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## Interagency Communications During Major Events Possible

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**C**ross-jurisdictional and cross-disciplinary events have become more significant in recent years. These events have enhanced the need for an effective means of on-scene communication and information exchange. In the Washington, D.C., area, law enforcement agencies and other disciplines recently participated in a military exercise at the Pentagon called Operation Gallant Fox II and in the dedication of the National World War II Memorial. Reliable and instantaneous communications was again tested, and the Capital Wireless Integrated Network (CapWIN) met the challenge.<sup>1</sup>

During the May 2004 Gallant Fox II incident response exercise at the Pentagon, CapWIN was deployed on the side in order to test its capabilities. Although CapWIN was not the primary tool for communications between participating agencies, valuable lessons were learned. Several law enforcement, transportation, and fire and EMS agencies used CapWIN to communicate with each other as the practical exercise unfolded. At one point there was a momentary radio communications failure, at which time CapWIN was used as a primary tool for communications between participating agencies.

Another lesson learned was that certain law enforcement-sensitive information had been posted to so-called public chat rooms that were accessible by fire and EMS and transportation personnel who had not been vetted to receive law enforcement-sensitive information. This emphasized the need to use invitation-only private chat rooms that allow specific vetted users to view sensitive information, such as the locations of and responses to bomb threats and suspicious packages and lookouts for suspicious persons.

CapWIN was also deployed during the daylong events surrounding the dedication of the National World War II Memorial on Memorial Day weekend. With more than 100,000 invited guests (to include tens of thousands of World War II veterans and numerous VIPS, dignitaries, and the president of the United States), the dedication activities involved numerous traffic closures, a high level of security precautions, and the expectation of numerous first aid and medical incidents. More than 30 law enforcement agencies from outside the city participated in the event. Primary law enforcement duties fell upon the U.S. Park Police, supplemented by the Metropolitan Police Department and numerous federal police agencies. The coordination of communications between the law enforcement agencies, Washington D.C., Fire and EMS, and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), and the Maryland State Highway Administration (MDSHA) was the perfect setting in which to test and showcase the capability of CapWIN in rapidly, efficiently, and effectively

transmitting real-time information between agencies and disciplines.

Throughout the day, traffic incidents resulting in road closures or significant traffic delays occurred. Should there have been a need to quickly evacuate vehicular traffic, the knowledge of such closures and delays would have been valuable.

CapWIN staff assisted at the on-site emergency operations center and at the CapWIN offices to resolve technical issues as they arose throughout the day. The primary focus of the use of CapWIN during the dedication events was to show that information could be collected directly from the scene (specifically the on-site emergency operations center) and rapidly disseminated to other agencies without the need to transfer information through multiple dispatchers.

Under normal conditions, a lookout for a suspicious person may be telephoned from the reporting agency to other agencies. Unfortunately, from the time the information is relayed from the original reporting officer to a dispatcher and then to someone who places a call to another agency and then from a call taker to a dispatcher and finally from the dispatcher to the officer in the field, there are numerous possibilities for information distortion to occur. Additionally, the originating agency caller may not remember to include all the information for each individual phone call that must be made if passing a lookout along to multiple agencies.

Through the creation of incident sub-rooms inside CapWin's Memorial Dedication incident chat room, information was posted in real time as it came directly from the field. Information was posted to one of the following rooms:

- General incident room
- Law enforcement room
- Law enforcement sensitive room (law enforcement users had to be specifically invited to this private room)
- Fire and medical emergencies room
- Missing persons room
- Traffic closures and incidents room

In the aftermath, CapWIN staff identified a few technical problems, mostly related to connectivity, and began developing solutions. The participating agencies will also meet to develop more lessons learned by focusing on the successes of the deployment and identifying ways to make CapWIN stronger. The initial goal of proving that CapWIN is a viable means for instant and reliable sharing of information between agencies was achieved.

For more information on CapWIN, please visit ([www.capwin.org](http://www.capwin.org)).

<sup>1</sup> CapWIN is a partnership between the law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency medical services, and transportation agencies in Washington, D.C., and suburban Maryland and Virginia. CapWIN enables secure and dedicated interoperable data communications between disparate agencies and disciplines during incident response and special events through the creation of incident chat rooms and instant messaging. CapWIN will also allow law enforcement agencies to query the wants and warrants and hot files of the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia law enforcement databases and NCIC. See George Ake and David J. Mullholland, "Expanding the Reach of Interoperable Data Communication," *The Police Chief* 71 (April 2004), 151-153, for details about CapWin.

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