

ID: 10-E-22VI

2010 Innovations Awards Application

State: United States Virgin Islands

Assign Program Category: Public Safety

1. **Program Name:** "Modernization of the 911 Emergency Communications System – A Comprehensive, Integrated and Collaborative Approach"
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9. **Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.**

The VI government overhauled an outdated, un-repairable and flawed 911 emergency system, dramatically improving public safety for citizens and visitors and enhancing protection for first responders.

Through an unprecedented collaboration of multiple government agencies, the Virgin Islands government addressed four major components to accomplish this mission: development of modernized call centers staffed with trained, professional emergency communications center operators; expansion of the tower/antenna grid for increased coverage across hilly terrains, upgrading the radio equipment and network to improve communications; and championing legislation to realign the 911 emergency communications system under a unified response agency.

10. **How long has this program been operational?**

Governor John P. de Jongh Jr. ordered an assessment of the 911 system in late 2007 and the reorganization and bulk of the modernization of 911 operations was implemented by October 2009.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

The U.S. Virgin Islands, a US territory, is home to 120,000 residents and a popular destination for millions of tourists each year, and before 2009, all were in jeopardy of falling victim to an unreliable, antiquated 911 emergency communications system that failed, even, to protect first responders whose job it is to keep the public safe.

When Gov. de Jongh took office in January 2007 the 911 emergency communications system was already more than 20 years old. Established in the 1980s and housed physically and organizationally within the VI Police Department, the system was outmoded, unsecure, and un-repairable. This previous system, rampant with failures and flaws, only dispatched police emergencies and offered mediocre geographic coverage and communications capabilities for first responders.

The 911 system was so plagued with inefficiencies and technological challenges that too often it resulted in dropped or abandoned calls — the worst possible response for an emergency call center. Under this mode of operation, dispatchers wrote the details of emergencies on pieces of paper and then entered the information into the computer system later — which ranged from minutes to hours. Improper time stamping had become commonplace and ultimately cast shadows of doubt on evidence presented by prosecutors during legal proceedings.

Also, with the police-centric 911 emergency communications system, when dispatchers received calls for other emergencies, such as fire or medical, they would record the information, end the call, reach the appropriate first responder agency and pass along the information. This was the extent of the police dispatcher's assistance to other first responder agencies.

To further exacerbate the problem, only one frequency was available for first responders. During an emergency, the radio system could be used by only one agency — Virgin Islands Police Department, VI Fire Service or Emergency Medical Services.

A 2008 assessment of the system found that standard operating procedures were almost non-existent, and that 911 dispatchers had failed to consistently apply proper protocols in handling emergency calls. These inadequacies led to delays in response to emergencies and — due to lack of indefensible data — hindered the prosecution of crimes.

The assessment also found that poor radio equipment and an inadequate geographic coverage network due to lack of accessible towers, made actual communication —

talking, hearing and being understood – difficult and frustrating. This left first responders sometimes heading blindly into emergency situations, putting themselves in imminent danger.

Lack of interoperability among agencies, limited frequencies and dead spots, all of these failings prevented first responders from performing their jobs efficiently and left them and the public at large, vulnerable.

The 911 operation showed obvious signs of years of serious neglect by Police Department officials, with noticeable lack of training and career advancement for dispatchers and little upgrades in the 911 equipment. All of this contributed to dispatchers' poor performance including dropping emergency calls, unprofessional attitudes, attendance problems, or placing callers on hold with no follow up.

The deficiencies of the 911 emergency communications system were illuminated in a scathing investigative report released by the Virgin Islands Daily News, a local newspaper, in December 2006. The investigative report gave a detailed account of how the territory's emergency dispatch equipment and personnel failures proved fatal in June of 2005.

In the early morning hours of June 15, 2005, a shooting victim lay bleeding to death in the street while a series of 911 technological malfunctions and grave human errors produced a 33-minute delay in response. The victim died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital from shock due to loss of blood. After the report was released, numerous residents called the newspaper's reporters to give shocking details of their experiences with the 911 system and even the first responders themselves voiced complaints. The public's responses were also published in local media.

