

Publicsafety

Frequency speech

Safety officials demonstrate a new system that allows area departments to easily communicate.

By Chris Wiebe

BURBANK — It's not every day that "Tonight Show" host Jay Leno tries to order a pizza over a radio frequency reserved for emergency response calls.

But that's exactly what city and public safety officials from Burbank and Glendale were treated to Wednesday in a moment of levity during a serious demonstration of the Interagency Communications Interoperability System, or ICIS.

The system — which is used by Glendale, Burbank, Beverly Hills, Culver City, Montebello, Pomona and Bob Hope Airport — enables police and fire agencies, as well as some local government operations, to communicate across jurisdictional lines.

Seamless interaction is especially vital in emergencies, and attendees at the demonstration Wednesday listened as dispatchers in several cities simulated the initial response to a mock magnitude 5.6 earthquake in Burbank.

"We're going to take the opportunity to show what we've accomplished," said Glendale Fire Department Battalion Chief Don Wright, executive director of the Interagency Communications Interoperability System board.

The mock emergency was broadcast to attendees over a speaker system, as dispatchers coordinated responses to power blackouts, downed traffic signals and other impacts of the quake, drawing in officers from Beverly Hills, Montebello and Pomona via the interoperability radio to assist in handling the crisis.

Using the interoperability system, officers responding from Pomona to Burbank knew the location and nature of their calls as soon as they set out to respond, Wright said.

"In sharing the network, they can also share resources and be able to better coordinate the interaction of those resources," he said.

Leno's cameo from Burbank came at the end of the mock first-response dispatch.

But the system is not only useful for emergency situations — it also facilitates

smooth communication lines for other police work, such as pursuing a suspect into a different city.

“The last thing you want to do when you’re involved in a high-speed chase is worry about communications,” Glendale Police Chief Randy Adams said.

Police and fire officials at Bob Hope Airport recently signed on with the system and already used it to work with Burbank officers to catch a suspected car thief, said Ed Skvarnam, chief of police at Bob Hope Airport.

When airport police spotted a man who appeared to be breaking in to vehicles in an airport lot, airport officers talked with Burbank Police over the interoperability system to detain the suspect, he said.

“It’s a very good example of working smart and working efficiently,” he said.

Advancements in computer technology have provided the backbone to put the interoperability system into place, said Greg Simay, assistant general manager for Burbank Water and Power.

“A generation ago, we may not have had the technology to make this all possible,” he said. “But, thankfully, now we do.”

And the system creates efficient, convenient communication that one might expect from a cellphone, he added. But, unlike a cellphone network, the interoperability system does not overload in a crisis.

“This could save seconds and minutes, and in a life-and-death situation, that could mean the difference between saving someone’s life or not,” he said.

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