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Office of Emergency Communications: Participates in Central States Communications Exercise

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MADISON, Wis. – During a disaster, personnel from multiple agencies are likely to be involved with the response. Many of those assisting agencies may be from outside of the area, making it critical that they can interface their communications systems with those already responding.

Wisconsin's Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) recently participated in a national exercise designed to promote interoperable communications between local, state, tribal, and federal levels of government. The Central States Communications Exercise was held Sept. 14-15 in the Quapaw Nation, which is located where Oklahoma, Missouri, and Kansas meet. Over 50 entities from nearly two dozen states were represented.

"Communication is an essential part of any disaster response," said Statewide Interoperability Coordinator Erik Viel. "By participating with partners from across the country in an exercise like this, OEC staff can develop the necessary relationships and technical skills to seamlessly work together when disaster strikes. The best time to get to know your fellow responders and their capabilities is before an incident happens."

As severe weather continues to increase in frequency and level of destruction, it is important that responders practice and hone their skills before they are needed under unpredictable conditions. The exercise provided an opportunity for public safety communications professionals to practice setting up, repairing and

maintaining interoperable communication pathways such as public safety radio, amateur radio, cellular services, and internet for first responders to use in disaster events.

“While Wisconsin does not have hurricanes like many of our Southern compatriots, we still have disasters that overwhelm local responders,” said Wisconsin Public Safety Broadband Manger Margaret Zieke, who served as a controller and evaluator during the exercise. “This type of networking and training brings experience with new technology and connections back to the state, so we are better prepared to assist local governments and other partners who are in need.”

The exercise also included a specialized agreement that expanded the ability of participants to get evaluated and approved for credentialing purposes. Such credentialing is often required for staff to join specialized teams, such as an incident management team. Typically, this process is limited to intrastate evaluations. However, participating agencies made a first of its kind agreement that allowed for evaluation between states, streamlining the review process for the exercise.

This Central States Communications Exercise was organized by the Central States Communication Association with support from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA).