Homeland
Security

MEMORANDUM   June 23, 2016

SUBJECT: Transition of NICS to Open Source and Operational Environments

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) First Responders Group (FRG) has announced the transition of the Next-Generation Incident Command System (NICS) to the open source community, and domestic and international response organizations.

Since 2010, DHS S&T led the funding of the development of NICS at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Lincoln Laboratory (MIT-LL). The aim was to develop a software tool to help responders organize, collaborate, and manage large-scale events. Through especially strong partnerships within the State of California, responder organizations across the U.S., and the State of Victoria in Australia, NICS software is now deployed as an operational tool in many first responder communities.

In 2014, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), which coordinates emergency response before, during and after emergencies across the State of Victoria in Australia, launched its information sharing environment, utilizing the NICS code. Since then, EMV has established a scalable, multi-jurisdictional platform to improve the information available before, during and after emergencies. This platform enables the community, emergency management agencies, partners, governments, and businesses throughout the State of Victoria to make better decisions regarding their safety.

The NICS vision was further advanced with the involvement of California, led by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), and numerous local fire, law enforcement, and emergency management agencies across California and the United States. In April 2016, Cal OES deployed the NICS software as an operational and tactical collaboration and situation awareness platform for California emergency responders—called Situation Awareness & Collaboration Tool (SCOUT) (www.caloes.ca.gov/scout).

Because of the success of these partnerships—and the advancements they have enabled—DHS S&T is transitioning the NICS software from a research and development effort, led by MIT-LL, to a DHS operational capability. As such, DHS is releasing the NICS capability as open source code to make it widely available to first responder and emergency management organizations across the U.S. and around the globe. DHS will manage the core NICS open source code and is in the process of transitioning the capability through 3 additional venues:

1) NICS source code is now available for any interested party and may be found on the U.S. Government's open source code repository site, GitHub. (https://github.com/1stResponder)
2) Another transition partner to implement NICS is the Worldwide Incident Command Services Corporation, Inc., and a California non-profit public benefit corporation, and has implemented the NICS code as RAVEN beginning in June 2016. (www.ravenwics.org)
3) For Homeland Security users, Fall 2016 the NICS capability will be hosted within the DHS Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) as part of the Geospatial Information Infrastructure. (https://gii.dhs.gov)

Moving forward, these domestic and international partnerships will continue collaboration on the NICS open source code. DHS, EMV, and Cal OES will establish the eCOMPAS oversight body to address operational needs, identify R&D gaps, and enable cost efficiencies to enhance future information sharing capabilities.

Transitioning NICS from a R&D project to an operational capability has been a complicated and heavy workload. It's initial and continued success is due only to the enduring support, vision, and leadership of many across the United States and Australia.