Similar to the 911 emergency communications system, the territory's overall emergency management system needed major revamping. Despite the devastating and crippling economic effects of Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and Hurricane Marilyn in 1995, in more than a decade, the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) had made only modest advancements in creating a robust emergency management system with capacity to respond to complex, large-scale incidents, including epidemics and chemical spills. The existing emergency management system lacked a strategic approach to preparedness, response, and recovery; needed to establish priorities and guidelines on allocation of grant funds; and needed to maximize the use grant funds.

Moreover, the organization was non-compliant with the National Incident Management System (NIMS), developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as a result of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center.

VITEMA was also embedded two levels down under the Office of the Adjutant General, which was out of step with the national trend to remove emergency management from military oversight, allowing adjutants general to focus solely on the efficient use of National Guard resources to fulfill federal, state and community missions.

12. Describe specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

January 2007 – Gov. de Jongh takes office and commits to improving emergency response to disasters and to overhauling the 911 system, ensuring that emergency operators and first responders have adequate resources to perform the vital function of keeping the public safe.

January 2007 - Gov. de Jongh requests James Lee Witt Associates to assist VITEMA in conducting an analysis of the emergency preparedness, response, and recovery in the territory. The analysis focused on three critical areas: state of preparedness for emergencies/disasters, gaps in the emergency management system, and recommendation for reorganizing public safety functions.

October 2007 – September 2008 – Gov. de Jongh orders an evaluation of the territory's 911 emergency system needs. VI government retains IBM to assess the territory's current system, needs and problems. IBM's assessment determines significant changes are needed in three areas – new call centers with modernized equipment, radio trunking to ensure communications, and a tower/communications backbone.

July 2008 – Gov. de Jongh appoints Mark A. Walters, a seasoned FEMA manager and a native Virgin Islander to the post of VITEMA Director. Mr. Walters is on loan from FEMA as an Intergovernmental Personnel Act employee and is tasked to work as part of an executive team to reorganize an inefficient emergency management system and to overhaul an inefficient 911 emergency communications system.

September 2008 – VI government selects IBM to assist in rebuilding the territory's 911 emergency communications system. The new system will include modernized call centers to support the 911 system and proper training programs for 911 emergency communications center operators, first responders, IT support personnel and agency leadership. IBM agrees to provide technical design and installation, project management and consulting and testing services for the systems located in St. Thomas and St. Croix.

November 2008 – VI government purchases a building to house the new VITEMA headquarters on St. Thomas.

December 2008 – VITEMA re-energizes the dormant Virgin Islands Emergency Management Council, comprising heads of departments and agencies, to renew the development of policies in emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

December 2008 – VITEMA Director announces the completed reorganization of the agency and its compliance with NIMS.

December 2008 – September 2009 – The Virgin Islands government conducts major procurement activities, bringing equipment, furniture, and computer hardware and software to the Virgin Islands and commenced installation and testing of the call center technology.

January 2009 – Gov. de Jongh appoints two working groups to manage the overhaul of the 911 system – the 911 Executive Steering Committee and the Enhanced 911 Task Force. The project was governed by the Executive Steering Committee which met bi-weekly, and was comprised of all of the pertinent Cabinet members and department heads. The committee was chaired by the Governor’s Chief of Staff, which ensured full participation and allowed officials to quickly resolve issues. The 911 Task Force was comprised of representatives of the VI Police Department, VI Fire Service, EMS, VITEMA, the Department of Property and Procurement, and the Bureau of Information Technology (BIT). The task force addressed the operations of the program.

January 2009 – Gov. de Jongh submits to the 28th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, legislation to remove VITEMA from under the auspices of the VI Office of the Adjutant General and to elevate it to a stand-alone, Cabinet-level agency. The measure also seeks to give VITEMA jurisdiction over the 911 emergency communications system, homeland security and the Office of Management and Budget’s Public Assistance Unit. The placement of 911 under VITEMA is expected to improve dispatchers’ on-the-job performance and professionalism through: re-setting the work environment, improving the pay grades; opportunities for advancement, and offering better leadership. The measure will transform 911 from a police-centric operation to an all-hazard emergency communications system.

January 2009 – Lease negotiations for the 911 emergency communications center on St. Croix is completed and renovations and retrofitting begins.

February 2009 – The 911 Executive Steering Committee appears before the V.I. Senate’s Committee on Budget and Appropriations to discuss overhaul of the 911 emergency management system.

