



441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Accessible Version

October 30, 2017

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member

Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

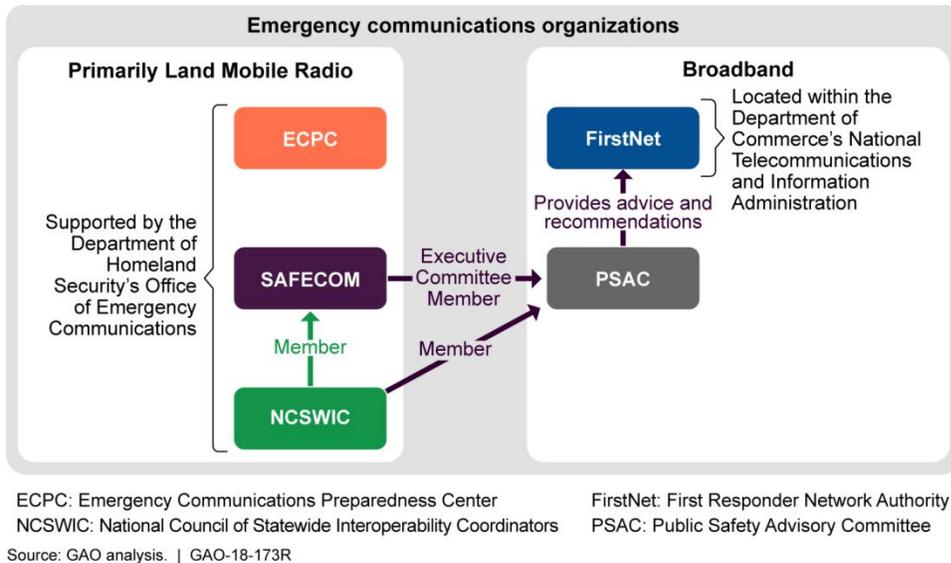
The Honorable Fred Upton
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

Emergency Communications: Overlap and Views on the Effectiveness of Organizations Promoting the Interoperability of Equipment

Public-safety communications systems are used by first responders, such as police officers and firefighters, to respond to various types of emergencies. Interoperable communications systems are important because they allow first responders to communicate with their counterparts in other agencies and jurisdictions, even though the systems or equipment vendors may differ. Currently, the public-safety community uses land mobile radio systems to transmit and receive critical voice communications, but land mobile radio systems may have issues with interoperability and capacity during large-scale emergencies or disasters.

A number of organizations have been created to promote the interoperability of emergency communications. In 2006, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act created the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC).¹ OEC works with three emergency communications advisory groups: SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC), and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC). These organizations promote the interoperability of emergency communications systems by focusing on technologies including, but not limited to, land mobile radio and satellite technology. Additionally, in 2013, the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) established the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) to provide advice to FirstNet, an independent authority within the Department of Commerce's (Commerce) National Telecommunications and Information Administration. FirstNet's goal is to develop and implement a nationwide public safety broadband network (see fig. below).

¹ The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act was enacted as Title VI of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2007, Pub. L. No. 109-295, 120 Stat. 1355 (2006).



We focused on the efforts of federally-supported organizations that promote the interoperability of emergency communications. We focused our review on the four main organizations—SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC—that receive federal support from OEC and Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration and that promote interoperable emergency communications.

We addressed the following questions:

1. What are the missions and memberships of organizations that promote the interoperability of emergency communications, and to what extent, if at all, are they overlapping or duplicative?
2. What are selected stakeholders’ views on the effectiveness of the efforts of these organizations?

On August 30, 2017, we briefed members of your staff on the results of our review. This report formally transmits the final briefing slides (see enc. I).

To describe the mission and memberships of SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC, we obtained and analyzed documents from each organization and interviewed Homeland Security and Commerce officials who work with these organizations. We assessed the missions and memberships of these organizations against criteria developed in GAO’s *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide* to determine the extent to which, if any, overlap or duplication existed.²

To obtain stakeholders’ views on the effects of any overlap and duplication, as well as the overall effectiveness of these organizations, we identified 32 public safety organizations that are members of both SAFECOM and PSAC, and grouped them into five categories:

- public safety—law enforcement organizations;

²GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015).

- public safety—fire and emergency-medical-service organizations;
- public safety—public works and broadly represented organizations;
- state organizations; and
- county, municipal, and tribal organizations.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from 11 of the 32 organizations. We selected two organizations from each category to interview, except the county, municipal, and tribal organizations category, where we selected three organizations. We selected organizations representing key units of government or disciplines (e.g., firefighting, law enforcement, and emergency management services) within each category, and used professional judgment to select an organization when multiple options within a category were available. While these interviews provide relevant insights, they cannot be generalized to all organizations that are members of SAFECOM and PSAC. We also interviewed Homeland Security and Commerce officials. Further, we obtained stakeholder views about the collaboration among these organizations and compared these responses to selected practices from our leading practices on collaboration.³ Leading practices were selected that were most applicable to our review of OEC's effectiveness.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2016 to October 2017 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

In summary:

- There is some overlap in the missions of SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC because all of the organizations promote interoperable emergency communications. However, each organization has a specific focus and role. There is also overlap in membership, especially between SAFECOM and PSAC. However, we found that the organizations are complementary and not duplicative and that the overlap in mission among the organizations appears to have positive effects.
- Most stakeholders told us that SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC operate and collaborate effectively. For example, stakeholders said SAFECOM, along with NCSWIC in some cases, has developed effective written products that promote the interoperability of emergency communications. However, three stakeholders—representing tribal, county, or municipal interests—of the 11 we interviewed, told us that they believed the views of tribal, county, or municipal organizations were not fully represented on SAFECOM and PSAC. SAFECOM, an organization with over 50 members, and PSAC, with 43 members, have two associations that exclusively represent counties, two organizations that exclusively represent cities, and one that exclusively represents tribal interests. This representation is lower than the representation of federal, state, police, and emergency-medical-service organizations. A leading collaboration practice is

³GAO, *Managing For Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012) and GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C., Oct. 21, 2005).

ensuring that all of the relevant participants have been included in the collaborative effort or mechanism. Five of 11 stakeholders did not identify this as an issue.⁴

We are making two recommendations, one to DHS and one to FirstNet:

- The Secretary of Homeland Security should direct that OEC examine the composition and functioning of SAFECOM to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered through memberships in the organizations, executive committees, subcommittees, working groups, or other means. (Recommendation 1)
- FirstNet should examine the composition and functioning of PSAC to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered through memberships in the organizations, executive committees, subcommittees, working groups, or other means. (Recommendation 2)

Both DHS and Commerce provided written comments, reproduced in enclosures II and III respectively, where they concurred with our recommendation and discussed actions they are taking or plan to take to implement the recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and the Secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Commerce. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are Faye Morrison (Assistant Director), Kieran McCarthy (Analyst in Charge), Melissa Bodeau, Camilo Flores, Chris Keisling, James Lager, Hannah Laufe, Joshua Ormond, Amy Suntoke, James Sweetman, Sarah Veale, and Elizabeth Wood.



Mark Goldstein
Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

Enclosure

⁴Three stakeholders asked about this issue did not respond.

Enclosure I: Emergency Communications: Overlap and Views on the Effectiveness of Organizations Promoting the Interoperability of Equipment

Information for the Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

Emergency Communications: Overlap and Views on the Effectiveness of Organizations Promoting the Interoperability of Equipment

Contents

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Scope and Methodology
- Background
- Summary
- Findings for Objective 1
- Findings for Objective 2
- Conclusions
- Recommendation for Executive Action
- Appendix I – Information on Funding
- Appendix II – Information on Internal Structure
- Appendix III – SAFECOM and PSAC Members, as of July 2017

Introduction

Importance of Interoperable Emergency Communications

- Public safety communications systems are used by thousands of federal, state, and local jurisdictions, all of which have first responders—such as police officers and firefighters—who respond to various types of emergencies.
- Interoperable communications systems are those that allow first responders to communicate with their counterparts in other agencies and jurisdictions during emergencies, even though the systems or equipment vendors may differ.

