

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin holds annual State Inoperable Mobile Communication Exercise

Posted on Tuesday, Oct 18, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

JANESVILLE, Wis. – Communication between agencies during a disaster is one of the most critical components of an effective response. Earlier this month, representatives from multiple agencies worked together to test the connections that are needed to support an emergency response during Wisconsin's annual State Interoperable Mobile Communication (SIMCOM) exercise.

"SIMCOM brings together local responders, state responders, volunteer organizations and even federal assets," said Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) Administrator Greg Engle. "We can test communications and our procedures, allowing us to make sure our equipment works together. It's also an opportunity to practice responding together so that if we have a real incident, we'll be more successful, we'll be more prepared."

SIMCOM allows emergency responders, amateur radio operators, and other communications experts to move through the steps necessary to establish interoperable communications between agencies. For 2022, participants were staged at locations in Rock and Wood counties from Oct. 12-14. Those in attendance included about 150 participants representing state agencies, private sector partners, 27 Wisconsin county governments and eight other states.

"Communications is always one of our critical aspects during our operations and usually one of the first things we have a problem with," said Rock County Sheriff's Department Captain Curt Fell during an exercise briefing last week at the Rock County Fairgrounds. "We truly appreciate all of our partners being here."

Participants in SIMCOM were exercising the response to a mock disaster involving a large explosion and multiple injuries and deaths. Exercise activities included setting up a base of operations, establishing communication with other responding agencies, and troubleshooting issues that may occur during an actual response.

“The reasons we do this is to make sure all those folks with radios, with IT [information technology] equipment, with data and cellular connections are all able to work together,” said WEM Training and Exercise Supervisor Kevin Wernet. “It’s all about making sure responders in the field can talk when they need to.”

Among the agencies participating in this year’s SIMCOM exercise were members of Wisconsin Task Force 1, the state’s urban search and rescue team. The task force recently resumed operations after being inactive for a little over two years and was using SIMCOM as an opportunity to test out its equipment and connect with agencies they could assist someday.

“It’s important to make sure all of these systems work so that if there’s a flood, a swift water response, a structural collapse, a search that needs to be conducted, Task Force 1 can be supported and have the communications they need,” said John McManus, a task force leader.

County emergency management agencies also play a key role in interoperable communications, as they may be needed to assist neighboring communities during larger incidents and disasters. Among those participating in this year’s exercise were staff from Dane County Emergency Management.

“It’s all about bringing assets from across the state together to test our communications and our capabilities, so that in the event of an emergency we know we have the ability to communicate with each other and with others who are coming in,” said Rick Lange, a response equipment specialist with Dane County. “We don’t want to find out at the time of an emergency that there’s a problem.”

The location and scenario for SIMCOM changes with each year. A date and location for SIMCOM 2023 has not yet been announced.