March to June 2009 – With the new Emergency Communications Centers on St. Thomas and St. Croix set to go live by the end of September 2009, Gov. de Jongh announces, nationwide, employment opportunities as emergency communications center operators, emergency communications center supervisors and emergency communications center managers. New positions and job descriptions and salaries were upgraded by 38 percent. The Division of Personnel worked with the project consultant to develop the new positions based on current industry standards. Positions were upgraded to reflect more complex duties and responsibilities and the requirement of gaining and maintaining various training and certifications.

March 2009 – Construction of new VITEMA facility begins on St. Thomas.

April 2009 – The 911 Task Force holds a series of town hall meetings territory-wide to inform the public about capabilities and requirements of the new 911 emergency communications system.

May 2009 – The 911 Task Force appears before the VI Senate's Committee on Public Safety, Homeland Security and Justice to discuss the implementation of the new 911 emergency communications system.

May 12, 2009 – The VI Legislature's Committee on Financial Services, Infrastructure and Consumer Affairs approves and forwards legislation to reorganize VITEMA to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary. The legislation clears its first hurdle.

May 20, 2009 – Measure to reorganize VITEMA and give it jurisdiction over 911 operations, homeland security and public assistance is approved by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, and heads to the full body for a final vote.

June 2009 – Legislation to reorganize VITEMA passes the full Senate and is forwarded to Gov. de Jongh for signature.

June 2009 – New emergency call center operators who have successfully passed the required training and certifications and who will staff the new 911 emergency communications center on St. Croix, are recognized in a ceremony held at Government House.

July 2, 2009 – Gov. de Jongh enacts new legislation to establish VITEMA as an independent Cabinet-level agency with jurisdiction of the 911 emergency communications system, homeland security and the public assistance unit.

July 2, 2009 – Gov. de Jongh nominates Mark Walters to be the first director of the newly-reorganized VITEMA.

July 2009 – In the St. Croix district, the first of two modernized 911 Emergency Communications Centers goes live. Gov. de Jongh and key Cabinet officials conduct a walk-thru of the facility. Media also tours center.

September 2009 – New emergency call center operators, who have successfully passed the required training and certifications and who will staff the new 911 emergency communications center on St. Thomas, are recognized in a ceremony held at Government House.

October 2009 – Act 7074 becomes effective and VITEMA is officially an independent, Cabinet-level agency with jurisdiction over the 911 emergency communications system, homeland security and public assistance.

October 2009 – The second of two modernized 911 Emergency Communications Centers goes live in St. Thomas district, which also serves the sister islands of St. John and Water Island. Gov. de Jongh, key Cabinet officials and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region II officials tour the facility. Various media covers the event.

November 2009 – Officials from the governments of the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico formalize an agreement that establishes the protocol for re-routing 911 cell phone calls originating from the territory but picked up by Puerto Rico's emergency system. The issue is caused by the wireless carriers' lack of cell towers to blanket the territory. The Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico protocol agreement sets guidelines for Puerto Rico dispatchers to manage wireless 911 emergency calls originating from the Virgin Islands and procedures to transfer them back to the territory's Emergency Communications Centers on St. Thomas or St. Croix, including staying on the line until a VI emergency communications center operator answers the re-routed call.

January 2010 – VITEMA searches for additional operators to fully staff the two communication centers.

February 2010 – Construction of the new VITEMA headquarters completed. Staff moves into the new facility which also houses the new 911 Emergency Communications Center, Emergency Operations Center a Fusion Center, a Secure Compartmentalized Information Room and a male/female dormitory.

February 2010 – VITEMA Director appears before the Senate Committee on Public Safety, Homeland Security and Justice to discuss the territory's level of preparedness, the modernization of the 911 emergency communications center system and the transformation of the emergency management system.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

Attempts by previous administrations to address the multitude of problems that plagued the police-centric 911 system were piecemeal and fell short.

Gov. de Jongh instead looked at the broader spectrum of an emergency management system, addressing the needs of not only the public's safety, but first responders' and operators' as well. He addressed the issues in innovative and comprehensive ways.

From the onset, the governor adjusted the lack of funding for and attention to the 911 system by transferring the operations from under the Police Department to a unified and integrated emergency response organization. This required legislation to authorize the reorganization of the government. This occurred through the diligent political efforts of the executive branch while the technical project proceeded. The overall project included three major and interdependent components — developing new emergency response call centers, expanding the tower/antenna grid and an upgrading the radio transmission network and equipment.