Land Mobile Radio and Interoperability

- Currently, the public safety community transmits and receives mission-critical voice communications through a variety of public safety Land Mobile Radio systems that are operated by and licensed to state and local jurisdictions.
- Land Mobile Radio systems can have problems with interoperability and capacity in times of large scale emergencies or disasters.
- We examined the efforts of federally-supported organizations that promote the interoperability of emergency communications.

Establishment of Organizations that Promote Interoperability of Emergency Communications

- During the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the lack of interoperable public safety communications hampered rescue efforts and the overall effectiveness of public safety operations. SAFECOM was formed in 2001 after the terrorist attacks as part of the Presidential E-Government Initiative to improve public safety interoperability. More recently, interoperability issues arose during the Navy Yard attacks in 2013.
- The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 established the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC).
- OEC partners with three emergency communications organizations--SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC), and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC)--to promote the interoperability of emergency communications with a focus on Land Mobile Radio, NextGen 911, and satellite technology.¹¹
- In addition to these groups, the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) was established to advise the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet), an independent authority within the U.S. Department of Commerce (Commerce). Established by Congress in 2012, FirstNet's mission is to build and operate a nationwide, broadband network that will equip first responders to save lives and protect U.S. communities.

¹ NextGen 911 is an internet-based system that allows digital information (e.g., voice, photos, videos, text messages) to flow seamlessly from the public to emergency responders via the 911 network for emergency calls.

Objectives

This report examines the following questions:

1. What are the missions and memberships of organizations that promote the interoperability of emergency communications, and to what extent, if at all, are they overlapping or duplicative?
2. What are selected stakeholders' views on the effectiveness of the efforts of these organizations?

We also examined the funding and internal structures of these organizations and present this information in appendices I and II, respectively.

Scope and Methodology

- We focused our review on the main organizations that receive federal support from DHS's OEC and Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration and that promote the interoperability of emergency communications.⁶ We identified three organizations supported by OEC: SAFECOM, ECPC, and NCSWIC. We identified one organization supported by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration: FirstNet's PSAC.
- To describe the missions and memberships of these four organizations, we obtained and analyzed documents, such as governance charters and policies, from each organization. We also interviewed federal officials that work with each organization.
- To determine the extent to which organizations were overlapping or duplicative, we assessed the missions and memberships of the organizations against criteria developed in GAO's *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*.⁷

⁶ 2These organizations are federally supported in that they receive assistance from Homeland Security and Commerce employees and contractors. The departments also provide travel funds for members of these organizations to attend meetings.

⁷ 3Fragmentation refers to those circumstances in which more than one federal agency (or more than one organization within an agency) is involved in the same broad area of national need and opportunities exist to improve service delivery. Overlap occurs when multiple agencies or programs have similar goals, engage in similar activities or strategies to achieve them, or target similar beneficiaries. Duplication occurs when two or more agencies or programs are engaged in the same activities or provide the same services to the same beneficiaries. See GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, GAO-15-49SP, (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015).



- To obtain stakeholders' views on the effects of any overlap or duplication, as well as the overall effectiveness of these organizations, we identified 32 public safety organizations that are members of both SAFECOM and PSAC. We grouped them into five categories:
 - public safety-law enforcement organizations,
 - public safety-fire and emergency medical services (EMS) organizations,
 - public safety-public works and broadly represented organizations,
 - state organizations, and
 - county, municipal, and tribal organizations.
- We conducted semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from 11 of the 32 organizations. We selected two organizations from each category to interview, except the county, municipal, and tribal organizations category, where we selected three organizations. We selected organizations representing key units of government or disciplines (e.g., firefighting, law enforcement, and emergency management services) within each category, and used professional judgement to select an organization when multiple choices were available. We also interviewed DHS and Commerce officials.
- While these interviews provide relevant insights, they cannot be generalized to all organizations that are members of SAFECOM and PSAC. We also obtained stakeholder opinions about how these organizations were collaborating, and their effectiveness. We compared stakeholder responses to selected practices from our leading practices on collaboration.⁸ The collaboration leading practices that were selected were most applicable to our review of OEC's effectiveness.
- We conducted this performance audit from December 2016 to October 2017 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

⁸ GAO, Managing For Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms, GAO-12-1022 (Washington, D.C.: September 27, 2012) and GAO, Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies., GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C., October 21, 2005).



Background

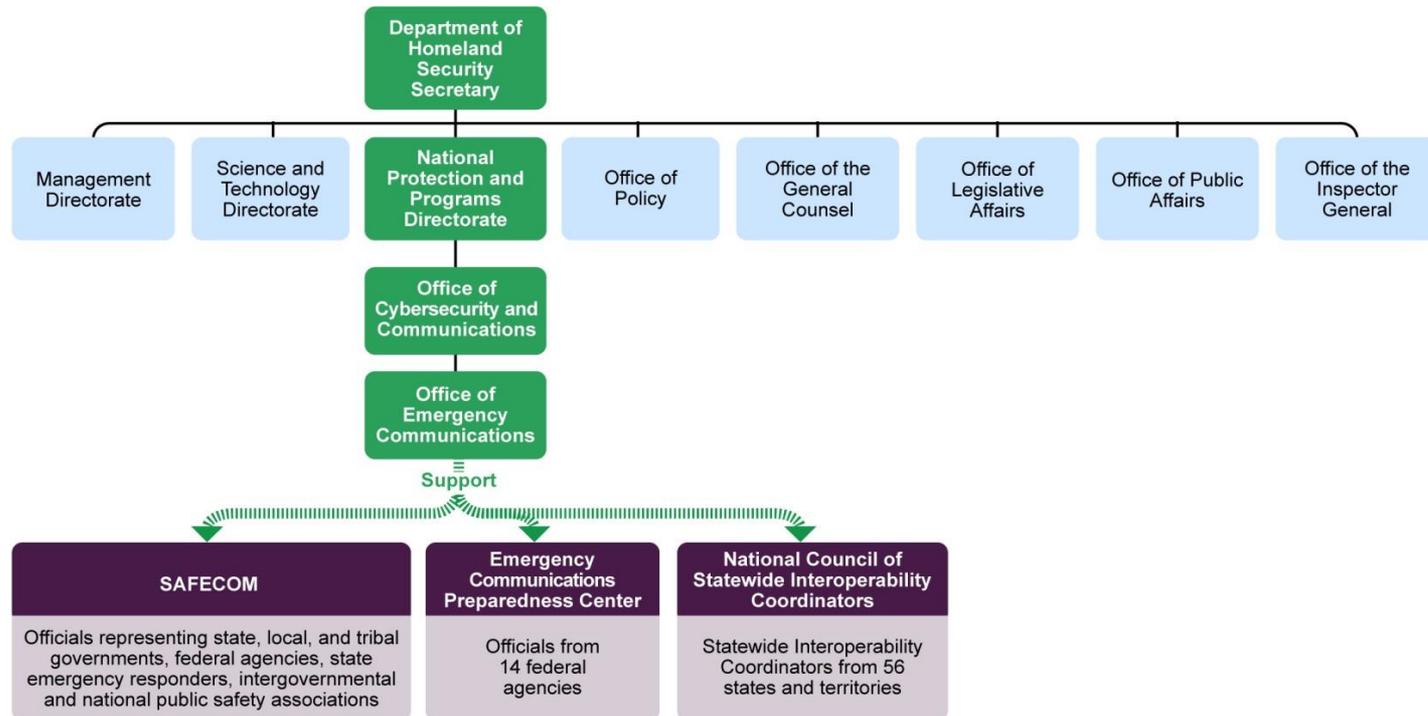
- SAFECOM, formed in 2001, currently includes over 50 members representing federal, state, municipal, county, and tribal governments, and intergovernmental and public safety organizations.
- ECPC was established in 2006 by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act. ECPC is a group of 14 federal agencies responsible for coordinating federal emergency communications programs.
- NCSWIC was established by DHS's OEC in July 2010. NCSWIC supports the Statewide Interoperability Coordinators from 56 states and U.S. territories.
- Commerce's FirstNet established PSAC in February 2013 consistent with the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012. PSAC consists of over 40 members from all disciplines of public safety; national organizations; federal, state, local, and tribal governments; and public safety at-large representation. PSAC advises FirstNet in implementing a nationwide public safety broadband network.

