SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH IWCE SPEAKERS

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Conference: March 16-19, 2026
Exhibits: March 18-19, 2026
West Hall, Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, NV

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | BRANDON ABLEY

Chief Technology Officer, NENA

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

It may sound odd, but the most important thing that affected my career was when I was mugged as a food delivery driver at age 19. I was studying music theory at the time, had dim career prospects, and needed the money. Of course, I quit that job, and it led to another job servicing radios for the National Park Service, which led to my interest in engineering and public safety communications. Had that crime never happened, I might never have discovered an important and rewarding career in public safety technology.

Q: What are the most significant technological advancements you've seen in emergency communications over the past few years, and how have they impacted first responders?

One of the most important developments has been that U.S. regulatory bodies—primarily the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)—have embraced standards-based Next Generation 9-1-1 technologies. We now have FCC rules requiring 9-1-1 authorities and originating service providers to migrate to NG9-1-1 under a fair and commonly understood regulatory framework. ***We have also seen massive improvements in caller location driven by regulatory requirements, including the ability to locate a caller in three dimensions inside a multistory building.*** As these technologies are being implemented, we are seeing better caller location, more data provided to 9-1-1 public safety answering points (PSAPs), and better interoperability between disparate 9-1-1 systems. All of these changes are improving the speed and accuracy of emergency response, which translates directly into saving lives.

Q: How is NENA addressing challenges related to Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) implementation, and what advice would you give to agencies navigating this transition?

NENA is the standards development organization for 9-1-1 and NG9-1-1 operations and technology for North America, and as such, we are always working to advance NG9-1-1. NENA also has played a critical role in the development of federal rules that facilitate the transition to NG9-1-1. We provide expert training on NG9-1-1 technologies and produce many informational and guidance documents about how to manage the transition and understand our standards. The best advice I could give to 9-1-1 authorities that are transitioning to NG9-1-1 is to have experts that really understand the standards and technology as well as the regulations. This is a critical time for NG9-1-1 implementation.

Q: What role do emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and IoT, play in enhancing emergency response systems?

Artificial intelligence (AI) offers exciting possibilities in 9-1-1. But it is only one tool in the toolbox and will never fully replace the role of humans at the heart of 9-1-1. We see AI used in 9-1-1 for many novel tasks, such as call triage, foreign language detection and translation, transcription and recordkeeping, and quality assurance assessments. The IoT environment provides an interesting challenge because many devices like alarms and sensors are technically capable of contacting emergency services without placing a phone call, starting a text session, or having any human interaction. It is critically important that the 9-1-1 telecommunicator answering a call understands how the call was placed, and thus, NENA is working on keeping pace with the market and providing guidance for training and operations to handle IoT calls. The market is not quite ready for this type of call, but it is coming and will introduce operational challenges once implemented.

Q: What are the biggest obstacles facing the emergency communications industry today, and how can they be overcome?

The biggest obstacle to NG9-1-1 implementation is funding. Public safety agencies want to make the transition, and carriers are required by the FCC to send NG9-1-1 calls to NG9-1-1 systems upon receiving valid requests from 9-1-1 authorities. However, most local governments do not have the resources to maintain both a Legacy 9-1-1 system and implement NG9-1-1 at the same time. That's why for the health and safety of all Americans, Congress needs to complete the job of providing enough funding to speed the deployment of NG9-1-1 across the United States.

Q: Looking ahead, what innovations or trends do you foresee shaping the future of emergency communications and public safety?

AI has the potential to be a major force multiplier for first responders. NENA has already seen valuable implementations of AI in 9-1-1 centers, and we are excited to see what the future holds. And while AI can never replace the role of humans in 9-1-1, it is part of the solution to staffing challenges because it can help 9-1-1 telecommunicators handle more calls with greater efficiency and accuracy and with less mental stress. I think AI tools are extremely promising in this regard.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

I have two sessions at IWCE. One will discuss an NTIA-led study that NENA contributed to on the use of AI in 9-1-1. This is a very hot topic right now, and I look forward to sharing NENA's perspectives and discussing NTIA's findings with my colleagues. My second session is on a DHS-sponsored project to develop an NG9-1-1 conformance and interoperability testing laboratory to certify NG9-1-1 products as compliant with the NENA standards. I have worked closely with DHS and their partners on this project as the person responsible for directing NG9-1-1 standards development in North America. I think this is an exciting subject that both NG9-1-1 solution providers and 9-1-1 authorities need to know a lot more about.

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | BRANDON ABLEY

Chief Technology Officer, NENA

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I have attended IWCE almost every year for two decades. The agenda is always full of valuable content. In recent years, IWCE has had more subject matter on 9-1-1, which I really appreciate. I am excited to learn more about what other experts in my industry have to say, and to see new technology solutions on the show floor.

IWCE SESSIONS

Artificial Intelligence Integration in 911 Centers

Date: Wednesday, March 18
Time: 3:10 pm - 4:10 pm
Track: Government
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

NG911 Conformance & Interoperability: Testing Status and Lessons Learned

Date: Tuesday, March 17
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

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Las Vegas Convention Center

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | BRAD STODDARD

Director/SWIC,
State of Michigan

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

A few items regarding my career journey was initiated in the Space and Defense sector where I honed my skills on technology and scenarios that were not for conversation away from the office. That type of work environment set in motion a passion for solutions that support our first responders in every facet that they face day-to-day. I learned from seasoned engineers and staff that taught me key skills in leadership, politics, and perseverance, even on the toughest days.I also coached travel basketball for girls and boys for a decade and had the opportunity to pass on key skills of teamwork, sportsmanship, listening and caring for one another, even if they may have been on different teams. I also was awarded the Legion of Merit from the Michigan National Guard. I also was a recipient as the most influential person in land mobile radio by Mission Critical Communications. I'm still just a regular guy.

