged.

If you were to make a call to 9-1-1 from your home phone, in most parts of this country, the emergency responder would have your street address their screen automatically. Help can be dispatched, even if you do not talk.

If you were to call from this room, the 9-1-1 reported address would be "Capitol complex." Location information speeds response. It is vitally important that the federal government, at least, ensure that its phones are locatable and encourage the private sector to work with emergency responders to find solutions. An excellent example of public/private partnership is in Washington State where Bob Oening, State 9-1-1 Administrator worked with Boeing to provide locations for phones on its vast Washington State network.

On the wireless side, today, wireless calls account for nearly 40% of 9-1-1 calls in some communities. Today, wireless phones are not locatable, although commercial technologies to do so are available. Make that same 9-1-1 call from your cell phone from the plaza in front of the Capitol, and the dispatcher will have no idea where you are. Indeed, the call could be answered in Virginia. This Committee has done a great deal to raise the profile of this important issue.

In the car, telematics is one of the most important safety features to be developed in recent years. By providing a hands free communications link, navigation, automatic crash notification and a mayday alert, powered by telecommunications and location technology, the telematics leaders in the auto industry are making Americans safer by delivering location and safety products. Those efforts should be encouraged.

#### **Point 4. Support State Planning and Deployment of Integrated Systems in Model States.**

Leading states are ready to bring together all stakeholders, plan sophisticated, integrated emergency and transportation communications and information systems, and then deploy them. New information technologies hold great promise in helping bridge the gap between urban and rural response capabilities.

Grants should be made available to create models of deployment in these leading states for other states to emulate, and to encourage state emergency communications planning.

This Committee understands well the importance of coordinated state, federal, local and private sector planning. Thanks to the leadership of members of this Committee, the Congress enacted legislation which includes the clear blueprint for action.

In enacting the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act of 1999 (WiCAPs '99) the Congress called for a coordinated, end to end response to emergency communications planning.

Working together, communities are stronger than working separately. Several States have taken leadership role in beginning to give life to the vision of WiCAPs '99. ComCARE is proud to be working with these states to advance the vision of an integrated approach to emergency communications

planning.

Just days before September 11, Senator Burns convened an historic public safety summit in Helena, Montana. The ComCARE Alliance was honored to participate. By bringing people together, and continuing a formal dialogue, participants are discovering that they have common needs, new opportunities to share and leverage resources and the support of the State's political leadership to get the job done. We look forward to continuing to work with the public safety community in Montana.

In Virginia, the Virginia Department of Transportation is funding a ground breaking effort in the Shenandoah Valley to create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century emergency communications capability. Thanks to the leadership of Congressmen Wolf, Goodlatte and Boucher the Shenandoah Valley is quickly becoming a test bed for new thinking in emergency communications.

In Washington State under the leadership of Senators Murray and Cantwell and with the support of the Washington State Center for the Digital Bridge, a Washington State E-Safety Summit is planned for this March 26<sup>th</sup>.

And in Oregon, Senator Wyden's Net Guard proposal has inspired the public safety and technology communities in Oregon to begin a dialogue on next generation response technologies.

Through these efforts, communities learn that they are not alone. They see opportunities to leverage existing funding sources and technology projects. The private sector discovers that there are innovation solutions for public/private partnership and resources well spent can solve multiple problems.

#### **Point 5. Provide Two Basic Tools to All Emergency Agencies: National Emergency Electronic Registry and Event Mapping Capability.**

There is no comprehensive, electronic directory of all emergency response and public health agencies. Therefore neither the President nor any other appropriate entity has the ability to send emergency warnings or data to all or some emergency responders or public information outlets in a particular area. The national non-profit registry being developed by ComCARE will fill that gap.

We also need to encourage broad use of shared electronic mapping of emergency event information. Emergency data and information can be sent to a shared map resource by emergency managers, telematics companies, wireless carriers, commercial transportation and others, and displayed/shared by all relevant emergency responders. These enabling technologies, combined with broadband connections to a safety network create a basic E-Safety platform on which a wide variety of other safety applications can operate.

#### **Point 6. Augment and Increase Emergency Response Training**

New threats and new technologies require new training. There is a continuous need to ensure that new employees and volunteers are fully prepared for the challenges that face our nation. Fortunately, new communications technologies can make training more efficient. The same broadband platform for emergency response can be used for a host to digital training uses in times of peace and calm.

Where ever ComCARE goes, we hears a common theme. The hard working professionals in the emergency response field want more training. We especially need to share the lessons of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the anthrax attack.

The public also needs to be informed of their role in the war on terrorism. Public information is a vital government role.

In times of emergency, the public needs reliable information and instructions on how to move from danger to safety. Fortunately, America has a time tested system to alert the public to weather danger through NOAA weather radio network. The ComCARE Alliance applauds the Committee for its work and support for the NOAA all hazards warning network initiative. NOAA Weather Radio saves lives and it is the nation's largest most expansive radio network. It is an important backbone network for emergency warnings. I am especially proud of my former agency, the Rural Utilities Service for its leadership in efforts to close the NOAA weather radio gaps in rural America. In the Senate farm bill, the stage is being set to finish the job.

NOAA and the National Weather Service must continue and expedite its work to make the Weather Radio System a true all hazards warning system.

#### **Point 7. Make a Commitment to Research, Develop and Deploy New Safety Applications and Devices**

We must encourage major public and private efforts to develop critical civil defense and emergency applications which can use the basic E-Safety platform. This requires a significant university-based, emergency response research capability; rapid, industry-based open standards development efforts; and major public and private investments in new safety applications and devices.

#### **Point 8. Support National Education and Outreach, Bringing Together All the Key Emergency Stakeholder Communities**

We need to involve all the key members of the emergency response community in understanding -- together -- what is possible with the new technologies, and in planning, deploying and creating new operations protocols based on them. ComCARE and its non-profit membership associations like Emergency Nurses Association, National Emergency Number Association, American Public Health Association and the American College of Emergency Physicians should be given the resources to hold national, state and local conferences, and to run communications programs with agency and private sector partners, focused on best practices and new technologies. They are ready to step up to the plate and help bring emergency communications and response into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

To achieve the E-Safety program will require some new legislation and appropriations, but significant elements of the E-Safety program can be accomplished through a coordinated approach to existing programs and homeland security and through cooperation with the private sector. Billions of dollars have already been appropriated. The President has appointed a respected leader to head the Office of Homeland Security. This is a unique and important moment to forge an integrated approach to emergency communications and response. That approach was very clearly put forward by this Committee in WiCAPs '99. It is fully consistent with the Administration's approach to federalism and

homeland defense. This is a moment and an opportunity which should not be lost.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for inviting ComCARE to be represented at today's hearings. The individual members of this Committee and the Committee as a whole have done so much to advance emergency preparedness and response. The E-Safety program seeks to build on that solid record of success and we welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to find ways to make America Safer.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.