-
- SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC each have an Executive Committee, and use working groups, subcommittees, task forces, or other methods to provide input and guidance to the full organization and undertake projects or tasks.
 - Stakeholders told us that interoperability is improving nationwide. We recently reported that, of the federal agencies that identified the need to communicate with each other, about two-thirds reported generally having a good or excellent level of Land Mobile Radio interoperability, but one-third of federal agencies did not.⁹
 - We recently reported that FirstNet has made progress in establishing a public safety broadband network, but faces challenges that include providing coverage to rural areas, in buildings, or underground, and ensuring the network's overall cybersecurity.¹⁰

⁹ 5GAO, Emergency Communications: Improved Procurement of Land Mobile Radios Could Enhance Interoperability and Cut Costs, GAO-17-12, (Washington, D.C., October 5, 2016).

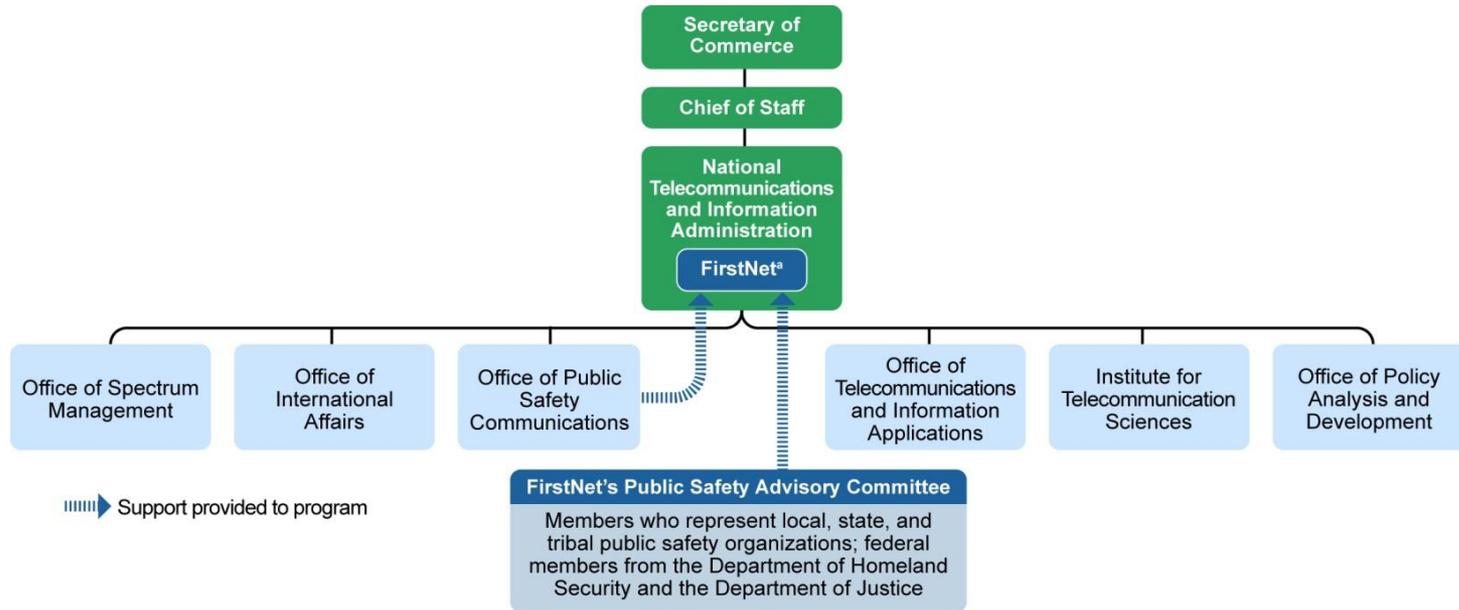
¹⁰ 6GAO, Public-Safety Broadband Network: FirstNet Has Made Progress Establishing the Network, but Should Address Stakeholder Concerns and Workforce Planning , GAO-17-569, (Washington, D.C., June 20, 2017).

Figure 1: Organizational Structure of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications, and Its Support for SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center, and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators



Source: GAO presentation of Department of Homeland Security information. | GAO-18-173R

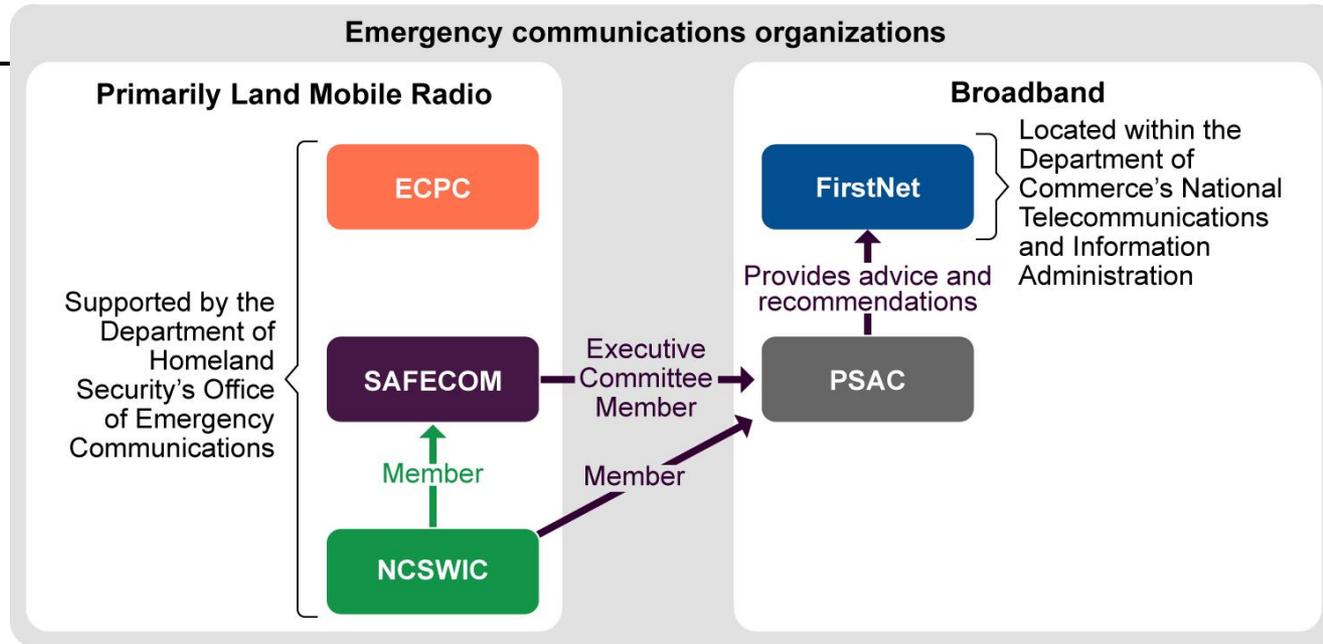
Figure 2: Organizational Structure of FirstNet's Public Safety Advisory Committee