Gov. de Jongh established an Executive Steering Committee of all principally-involved Cabinet members and department heads, to oversee the project. The committee met bi-weekly to address and quickly resolve problems as they arose. This committee was chaired by the Governor's Chief of Staff – a crucial factor in successful cross-department cooperation.

Multiple government agencies were sitting across the table from each other and collaborating and resolving problems to ensure the success of a project of this realm. For instance, the Police Department offered police officers to fill-in while emergency operators received intensive training, and the Health Department offered to train operators in basic medical emergency skills to cut project costs. This contributed significantly to the overall success of the project.

The 911 project serves as a positive model of multi-agency collaboration where substantial invested resources are at stake.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about the specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

The program's start-up cost is estimated at approximately \$24.3 million – from the initial assessments to finding facilities to house the 911 communications centers and

purchasing modernized equipment. A general breakdown of expenditures is as follows:

- \$6.9 million to purchase and redesign/retrofit the new VITEMA Headquarters facility.
- \$17.4 million to build and equip two new 911 emergency communications center. A breakdown of the \$17.4 million is as follows:
 - o \$6.5 million for professional services to design communications center and train 911 staff.
 - o \$3.8 million for communications center equipment.
 - o \$3.5 million for radio and trunking equipment.
 - o \$3 million for tower/communications backbone.
 - o \$210,556 to furnish centers.
 - o \$443,598 for St. Croix communications center build-out. *(Build-out cost for the St. Thomas center is included in the \$6.9 million for the purchase, redesign and retrofit of VITEMA's new headquarters where the new communications center is housed.)*

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

The operational costs were built into start-up funding for this project.

16. How is the program funded?

The 911 modernization program was funded through a combination of the local government's General Fund, VI Public Finance Authority funds from bond issuances and federal funding.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, indicate the citation number?

Yes, legislation was required to reorganize VITEMA as a stand-alone Cabinet-level agency with jurisdiction over the 911 system, homeland security and the Office of Management and Budget's Public Assistance Unit. Act 7074, the Emergency Management Act of 2009, was enacted in July 2009 and the reorganization officially took effect in October of 2009.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

- *“Critical,”* an innovative software tool to pre-screen candidates for the new 911 emergency communications center operator jobs. Core skills tested included typing speed and accuracy, listening, critical decision-making, map reading, reading comprehension, and multi-tasking.
- Avaya IP Telephony System including Avaya Call Manager call management software.
- PlantCML Sentinel ECS-1000 Communications Manager including integrated ANI/ALI (Automated Number / Location Identification) capability.
- PLantCML Sentinel CM integrated with Avaya PBX.
- CTS America SMARTCAD – Computer Aided Dispatch software solution integrated with PlantCML ANI/ALI data feed.
- NICE Digital Voice Logger – providing digital voice recording for telephone and radio dispatch communications.
- Synoptics Timing System – providing accurate time of day clocking to all system components.
- IBM x-Series Servers hosting SMARTCAD and NICE Voice Logger.
- IBM x-Series Storage Controller for automated server data backups and voice logs.
- CISCO 4705 Catalyst Switches – providing VoIP to Avaya Handsets and LAN IP Communications to Call Center Desktop Computers.
- CISCO 5510 Adaptive Security Appliance (Firewall).
- Radio & Trunking System - radio trunking equipment, Radio Mux, encryption board, encryption cards, radios, scramblers.
- Microwave & Tower Systems - microwave link equipment, repeaters, tower equipment with accessory.
- Ergonomic furniture to meet the needs of personnel on 12-hour shifts. Furniture includes ergonomic desks and chairs and monitors and keyboards that adjust for sitting or standing comfortably.

- 19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.**

While the integration of emergency management and 911 operations has been accomplished in some states, to the best of our knowledge, implementing this combined system for four islands – with built-in redundancies for continuous operation – may have originated in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The territory's two emergency communications centers, although separated by water, are fully-capable of backing each other up in the event one goes down. Each center can manage the others' overflow, if necessary.

We faced numerous challenges in ensuring communications across the two districts, not only because of the separation by water, but also due the territory's hilly terrain.

