



Secretary Napolitano Unveils "Virtual USA" Information-Sharing Initiative

Release Date: December 9, 2009

For Immediate Release
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Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano today officially launched Virtual USA, an innovative information-sharing initiative—developed in collaboration with the emergency response community and state and local governments across the nation—that helps federal, state, local and tribal first responders communicate during emergencies.

“Our first responders need interoperable tools to make accurate and timely decisions during emergencies,” said Secretary Napolitano. “Virtual USA makes it possible for new and existing technologies to work together seamlessly during disaster response and recovery and gives the public an opportunity to contribute information in real-time to support the efforts of police officers, firefighters and other emergency management officials.”

The announcement came as part of the White House Open Government Initiative and reflects President Obama and Secretary Napolitano’s shared commitment to making government more efficient and fostering a culture of transparency, participation and collaboration.

Virtual USA links disparate tools and technologies in order to share the location and status of critical assets and information—such as power and water lines, flood detectors, helicopter-capable landing sites, emergency vehicle and ambulance locations, weather and traffic conditions, evacuation routes, and school and government building floor plans—across federal, state, local and tribal governments.

Virtual USA:

- **Integrates Existing Frameworks and Investments:** Virtual USA utilizes current information-sharing platforms to permit new and existing technologies to seamlessly exchange information with one another.
- **Draws on Local Input:** Virtual USA is based on the needs of local and state first responders to manage data access within their own jurisdictions and to share information with relevant jurisdictions across the nation.
- **Employs a Comprehensive Approach:** Virtual USA is not limited to information exchanges between two agencies; instead, the initiative fosters dynamic information sharing among all federal, state, local and tribal practitioners.
- **Provides a Flexible, Accessible Platform:** Because Virtual USA uses open data standards and open source software, more states and localities can join this information exchange project.
- **Involves Everyone:** Virtual USA allows Americans in their own communities to contribute information—in real-time—to support the efforts of police, fire and emergency management officials during disasters and recovery efforts.

Developed by the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T), Virtual USA currently operates as a pilot in eight states—Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Virginia and Tennessee—with plans to incorporate additional states underway. In Virginia alone, Virtual USA has reduced response times to incidents involving hazardous materials by 70 percent.

For more information, visit www.dhs.gov.

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