Source: GAO presentation of Department of Commerce information. | GAO-18-173R

^aFirstNet is an independent authority within Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

Figure 3: Membership Among Organizations that Promote the Interoperability of Emergency Communications



ECPC: Emergency Communications Preparedness Center
 NCSWIC: National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators

FirstNet: First Responder Network Authority
 PSAC: Public Safety Advisory Committee

Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-18-173R

Summary

- There is overlap in the missions and memberships among the organizations that promote the interoperability of emergency communications, but we found that these organizations are complementary and, according to stakeholders, generally operate and collaborate effectively; however, it is unclear whether the views of some stakeholders are being fully represented and considered in SAFECOM and PSAC.
 - There is some overlap in mission among SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC because all of the organizations promote interoperable emergency communications; however, each has a specific focus and role. There is also overlap in membership, especially between SAFECOM and PSAC. However, we found that the organizations are complementary and that the overlaps in mission and membership may have positive effects for the public safety community.
 - Most stakeholders told us that SAFECOM and PSAC operate effectively. While most stakeholders whom we interviewed did not interact with ECPC and five did not interact with NCSWIC, most of those who did found them to be effective. Three stakeholders told us that SAFECOM, along with NCSWIC in some cases, has developed effective written products that promote collaboration and the interoperability of emergency communication.
 - Stakeholders from three organizations (the National Congress of American Indians, the National Association of Counties, and the National League of Cities) told us that they believed that their respective memberships are under-represented on both SAFECOM and PSAC. However, most other stakeholders that provided an opinion on this issue believe that representation is appropriate within SAFECOM and PSAC.

Objective 1: Overlap in Mission

- Using GAO's *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication Guide*, we compared the mission of each organization to the others and found there was overlap because each organization's mission at the broadest level is to facilitate the development of interoperable emergency communications.¹¹
- However, we did not identify duplication among the missions of SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC because each organization has a specific focus and performs different roles and responsibilities within the broader mission of facilitating interoperable emergency communications.

¹¹ GAO-15-49SP.

- The organizations are complementary, not duplicative.
 - GAO's *Duplication, Overlap, and Fragmentation Guide* states that related organizations and their outcomes should be complementary.¹²
 - Each organization has a distinct role and, collectively, they enhance the development of interoperable emergency communications. For example, one stakeholder noted that as FirstNet moves toward a broadband network, it will be important for SAFECOM to provide input to public safety agencies to ensure the equipment they purchase is compatible with FirstNet's network.
- Each organization has a charter detailing goals and roles and responsibilities.
 - GAO's *Duplication, Overlap, and Fragmentation Guide* states that whether organizations have strategic agreements in place and have clarified roles and responsibilities are important considerations for assessing overlap and duplication.¹³
 - We found that the organizations' governance charters describe goals. For example, one of the goals in SAFECOM's charter is to promote integration of emergency communication technology, resources and processes, while one of the goals in NCSWIC's charter is to implement state interoperability plans.
 - We found that roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated in the organizations' charters. For example, ECPC's charter describes its clearinghouse role and responsibility for grant guidance. PSAC's charter describes its role providing input on issues such as outreach, state plans, and state consultation.
- Overlap can have positive or negative effects, as we have previously reported.¹⁴ We found that the overlap in mission among the organizations appears to have positive effects. For example, SAFECOM tools and guidance have facilitated outreach to state and local emergency communication officials and have been used by Statewide Interoperability Coordinators to develop state communication plans.

¹² 8GAO-15-49SP.

¹³ 9GAO-15-49SP.

¹⁴ 10GAO-15-49SP.

Table 1: Memberships of SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC), the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC), and the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC)

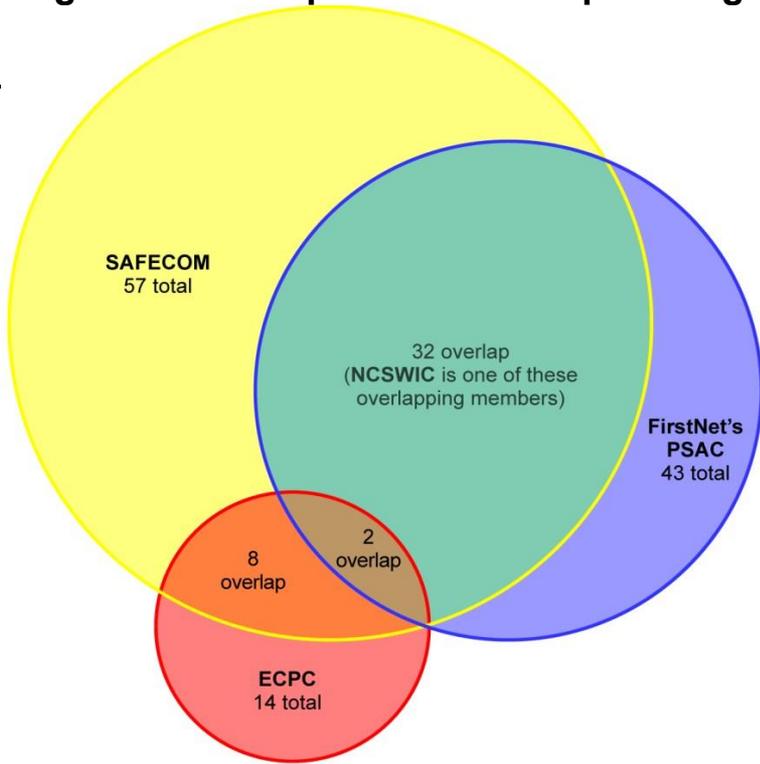
	SAFECOM	ECPC	NCSWIC	PSAC
Membership composition	SAFECOM consists of more than 50 members that represent local, tribal, and state governments; federal agencies; state emergency responders; and intergovernmental and national public safety associations.	ECPC consists of 14 federal agencies, including, but not limited to Homeland Security, Commerce, and the Federal Communications Commission.	NCSWIC consists of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators and their alternates from 56 states and territories. Statewide Interoperability Coordinators are officials within each state or territory responsible for coordinating interoperability efforts.	PSAC consists of no more than 45 members. Currently, there are 43 members. PSAC is composed of members that represent local, tribal, and state public safety organizations; federal agencies; and national public safety associations.
Terms of membership	Members serve 3-year terms, but are eligible for reappointment.	The ECPC Governance Charter lists agencies that are members of ECPC, but does not identify term limits or lengths for members.	Statewide Interoperability Coordinators are considered members of NCSWIC as long as they hold the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator position.	Members serve a 2-year term, but may be reappointed for additional consecutive terms.
Criteria for appointing new members	The Governance Committee makes recommendations to the Executive Committee regarding new members. New members must be approved by the Executive Committee. New members must have experience with communications and interoperability, be a designee of a SAFECOM member association, and have relevant expertise or represent a relevant discipline, among other things.	The ECPC Governance Charter states that the ECPC Executive Committee may invite new federal members to the ECPC, but does not identify any criteria to be used to make these invitation decisions.	Statewide Interoperability Coordinators are determined at the state level.	The Chair of the FirstNet Board appoints new PSAC members. New organizations must contribute a perspective that is not already represented on PSAC.

Source: GAO analysis of information from the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Commerce. | GAO-17-787R

-
- Using GAO's *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication Guide*, we compared organizational memberships to identify overlap or duplication.¹⁵
 - We found that the largest area of overlap occurs between SAFECOM and PSAC, with 32 overlapping public safety organizations and 2 overlapping federal agencies (see app. III).
 - SAFECOM and ECPC have 8 overlapping members: the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Homeland Security, the Interior, Justice, Transportation, the Treasury, and the Federal Communications Commission.
 - ECPC and PSAC have 2 overlapping members: Homeland Security and Justice.
 - NCSWIC is a member of PSAC and a member of SAFECOM's Executive Committee.
 - We did not identify duplication in membership of SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC and PSAC because each organization has some unique members.

¹⁵ GAO-15-49SP.

Figure 4: Overlap in Membership Among SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC



ECPC: Emergency Communications Preparedness Center
NCSWIC: National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators
FirstNet: First Responder Network Authority
PSAC: Public Safety Advisory Committee

Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-18-173R

- We found no evidence that overlapping membership negatively affects program implementation, as GAO's *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication Guide* asks us to consider.¹⁶
-

- A DHS official told us that when PSAC was created, it leveraged SAFECOM's membership to identify organizations that should be included in PSAC.
- Another stakeholder noted that PSAC has learned from the knowledge and experiences of SAFECOM.
- Based on our analysis, we identified positive effects of overlapping membership. Overlapping membership may prevent members from being silo-like within their specific focus area and allows them to understand the totality of emergency communications efforts.
 - Most stakeholders we spoke with believed that SAFECOM's and PSAC's overlapping memberships are appropriate. Stakeholders told us that the overlap facilitates awareness about the efforts of each group. For example, SAFECOM considers the credentialing of first responders, while PSAC considers the credentialing of FirstNet users. Each organization being aware of the other's efforts can help ensure a logical credentialing system.

¹⁶ GAO-15-49SP.

Objective 2: Stakeholders Generally Stated that SAFECOM, ECPC, NCSWIC, and PSAC Operate

Effectively, as Each has Its Own Focus

- Most stakeholders told us that SAFECOM and PSAC operate effectively. While most stakeholders that we interviewed did not interact with ECPC and five did not interact with NCSWIC, most of those that did found them to be effective.
- For example, according to one senior NCSWIC official, during joint SAFECOM-NCSWIC meetings, and when new leadership is elected, the SAFECOM Executive Committee will identify areas for SAFECOM to improve upon or prioritize. According to this NCSWIC official, this approach helps increase the effectiveness of SAFECOM.
- Two stakeholders said that ECPC is effective. ECPC is the federal interagency focal point for interoperable communications coordination.
 - One significant function of ECPC is serving as a clearinghouse for the sharing of intergovernmental information relating to emergency communications. According to the ECPC Chairman, ECPC interacts with SAFECOM, NCSWIC, and PSAC in several ways. For example, the chairs of SAFECOM and PSAC are invited to ECPC steering or executive committee meetings, which occur four times a year. Information developed by ECPC's focus groups are also shared with the chairs.
- The NCSWIC Chair explained that NCSWIC is effective because its state focus allows the Statewide Interoperability Coordinators to rely on each other and learn from the experiences of different states.
 - For example, the NCSWIC Chair described how, years ago, Wyoming was experiencing difficulties obtaining particular spectrum from the Federal Communications Commission. He went on to describe how Wyoming officials held a summit on the issue and invited federal partners to participate. The NCSWIC Chair said that 4 years later, Wyoming received a spectrum allocation from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and Wyoming officials were able to share their experience with other states.
- One stakeholder noted that PSAC provides useful outreach to emergency communications stakeholders. For example, PSAC provides weekly updates to county officials about the status of the FirstNet network.

Objective 2: Stakeholders Told Us that PSAC and SAFECOM Have Collaborated Effectively

- Most stakeholders told us that SAFECOM and PSAC have collaborated effectively, agreeing that SAFECOM's and PSAC's meetings were effective.
 - We have found that a number of factors, such as bridging organizational cultures, are necessary elements for a collaborative working relationship.¹⁷
 - SAFECOM and PSAC members typically meet in person twice a year. The main committee, subcommittees, and working groups typically hold monthly teleconferences. Stakeholders explained that these frequencies allow for good information exchange, and timely updates on interoperability progress without imposing an undue burden on SAFECOM or PSAC members.
 - Since 2012, OEC has held joint meetings with SAFECOM and NCSWIC, which were intended to save travel funds for Homeland Security and save time for the members of these organizations. According to Homeland Security and one public safety organization, these joint meetings enhance the coordination between state groups, public safety organizations, and federal officials. According to DHS officials, the full SAFECOM committee also scheduled joint meetings with its Funding and Sustainment Committee and Technology Policy Committee.
 - While most stakeholders told us that the frequency and type of SAFECOM and FirstNet meetings were sufficient, two stakeholders believed that there should be more frequent in-person travel meetings for SAFECOM and PSAC members. One of these stakeholders explained that the ability to discuss important issues regarding public safety, such as encryption, public safety grade infrastructure, and integrating different technologies for voice communications, is effective when SAFECOM, NCSWIC, and OEC staff are able to speak face-to-face about the challenges experienced by first responders.
- Stakeholders noted that ECPC effectively interacted with the other organizations in several ways. The chairs of SAFECOM and PSAC are both invited to ECPC steering or executive committee meetings, and information developed by ECPC's focus groups is shared with the SAFECOM and PSAC chairs.

¹⁷ 13GAO-12-1022, Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms, (Washington, D.C.:Sept. 27, 2012).



Objective 2: Stakeholders Cited Development of Effective Grant Guidance

- Stakeholders told us that SAFECOM, along with NCSWIC in some cases, has developed effective written products that promote collaboration and the interoperability of emergency communications.
 - One of our leading collaboration practices is that agencies should establish compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries.¹⁸
 - For example, SAFECOM and NCSWIC's jointly-developed *Guidance on Emergency Communications Grants* aims to ensure that emergency communications standards and policies across federal grant programs provide a consistent approach to improving emergency communications nationwide.
- Two stakeholders told us that the guidance works to improve the quality of grant investments and helps ensure that equipment purchased is interoperable with current standards and that they use this guidance when making decisions about purchasing emergency communication equipment.
 - For example, one member of SAFECOM told us that it requires purchase of P25-standard equipment with any grant funding, unless non-standard equipment is absolutely necessary. This requirement helps avoid the purchase of proprietary systems by local agencies that are not interoperable.¹⁹

¹⁸ GAO-06-15.

¹⁹ Project 25 (P25) standards are a suite of voluntary national standards that are intended to facilitate interoperability among different manufacturers' of Land Mobile Radio communications products.

Objective 2: Stakeholders Cited Development of Other Written Products

- According to three stakeholders we interviewed, SAFECOM has produced a number of other written products that help with promoting the interoperability of emergency communications. Two stakeholders cited SAFECOM's *Interoperability Continuum* and the *National Emergency Communications Plan* as particularly valuable.
- Three stakeholders told us that SAFECOM and PSAC are effective at developing and distilling complex information about emergency communications and interoperability.
 - According to an official from one public safety organization, PSAC has produced useful documents that describe Land Mobile Radio and the FirstNet network. The official said that these white papers are helpful in discussing complex technologies with elected officials.
 - An official from one public safety association cited SAFECOM's *Interoperability Continuum*, *National Emergency Communications Plan*, and Grant Guidance, among other documents, as particularly helpful.
 - An official from one city's public safety organization explained that SAFECOM has issued helpful information for ensuring that current technology investments are compatible with future technology, and that PSAC documents can help explain the benefits of investing in broadband technologies. For example, the official said that SAFECOM and PSAC resources have resulted in the city ensuring that a \$170 million radio replacement initiative is compatible with FirstNet technologies.²⁰

²⁰ 16SAFECOM's written products (many produced jointly with NCSWIC) can be found at its website at <https://www.dhs.gov/safecom>. FirstNet's written products are at <https://firstnet.gov/content/annual-reports#Reports>.