Project managers also expended a tremendous amount of time and energy coordinating infrastructure upgrades with land-based and wireless phone carriers. The infrastructure upgrades were necessary so that emergency communications center operators would be able to access critical information such as caller identification. Those carriers included AT&T, Sprint and local, land-based carrier Innovative Telephone Co. Unlike jurisdictions across the US mainland where carriers already provide the support to implement communications center, carriers in the U.S. Virgin Islands did not.

Project managers for this program are Paul Arnold Jr., Bureau of Information Technology Director, 340-244-6868, paul.arnoldjr@bit.vi.gov and Mark Walters, VITEMA Director, 202-367-5320, mark.walters@vitema.vi.gov.

- 20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?**

Gov. de Jongh visited Washington D.C.'s emergency communications center and used his observations there as a point of reference to develop the territory's modernized 911 emergency communications system.

- 21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?**

The program has been fully implemented and VITEMA, in collaboration with first responder agencies and the Bureau of Information Technology, are now looking ahead to future enhancements. For example, the 911 emergency communications system is designed for Reverse 911 capability to facilitate tsunami and other types of warnings to the public.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

With the expansion of capabilities of this new 911 system, the Virgin Islands has departed from what was an ineffective police-centric system, to one that provides prompt and efficient service to citizens and visitors and a broad range of support for first responders.

In the event of an emergency, a 911 emergency communications center operator will promptly and professionally answer their call, dispatch first responders and depending on the emergency, remain on the line until the first responder reaches the scene and takes control.

Within the first 24 hours of operation of the new 911 Emergency Communications Center in the St. Croix district, a 911 operator assisted a resident in successfully giving birth to a new baby at home using pre-medical assistance protocol script. The operator did this while dispatching Emergency Medical Services and remained on the line until the first responder arrived.

Previously, a dispatcher would have ended the emergency call and contacted the hospital's medical dispatch team, losing valuable or even lifesaving seconds or minutes in responding.

Today, emergency communications center operators are more qualified and trained than ever before.

The territory's new cadre of emergency operators have passed medical certification and obtained First Responder training, Emergency Medical Services Modified Basic training, HAZMAT training and National Crime Information Center certification. Their training included classes such as first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, hazardous materials, weapons of mass destruction and basic conversational Spanish. They also received training on crisis counseling, effective verbal communication and customer service. Continuous training emphasizes customer service, not only with callers, but with first responders as well.

Our operators also are qualified and certified in Priority Dispatch for Medical, Fire and Police. They manage an average of more than 20,000 calls per district, per month, for various emergencies.

Also, all 911 phone calls and radio transmission to first responders are digitally-recorded and archived and recordings have already been used to help prosecute criminal cases.

Besides raising the level of qualification and training of emergency operators, significant improvements have been made in geographic coverage and radio communications for first responders.

As a result of this comprehensive transformation, geographic coverage has improved from approximately 40 percent to over 60 percent, and geographic coverage is expected to continue to grow significantly as real estate and construction expands.

For the first time, police, fire, Rescue, Emergency Medical Services and other first responders can communicate on the same radio frequency, controlled by a 911 operator, and understand each other. First responders have more reliable communications with emergency response staff, increasing public safety.

This new system is also poised to transition to new federal standards for digital radio communications to be used by federal, state and local public safety agencies. This standard will allow our first responders to communicate with mutual aid response teams in emergencies.

In addition to the new radio trunking system, a microwave radio network provides inter-island connectivity enabling communications between agencies, between districts, and between islands — all on one network.

Other future enhancements to the radio system include increased security against public monitoring and interoperability between agencies through the use of call groups, which permits agencies to communicate privately internally or externally with other agencies. Also for the first time, a secure, encrypted frequency for 911 prohibiting the criminal element eavesdropping on police operations.

Regarding the overall emergency management system, Gov. de Jongh signed into law the Emergency Management Act of 2009, Act 7074, reorganizing VITEMA as an independent Cabinet-level agency and established clear lines of authority for emergency management in the territory, falling in line with trends seen across the United States since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. The legislation also placed under the VITEMA's jurisdiction, the 911 emergency communications center and territorial emergency communications, homeland security and the public assistance program.

With the agency's reorganization, VITEMA became NIMS-compliant. Its system mirrors the template developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to guide departments and agencies at all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations,

and the private sector on how to work seamlessly to manage all types of incidents, in order to reduce the loss of life and property and harm to the environment.

