



**Homeland  
Security**

# Press Release

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## **DHS S&T ENHANCES INFORMATION SHARING FOR FIRST RESPONDERS**

PHILADELPHIA — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) today announced enhancements in first responder information sharing initiatives at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Technologies for Critical Incident Preparedness (TCIP) Conference and Expo in Philadelphia.

S&T Command, Control and Interoperability Division Director Dr. David Boyd announced the next phases of Virtual USA, an innovative information sharing initiative that helps federal, state, local and tribal first responders communicate during emergencies. Five states in the Pacific Northwest—Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington—will form the second Virtual USA regional information sharing pilot, while the six states currently participating in the existing Southeast Regional Operations Platform Pilot (SE ROPP)—Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia—will be joined by Georgia and Tennessee and enter into the second, operational phase.

“Virtual USA improves information sharing across jurisdictions and helps ensure collaboration among emergency management practitioners at all levels,” Boyd said. “The next phase will allow us to build upon lessons learned and operationalize a real-time state-to-state information-sharing capability—with the end goal of improving emergency response at the national level.”

S&T’s First Responder Technology Program also today conducted a technical demonstration of the First Responder Communities of Practice—an information sharing tool designed to help first responders collaborate on best practices in support of their respective homeland security missions—unveiled as part of a newly redesigned [Firstresponder.gov](http://Firstresponder.gov).

Communities of Practice allows its members—including active and retired first responders, emergency response professionals, and federal, tribal, state and local homeland security officials—to engage locally and nationally on critical homeland security programs, projects and initiatives in a protected environment.

Members build and participate in Communities that aggregate activity around a particular topic or mission, such as firefighters, emergency medical technicians and bomb squads; in order to share best practices and learn from others in their field. Each Community is equipped with a discussion board, wiki, documents folder, calendar, blog, RSS feeds and bookmarks.

In addition to Communities of Practice, the newly redesigned [Firstresponder.gov](https://www.firstresponder.gov) will have other new features to facilitate first responder engagement with DHS, including “Tell Us Your Story,” a forum to submit ideas to improve the site; “Success Stories,” an interactive map that highlights DHS-funded S&T initiatives by state; and a First Responder blog.

To request a Communities of Practice account, visit: <https://communities.firstresponder.gov>. The Communities are user-friendly; no technical expertise is required.

Virtual USA—developed in collaboration with the emergency response community and state and local governments across the nation—was announced in December as part of the White House Open Government Initiative and reflects a shared commitment to making government more efficient and fostering a culture of transparency, participation and collaboration. SE ROPP is the first-ever state-to-state information-sharing capability prototype.

To learn more about Virtual USA, please visit [www.firstresponder.gov/virtualusa](http://www.firstresponder.gov/virtualusa).

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