Objective 2: Some Stakeholders Told us That Stakeholder Representation on SAFECOM and the PSAC Could Be Improved

- Stakeholders from three organizations (the National Congress of American Indians, the National Association of Counties, and the National League of Cities) told us that they believed that their respective memberships are under-represented on both SAFECOM and PSAC. However, five of the eight stakeholders that provided an opinion on this issue believe that representation is appropriate within SAFECOM and PSAC; three stakeholders asked about this issue did not respond.
 - A leading collaboration practice is ensuring that all of the relevant participants have been included in the collaborative effort or mechanism.
- SAFECOM, an organization with over 50 members, and PSAC, with 43 members, have only two associations that exclusively represent counties, two organizations that exclusively represent cities, and one that exclusively represents tribal interests (see table next page).²¹ This representation is lower than the representation of federal, state, police, and emergency management service organizations.²²

²¹ There are a number of organizations within SAFECOM and PSAC that partially represent these groups, but that also represent other groups simultaneously. For example, the International City/County Management Association represents both city and county interests.

²² In addition, some groups like the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) are heavily represented on both SAFECOM and PSAC. NPSTC is a federation of sixteen voting-member organizations representing fire, emergency management services, law enforcement, transportation, and other telecommunications organizations. NPSTC itself is on both SAFECOM and PSAC, as are 13 of its 16 voting members.

- Stakeholders from the three organizations told us that SAFECOM's or PSAC's meeting discussions tend to be state-centric and do not adequately consider the needs of counties, cities, or tribes.
 - For example, according to one public safety organization, localities need to be more involved on PSAC. There needs to be greater communication with local governments, particularly with regard to user fees and equipment costs, because local governments need to be able to adjust their budgets to address FirstNet requirements.

Objective 2: Types of Organizations within SAFECOM and PSAC

Table 2: Types of Organizations within SAFECOM and the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC)

Types of Organizations within SAFECOM	Full Number (On Executive Committee)	Types of Organizations within FirstNet's PSAC	Full Number (On Executive Committee)
Law Enforcement	4 (3)	Law Enforcement	4 (1)
Fire Department	2 (2)	Fire Department	3 (1)
Emergency Management Services	7 (2)	Emergency Management Services	7 (1)
State Organizations	6 (3)	State Organizations	8 (1)
Municipal Organizations	2 (2)	Municipal Organizations ²³	2.5 (1)
County/Local Organizations	2 (1)	County/Local Organizations	2.5
Regional Organizations	1	Regional Organizations	1
Tribal Organizations	1 (1)	Tribal Organizations	1
Other Public Safety Organizations	7 (2)	Other Public Safety Organizations	8
Federal Agencies	8	Federal Agencies	2
Public Safety At Large Members (including, but not limited, to local fire and law enforcement)	17 (3)	Public Safety At Large Members (local fire, law enforcement, and SAFECOM Executive Committee)	4
Total	57 (19)		43 (5)

Source: GAO analysis of information from the Departments of Homeland Security and Commerce. | GAO-17-787R

²³ 19We counted the International City/County Management Association as a half for both the municipal and county/local categories.

Could Be Improved

- National Association of Counties officials stated that there should be an expanded role and presence for counties on SAFECOM and PSAC because they are the main stakeholders for emergency communication systems.
- According to National Congress of American Indians officials, both SAFECOM and PSAC need more tribal representation, and there is not enough discussion of tribal public safety and governance issues on the committees of these organizations. Specifically, the officials felt that PSAC interaction with tribes was done to “check the box.” They said they would like to see a tribal working group created in SAFECOM, and the existing tribal working group in PSAC elevated to having access to the Executive Committee.
- The National League of Cities told us that municipalities are under represented on PSAC and discussions tend to be too state-centric.

Objective 2: Some Stakeholders Told us That Stakeholder Representation on SAFECOM's and PSAC's Committees and Working Groups May Not Be Inclusive

- Stakeholder representation on SAFECOM's and PSAC's committees and working groups may not be inclusive. SAFECOM does not have a tribal working group, while PSAC does. Conversely, PSAC's executive committee does not have tribal representation, while SAFECOM's executive committee does. The PSAC executive committee has law enforcement county representation, but not broader county representation.
- With over 3,000 county governments, hundreds of metro areas, and over 500 federally recognized tribes in the United States, these groups represent a key segment of emergency communications stakeholders in the United States.
 - National Association of Counties officials told us that there is a great deal of variation among counties. Some are urban; some are rural. Counties have different views on issues depending on these types of characteristics. Instead of having a single seat on SAFECOM and FirstNet's PSAC for counties, they believe additional seats for county representatives would better help ensure that the views of different types of counties are heard and incorporated into decision making, otherwise the views of smaller counties in particular may not be considered.
- Effective collaboration includes ensuring that all of the relevant participants have been included. Without determining if the views of these stakeholders are receiving full discussion and consideration to improve the interoperability of emergency communications, either through membership representation or through involvement in working groups or other methods, SAFECOM and PSAC may not be collaborating as effectively as possible.

Conclusions

- While most stakeholders that provided an opinion on this issue told us that stakeholder representation on SAFECOM and PSAC is appropriate, three stakeholders told us that county, city, and tribal perspectives could be better represented.
- GAO's leading practices for stakeholder collaboration state that it is important to ensure that the relevant participants have been included in the collaborative effort.
- Without full inclusion of these stakeholders, there is the risk that their concerns and views are not being incorporated into the efforts of SAFECOM and PSAC to improve the interoperability of emergency communications. In addition, there is the risk that their information needs are not being met by the information coming from SAFECOM and PSAC, possibly affecting their ability to make sound decisions regarding budgeting for and purchasing emergency communications equipment.

Recommendation for Executive Action

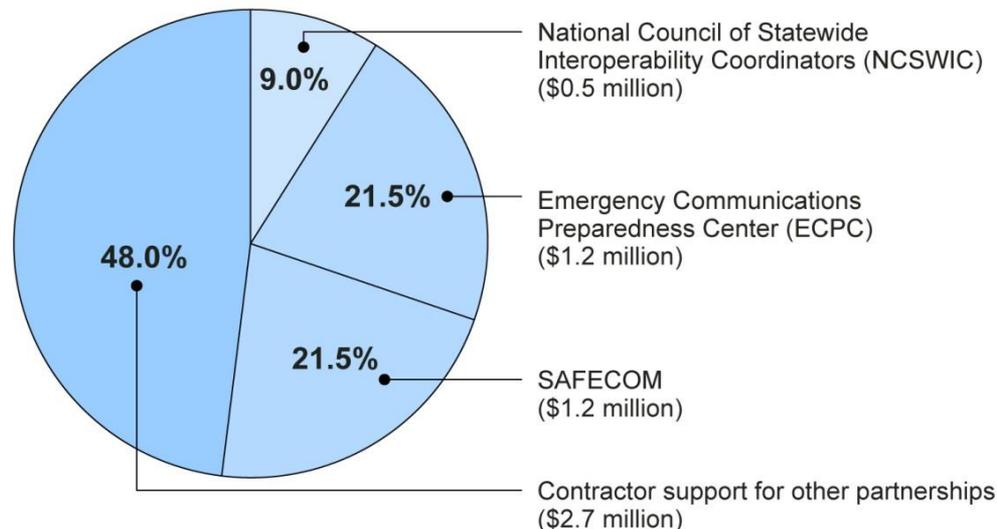
We are making two recommendations, one to DHS and one to FirstNet:

- The Secretary of Homeland Security should direct that OEC examine the composition and functioning of SAFECOM to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered through memberships in the organizations, executive committees, subcommittees, working groups, or other means. (Recommendation 1)
- FirstNet should examine the composition and functioning of PSAC to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered through memberships in the organizations, executive committees, subcommittees, working groups, or other means. (Recommendation 2)

