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CANADA – UNITED STATES COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY WORKING GROUP

IMPROVING CROSS-BORDER COMMUNICATIONS

The 5,500 mile Canada-United States border poses unique communications challenges, including operable and interoperable communications gaps for radio and public safety communications along and across the border, and interoperability concerns for public safety broadband planning efforts. In February 2011, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada issued *Beyond the Border: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness*, solidifying a binational commitment to enhance and improve cross-border communications. Later that year, President Obama and Prime Minister Harper approved a specific *Beyond the Border Action Plan*, outlining key priorities and actions for implementing the shared vision.



Co-Chairs Chris Essid (Department of Homeland Security Office of Emergency Communications) and Michael DeJong (Public Safety Canada) during the April 30-May 1, 2015, CANUS CIWG meeting. (Photo Courtesy of Embassy of Canada, Washington, DC)

The Action Plan calls for the establishment of a binational working group focused on cross-border interoperability as a means of harmonizing cross-border emergency communications efforts.

Public Safety Canada and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) worked with representatives from both governments to establish the Canada-United States (CANUS) Communications Interoperability Working Group (CIWG) as the focal point to plan and coordinate activities, drive action, and track progress.

ADDRESSING UNIQUE BORDER-SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGES

Since Communications interoperability is a fundamental challenge to all emergency response agencies, but such efforts take on added complexity in border regions where technical, operational, and policy differences compound tactical hurdles. The border between Canada and the United States contains a diverse array of geographies, communities, and operational environments that pose unique challenges to the federal, provincial/territorial, state, local, and tribal responders in the region. The CANUS CIWG is focused on addressing these challenges, which include:

- Cross-border coordination to enable radio and other public safety communications interoperability, including examining the spectrum approval processes within the coordination zone and mutual aid channel assignments.
- Administrative solutions, such as legal and governance frameworks, to better facilitate radio communications between American and Canadian response personnel.
- Operational solutions for American and Canadian responders whose equipment may not meet the basic requirements (e.g., security) and who may not have the communications coverage needed to establish operable and interoperable wireless

communications in a multi-jurisdictional scenario.

- Coordinating Canada-United States public safety broadband planning efforts to ensure cross-border interoperability into the future.

To address these challenges, the CANUS CIWG established a Work Plan to guide its efforts. This work plan was developed with input from members and previous cross-border communications workshops. The Work Plan establishes eight goals and associated activities and is updated on an annual basis to ensure it continuously addresses the evolving needs of the group.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ONGOING ACTIVITIES

The CANUS CIWG has completed a number of objectives associated with the Work Plan, including:

- Coordinating with the Federal Communications Commission and Industry Canada to develop a Statement of Intent (SOI) allowing the use of portable radio units across the borders by public safety licensees of either country
- Development of a Memorandum of Understanding to permit automated exchange of information between Canadian and U.S. situational awareness and reporting systems (i.e., the Canadian Multi-Agency Situational Awareness System [MASAS] and the U.S. Integrated Public Alert and Warning System [IPAWS])
- Engagement of federal, state, provincial/territorial and local public safety first responders along the border to document existing interoperability efforts and better understand current cross border interoperability challenges

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact OEC@dhs.gov or visit www.dhs.gov/oec.