

**RANKING MEMBER LAURA RICHARDSON (D-CA)
OPENING STATEMENT**

**“Ensuring Coordination and Cooperation: A Review of the Emergency
Communications Offices within the Department of Homeland Security”**

**Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and
Communications**

November 17, 2011 at 10:00 AM

I would like to thank Chairman Bilirakis for convening this hearing focusing on ensuring coordination amongst DHS’s several emergency communications offices.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for their service to the country and participation in today’s hearing.

Emergency communications broadly encompasses: interoperable communications, alerts and warnings, and building resilient networks.

The Nation has faced several disasters this year that requires for us to reaffirm our commitment to improving emergency communications.

Hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, and tornadoes have ravaged communities across the country.

Throughout all of these disasters, first responders needed reliable and resilient emergency communications to conduct their life-saving missions.

Additionally, citizens need to be alerted as soon as possible in order to evacuate, shelter in place, or take other actions recommended by emergency officials.

Simply put, resilient and interoperable communications is required to save lives and initiate recovery.

Unfortunately, gaps still exists despite progress over the last decade. I hope to learn what steps we can take moving forward to resolve these gaps in anticipation of future emergencies.

As a result of the failed Hurricane Katrina response, Congress established the Office of Emergency Communications to take a critical leadership role working to improve State and local interoperability and efforts within the Department.

Unfortunately, the Office of Emergency Communication’s role with the Department appears to be muted and based on working groups lacking any ultimate authority.

Eliminating silos, maximizing assets, and streamlining policies requires strong authority, as intended by Congress.

The introduction of broadband provides an advanced and innovative tool for first responders.

Building a Nationwide Interoperable Emergency Communications Network is critical to our ability to successfully conduct a multi-jurisdictional response operation.

I am proud to supporter of bipartisan legislation to addresses this long overdue need.

I am interested in hearing what role DHS will play in support of President Obama's commitment to develop and deploy a nationwide, interoperable wireless network for public safety.

This Committee has had particular interest in the importance of emergency alerts and warning. FEMA and the FCC conducted a comprehensive outreach campaign to announce last week's inaugural Emergency Alert System test.

Unfortunately, the initial lessons learned indicate that the current Emergency Alert System is unable to successfully provide a nationwide alert.

This gap in our alert and warning capabilities must be resolved in order to ensure that we are ready to provide citizens in every corner of the Nation with timely information, if a catastrophic event occurs.

I am interested in learning more about the results of the test and what interim steps FEMA will take to enhance the System.

Finally, as Congress continues to discuss the Nation's fiscal future we should recognize the importance of building and sustaining preparedness capabilities.

Draconian cuts authorized in the FY2012 DHS Appropriations' bill puts emergency communication capabilities gained over the last decade in jeopardy. We need to learn what capabilities have been supported by these grant programs and the effects on first responder response operations if they are eliminated.