Appendix I: Funding

- The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) expects to spend about \$3 million for contractor administrative support for SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC), and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) in fiscal year 2016.
 - OEC expects to spend \$1.2 million for SAFECOM, \$1.2 million for ECPC, and \$0.5 million for NCSWIC.
 - Contractor administrative support included tasks such as recording meeting minutes, conducting pre-meeting planning and logistics, and preparing meeting written materials.
- OEC provided approximately six full-time equivalent employees to support SAFECOM, ECPC, and NCSWIC in fiscal year 2016, according to budget information provided by OEC officials.
- Approximately \$185,000 in travel expenses were incurred for DHS officials and organization members to attend in-person meetings for SAFECOM, ECPC, and NCSWIC in calendar year 2016, according to DHS officials.
- The Department of Commerce (Commerce) expensed \$606,381 for Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) activities in fiscal year 2016, according to budget information provided by Commerce officials.
 - Of this amount, \$376,012 was used for labor (\$226,908 for contractor support and \$149,104 for FirstNet staff support), \$195,369 for travel, and \$35,000 for other direct costs associated with PSAC meetings, such as meeting space and audio/visual needs.
 - Contractor support includes assisting with the planning and execution of meetings, developing meeting materials, and evaluating and securing meeting space, among other things.
- The \$195,369 in travel funds was used to allow PSAC, FirstNet staff, and contractors to attend in-person meetings, according to budget information provided by Commerce officials.

Figure 5: Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Governance Branch FY 2016 Budget for Contractor Support



Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-18-173R

Data Table for Figure 5: Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Governance Branch FY 2016 Budget for Contractor Support

Entity	Dollars in millions	Percent
NCSWIC	0.5	9.0
SAFECOM	1.2	21.5
ECPC	1.2	21.5
Other Partnership Branch contractor support	2.7	48.0

Note: OEC's Governance Branch leads collaborative efforts across all levels of government to enhance public safety and emergency preparedness communications. The budget data above represents expected expenditures for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. After FY 2016 has ended, OEC has one year to spend these funds. OEC expects to spend nearly all of its FY 2016 funds by the end of FY 2017. This funding represents funds used for contractor support for organizations including SAFECOM, ECPC, and NCSWIC. Contractor support for other partnerships includes support provided for stakeholder groups such as the Canada-United States Communications Interoperability Working Group, the Southwest Border Communications Working Group, and the Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications, among others.

Appendix II: Information on Internal Structure

Table 3: Internal Structure Information for SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC), the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC), and the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC)

	SAFECOM	ECPC	NCSWIC	PSAC
Executive committee composition	19 members, including 15 member associations, and 4 at-large members.; 7 members of SAFECOM leadership including the chair, 2 vice-chairs, and 4 committee chairs.	Members from 14 federal agencies that comprise the ECPC, including a Chair.	Ten Regional Interoperability Council Chairs, including a Chair and Vice Chair.	Five members comprise the Executive Committee, which is led by the Executive Committee Chair.
Process for appointment to the executive committee	SAFECOM members elect a Chair, Vice Chairs, and at-large members to serve on the Executive Committee. Committee Chairs are elected by committee members. The SAFECOM Governance Committee makes recommendations to the Executive Committee regarding members associations serving on the Executive Committee.	Executive Committee members are designated by the Office of the Secretary, Commissioner or Administrator at the Under Secretary level of each member agency. The Chair is appointed by the Department of Homeland Security.	Members of each Regional Interoperability Council elect a council chair, who serves on NCSWIC's Executive Committee. Executive Committee members may be elected to serve as the Chair or Vice Chair.	Executive Committee Chair and members are appointed by the Chair of the FirstNet Board.
Voting structure	When the Executive Committee votes on SAFECOM issues, each organization and at-large member receives one vote.	Voting occurs within committees and focus groups, according to OEC officials.	Each Executive Committee member receives one vote.	FirstNet and the PSAC Chair meet to identify issues requiring a vote by PSAC. The Executive Committee votes on approving new working group leadership, for example, while the full PSAC votes on approving meeting minutes and submitting task team recommendations.
Working groups	SAFECOM has four committees, each of which can form working groups for a pre-determined length of time.	The ECPC's Steering Committee oversees focus groups that support ECPC's activities.	NCSWIC has four committees, each of which can form working groups as a subset of the committee.	FirstNet officials may create working groups or task forces to help accomplish PSAC activities. These subgroups report to PSAC's Executive Committee.

Source: GAO analysis of information from the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Commerce. | GAO-17-787R

-
- Members of each organization establish sub-groups to implement their mission.
 - SAFECOM has four committees, and a number of working groups, including the Identity, Credential and Access Management Working Group and the Communications Unit Working Group. However, SAFECOM does not have a tribal working group. SAFECOM also has task forces, which report to the Executive Committee. According to DHS officials, subject matter experts may attend general, committee, working group or task force meetings to present relevant information. Subject matter experts may remain in the meeting for its duration, but may not vote or raise topics for consideration.²⁴
 - ECPC has two committees. The Executive Committee provides strategic direction. The Steering Committee implements Executive Committee actions, and manages focus groups.
 - NCSWIC has four committees. Each committee may form working groups for projects requiring specific expertise or significant stakeholder involvement. Additionally, NCSWIC has task forces, which are ad-hoc groups intended to develop specific products over a short timeframe.
 - PSAC has one committee, and three working groups: the Early Builders Working Group, the Tribal Working Group, and the Federal Working Group. PSAC's working groups have a broad scope and operate for a calendar year, with the option to renew. The chair of the working group is a PSAC member. Other members of the working group are not required to be PSAC members. PSAC also has three task teams, which have a narrow scope and submit recommendations on specific topics within a specific timeframe. The chair of the task team is a member of the PSAC. Unless otherwise approved by the Executive Committee Chair, other task team members must be PSAC members.

²⁴ This information is not in the SAFECOM charter.

Appendix III: SAFECOM and PSAC Members, as of July 2017

Members of SAFECOM Only (23)

- Arizona State Forestry
- Baker Police Department (LA)
- City of Cambridge Fire Department (MA)
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of the Interior
- Department of Transportation
- Department of the Treasury
- Division of Homeland Security and Emergency
- Services Communications and
- Interoperability Working Group (NY)
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue (VA)
- Federal Communications Commission
- Fire Department New York (NY)
- Merrionette Park Fire Department (IL)
- Metropolitan Transportation Authority Police
- Department (NY)
- Miami-Dade Police Department (FL)
- Monroe County (NY)
- Office of Statewide Emergency
- Telecommunications (CT)
- Port of Houston Authority (TX)
- State of Wyoming
- Ulser County 911 Emergency
- Communications (NY)
- West Cities Police Communications (CA)
- Willamette County 911 (OR)
- Wireless Information Network (AR)

Members of SAFECOM and PSAC (34)

- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
- American Public Works Association

- Association of Public Safety Communications Officials International
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Justice
- Forestry Conservation Communications Association
- Interagency Board
- International Association of Chiefs of Police
- International Association of Emergency Managers
- International Association of Fire Chiefs
- International Municipal Signal Association
- Major Cities (Police) Chiefs Association
- Major County Sheriffs' Association
- Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association
- National Association of Counties
- National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians
- National Association of Regional Councils
- National Association of State 911 Administrators
- National Association of State Chief Information Officers
- National Association of State Emergency Medical Service Officials
- National Association of State Technology Directors
- National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors
- National Congress of American Indians
- National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics
- National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators
- National Criminal Justice Association
- National Emergency Management Association
- National Emergency Number Association
- National EMS Management Association
- National Governors Association
- National League of Cities
- National Public Safety Telecommunications Council
- National Sheriffs Association
- U.S. Conference of Mayors

Members of PSAC Only (9)