This new holistic integrated emergency management system means that response and recovery efforts can be coordinated seamlessly for any type of incident or disaster. The new and improved emergency management system has already been tested through several storms and incidents – including bomb scares and major accidents – and has worked.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

Since the implementation of the program, the VI government has strengthened its ties with neighboring islands of Puerto Rico and the British Virgin Islands.

During the assessment of the 911 system, it was discovered that some cell phone calls that are made on the west ends of St. Thomas and St. Croix are routed through Puerto Rico. This is due to the lack of cell sites available to the cell phone carriers. The assessment also revealed that one of the carrier's systems was actually programmed to send all calls – including 911 calls – to Puerto Rico for processing.

Until carriers install additional cell sites, the Virgin Islands government was compelled to find an interim solution to address this problem. In October of 2008, VITEMA's director and members of his operational staff traveled to Puerto Rico to meet with the 911 call center manager and his team. The outcome of this meeting was a protocol agreement between the governments of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

The Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico protocol agreement sets guidelines for Puerto Rico dispatchers to manage wireless 911 emergency calls originating from the Virgin Islands and procedures to transfer them back to the territory's Emergency Communications Centers on St. Thomas or St. Croix, including staying on the line until a VI emergency operator answers the re-routed call.

The contact numbers for the Virgin Islands' emergency communications centers were added to Puerto Rico's computer-aided dispatch, a computerized system from which dispatchers route all their calls.

The new protocol was tested several times and worked.

The VI government is in the process of negotiating a similar agreement with the British Virgin Islands (BVI). Due to the BVI's proximity to St. Thomas, 911 calls originating there

often reach St. Thomas district's 911 Emergency Communications Center, and vice versa.

At another level, the University of the Virgin Islands will also contribute to the project. The university is leading a multi-year project to implement a GIS – Geographic Information System – to provide a clearinghouse for improving the information available on locations in the territory. Currently, most of the territory's streets are un-named and signs depicting plot numbers which are rarely posted on homes. The completed project will drastically improve the ability of 911 operators and first responders to quickly pinpoint the location of an emergency.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

One of the biggest challenges was transitioning dispatchers under the previous 911 system to the new one.

Operators under the old system were members of a police union. This became problematic as union officials sought to extend their collective bargaining representation to the new emergency management authority, in opposition to the government's desire.

New job descriptions, pay grades, skill requirements and training all had to be addressed in the course of making the transition. Operators under the old system had none of the required skill sets and the transition required assumption of new responsibilities, training and certification. Training had to be tailored for those who came over to the system, which taxed limited instruction time.

During the course of the transition, operators under the old system threatened to walk out over training and testing requirements, almost seriously hampering the project schedule. The Office of Collective Bargaining worked collaboratively with the participating government departments to avert the threat and resolve these issues.

Another challenge was that the VI government had to acquire sites to increase radio coverage, which proved to be a time-consuming process.

Thirteen tower sites across St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John are required to provide almost 100 percent geographic coverage, which is critical to the safety of citizens as well as first responders. Several of these sites were new and required negotiated property leases, ground preparation and security, and the construction of towers and/or antennas.



THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE

Charlotte Amalie, V.I. 00802
340-774-0001

February 26, 2010

Nancy J. Vickers
CSG 2010 Innovations Awards
The Council of State Governments
2760 Research Park Drive
P.O. Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-1910

Dear Ms. Vickers:

It is my profound honor to submit, on behalf of the Government of the Virgin Islands, an application for the Council of State Government's 2010 Innovations Awards program. The Innovations Awards program has been a proven platform and effective resource for state leaders to exchange and encourage transformative ideas and practices.

We hope you glean from the pages of this application how the dedicated and committed executive leadership of the Virgin Islands Government transformed an ailing and antiquated emergency response system into a state-of-the-art system of which our citizens can be proud.

Through countless hours of collaborative meetings and Herculean efforts to overcome major obstacles, our officials succeeded in improving the quality of life for the citizens of the United States Virgin Islands and enhancing the protection of millions of tourists who visit annually to experience our warm climate, beaches and unmatched Caribbean hospitality. This initiative has also given our first responders, the men and women we entrust to protect and keep us safe, the tools they need to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively.

Again, we thank you for this opportunity to highlight this endeavor which has given us great pride and appreciate your consideration of our application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John P. de Jongh, Jr.", written over a circular embossed seal.

John P. de Jongh, Jr.
Governor