- Fire Non-Management First Line - Responder

- Governors Homeland Security - Advisors Council
- International City/County - Management Association
- International Justice and Public - Safety Network
- National Conference of State - Legislators
- National Volunteer Fire Council - Police Non-Management First Line Responder
- Police Non-Management First Line - Responder
- SAFECOM Executive Committee

GAO on the Web

Connect with GAO on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and our Web site: <http://www.gao.gov/>
Subscribe to our [RSS Feeds](#) or [E-mail Updates](#). Listen to our [Podcasts](#) and read [The Watchblog](#)

Congressional Relations

Katherine Siggerud, Managing Director, siggerudk@gao.gov
(202) 512-4400, U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW, Room 7125, Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov
(202) 512-4800, U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW, Room 7149, Washington, DC 20548

Strategic Planning and External Liaison

James-Christian Blockwood, Managing Director, spel@gao.gov
(202) 512-4707, U.S. Government Accountability Office,
441 G Street NW, Room 7814, Washington, DC 20548

Copyright

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. The published product may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.³⁶

Enclosure II: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland
Security**

October 13, 2017

Mark Goldstein
Director, Physical Infrastructure
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management's Response to Draft Report GAO-18-173R, "EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS: Overlap and Views on the Effectiveness of Organizations Promoting the Interoperability of Equipment"

Dear Mr. Goldstein:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of DHS Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) efforts to promote emergency communications interoperability. Specifically, GAO found that overlap in the missions and efforts of SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center, and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators—with which OEC partners—and the Department of Commerce's First Responder Newwork Authority Public Safety Advisory Committee (PASC) are complementary, not duplicative, and according to stakeholders, generally operate effectively. DHS is committed to continuing its collaboration with emergency responders and elected officials across all levels of government to assure a safer America through effective public safety communications.

The draft report contained one recommendation with which the Department concurs. Attached find our detailed response to that recommendation.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim H. Crumacker".

JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

**Attachment: DHS Management Response to Recommendation
Contained in GAO-18-173R**

GAO recommended that the Secretaries of Homeland Security and Commerce:

Recommendation: Direct that OEC and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) examine the composition and functioning of SAFECOM and PSAC to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered through memberships in the organizations, executive committees, subcommittees, working groups, or other means.

Response: Concur. OEC is working with SAFECOM (whose membership includes the Department of Commerce's NTIA) to address this recommendation. More specifically, SAFECOM has acknowledged gaps in membership and is actively taking steps to remedy this concern, including accessing and revising its membership through its Governance Committee and Membership Working Group, as appropriate.

For example, SAFECOM is developing a more formal process for attracting new members from organizations and individuals who can bring unique perspectives on public safety or relevant fields to the group. These perspective may include:

- practical experience with communications and interoperability, and the desire to learn;
- representation of a relevant discipline within the public safety community;
- service on statewide and/or regional interoperability governing bodies;
- representation of a relevant public safety association; and
- expertise in a specific area relevant to the public safety community.

SAFECOM recognizes the value in the views of tribal, county, and municipal organizations, and welcomes organizations or individuals with perspectives representing these groups to submit applications for membership. SAFECOM ensures relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented as part of its membership and have opportunities to express their views for organizational consideration. Estimated Completion Date: March 30, 2018.

Text of Enclosure II: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

Page 1

October 13, 2017

Mark Goldstein

Director, Physical Infrastructure

U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW

Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management's Response to Draft Report GAO-18-I 73R, "EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS: Overlap and Views on the Effectiveness of Organizations Promoting the Interoperability of Equipment"

Dear Mr. Goldstein:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (OHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of OHS Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) efforts to promote emergency communications interoperability.

Specifically, GAO found that overlap in the missions and efforts of SAFECOM, the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center, and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators-with which OEC partners-and the Department of Commerce's First Responder Network Authority Public Safety Advisory Committee (PASC) are complementary, not duplicative, and according to stakeholders, generally operate effectively. OHS is committed to continuing its collaboration with emergency responders and elected officials across all levels of government to assure a safer America through effective public safety communications.

The draft report contained one recommendation with which the Department concurs. Attached find our detailed response to that recommendation.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

Attachment: DHS Management Response to Recommendation Contained in GA0-18-173R

GAO recommended that the Secretaries of Homeland Security and Commerce:

Recommendation: Direct that OEC and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) examine the composition and functioning of SAFECOM and PSAC to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered through memberships in the organizations, executive committees, subcommittees, working groups, or other means.

Response: Concur. OEC is working with SAFECOM (whose membership includes the Department of Commerce's NTIA) to address this recommendation. More specifically, SAFECOM has acknowledged gaps in membership and is actively taking steps to remedy this concern, including accessing and revising its membership through its Governance Committee and Membership Working Group, as appropriate.

For example, SAFECOM is developing a more formal process for attracting new members from organizations and individuals who can bring unique perspectives on public safety or relevant fields to the group. These perspective may include:

- practical experience with communications and interoperability, and the desire to learn;
- representation of a relevant discipline within the public safety community;
- service on statewide and/or regional interoperability governing bodies;
- representation of a relevant public safety association; and
- expertise in a specific area relevant to the public safety community.

SAFECOM recognizes the value in the views of tribal, county, and municipal organizations, and welcomes organizations or individuals with perspectives representing these groups to submit applications for membership. SAFECOM ensures relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented as part of its membership and have opportunities to express their views for organizational consideration. Estimated Completion Date: March 30, 2018.

Enclosure III: Comments from the Department of Commerce



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Secretary of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

October 16, 2017

Mr. Mark Goldstein
Director, Physical Infrastructure
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Goldstein:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report titled *Emergency Communications: Overlap and Views on the Effectiveness of Organizations Promoting the Interoperability of Equipment* (GAO-17-787R). The report recommends an examination of the composition and functioning of the First Responder Network Authority's (FirstNet) Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered.

I accept your recommendation. FirstNet already has begun this effort as an outgrowth of GAO's recommendation in its report, *Public Safety Broadband Network: FirstNet Has Made Progress Establishing the Network, but Should Address Stakeholder Concerns and Workforce Planning* (GAO-17-569) (June 2017), which focused principally on concerns about tribal representation on the PSAC. FirstNet will continue to examine PSAC composition by soliciting feedback from stakeholders prior to the expiration of member terms as well as considering other means of ensuring adequate stakeholder representation.

The Department of Commerce appreciates GAO's thoughtful and thorough examination of these important issues. If you have any questions regarding this response, please contact Uzoma Onyeije, FirstNet, at (571) 665-6142.

Sincerely,


Wilbur Ross

Text of Enclosure III: Comments from the Department of Commerce

October 16,2017

Mr. Mark Goldstein

Director, Physical Infrastructure

U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW

Washington, DC 20548 Dear Mr. Goldstein:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report titled Emergency Communications: Overlap and Views on the Effectiveness of Organizations Promoting the Interoperability of Equipment (GAO-17 - 787R).

The report recommends an examination of the composition and functioning of the First Responder Network Authority's (FirstNet) Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) to determine whether all relevant stakeholder groups are adequately represented and their views adequately expressed and considered.

I accept your recommendation. FirstNet already has begun this effort as an outgrowth of GAO's recommendation in its report, Public Safety Broadband Network: FirstNet Has Made Progress Establishing the Network, but Should Address Stakeholder Concerns and Workforce Planning (GAO-17-569) (June 2017), which focused principally on concerns about tribal representation on the PSAC. FirstNet will continue to examine PSAC composition by soliciting feedback from stakeholders prior to the expiration of member terms as well as considering other means of ensuring adequate stakeholder representation.

The Department of Commerce appreciates GAO's thoughtful and thorough examination of these important issues. If you have any questions regarding this response, please contact Uzoma Onyeije, FirstNet, at (571) 665-6142.

Sincerely,

Wilbur Ross