Q: What are some of the most significant challenges faced during the implementation of P25 systems, and how were they overcome?

There are number of challenges that can be encountered in the process of implementing P25 standards-based systems. Some of the those may be qualified as governance challenges, siting challenges (i.e., building towers), financial challenges, technology (backhaul) and even sometimes politics can show its problematic head during these efforts. These are all overcome in the same manner, people talking to one another. It's easy to point fingers and identify blame, but it takes the best leadership to collaborate and find pathways to solutions that still ensure the objectives of the system buildout is still achieved. In the early days of P25 there were fewer vendors that provided solutions from the architecture to the radios and now there are many vendors in that space providing numerous options for radios that will operate on any of the p25 systems.
Additionally, there was not a "playbook" for building these systems, and deriving procedures and policies were based on prior legacy systems , so a few of us had to embark in the efforts of documenting these early systems, the processes, procedures, and policies that would govern these systems. Now through many different communities we share that information out to others to help them get a jump on some of those challenges and lessons learned that earlier systems had faced.

Q: Can you share a specific case study where a P25 system made a measurable difference in a public safety operation?

There are countless examples all around the nation where the P25 systems were the only communication tool operating for the end users. I recall examples where natural disasters destroyed other communication networks and the only solution operating was the P25 land mobile radios systems. This has occurred during hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, ice storms, and blackouts. Most recently in Michigan where a catastrophic ice storm stalled over northern lower Michigan knocking out commercial carriers, internet providers, and other traditional communications solutions, the only communications tool used by first responders, public safety, hospitals, emergency managers, local and state government and utilities was Michigan's statewide P25 land mobile radio solution, known as Michigan's Public Safety Communications System (MPSCS). Even when carriers were reporting little impacts, we were well aware of the widespread communications gaps for anyone that was not operating on the P25 system.

Q: How do P25 systems ensure interoperability across different agencies and jurisdictions?

There are multiple ways to approach this from the standards process ensuring that radios made by manufacturers adhere to common standards and will operate on different manufacturers P25 systems is the basis for the success of interoperability. That then transitions to a governance model by the government entity responsible for operating the P25 systems. There are robust approaches to ensure public safety in communities, adjoining communities or part of mutual aid responses have access to the same talkgroups enabling that simple capability of like disciplines or different disciplines to communicate effectively day-to-day or during larger events in both planned and unplanned scenarios. Not to just skim over the standards, but that is a very robust process that ensures the users requirements are vetted and then added to the standards that all the manufacturers will build to. As P25 has evolved over the past 35 plus years, so have the standards ensuring that as users needs of the technologies evolve so will the technology as well.

Q: What are the key factors to consider when planning and deploying a P25 communication system?

The users. It's one thing to plan for the number of towers, what kind of backhaul and identify the staff to support this new system, but the success of the system will be modeled by the users of the system. Having a solid governance process in place that focuses heavily on promoting interoperability between users. This transcends from the 911 centers to the first responders on the street. When you can plan accordingly and effectively around the users of the system, the technology solutions and coverage become less problematic as eth users know what is needed, where and how to utilize the power of shared p25 systems.

Q: How do you see P25 systems evolving in the future to meet the changing needs of public safety communications?

P25 LMR has proved itself for almost 100 years, so the evolution has continued to occur based on the growing needs of the community of users. Location tracking embedded in the radio is a need across the nation, it's one thing to hear the users voice over the radio, but its another to know where they are. So, tools and standards to make that a baseline in the radio in lieu of a paid option is a key shift.

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | BRAD STODDARD

Director/SWIC
State of Michigan

Others are security controls on these networks as they continue to evolve and include more IT components, we need to make sure they are protected from threats. Future scenarios may make radios that have both the P25 portion of a radio and an LTE portion where space satellite coverage may address remote terrestrial needs where towers can't or are unable to be constructed, such examples might be in remote public safety communities on the fringe of the P25 networks.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

Knowledge! We recently celebrated our 30th year of having a statewide P25 system and with that came years of experience in growth, collaboration, and dismissing politics that were affecting adoption around the State. We are starting our third generation of this network and sharing with the audience how the p25 standards process, basic communication and outreach with our user community, and planning accordingly as we evolve these large customer operated and managed systems.

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I always look forward to the networking at IWCE. The conference brings together the best and the brightest in this space and attending the sessions, workshops and the vendor floor provide abundant opportunities to expand your network of colleagues and knowledge of the today and the tomorrow of technology. The speakers are generous with their time following their sessions and through the years I have left the events with added knowledge in areas I was searching for and the expertise from those that shared their wisdom with the attendees.

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | BRAD STODDARD

Director/SWIC
State of Michigan

IWCE SESSIONS

P25 LMR & LTE: Better Together with Standards-Based Interworking

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 9:40 am - 10:40 am
Track: Government
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Project 25 Questions? Ask the Experts

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 4:20 pm - 5:20 pm
Track: Government
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

P25 Case Studies: Real Systems, Real People, Real World

Date: Wednesday, March 18
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

User Needs Update - How Users Can Be Involved with P25 Standards

Date: Thursday, March 19
Time: 3:40 pm - 4:10 pm
Track: Government
Format: Power Session

Find out more

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | JARED VANDENHEUVEL

Director, Public Safety Solutions, Texas Department of Public Safety

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

From my time as an analyst in the Army to first an analyst and later a technologist at the Texas Department of Public Safety, I've had one very consistent through-line, and that is situational awareness. I want to present information and communications about critical matters in a manner that is timely, clear, effective, and yields faster decision-making, which translates into lives saved.

Q: In your view, what are the most pressing challenges public safety agencies face when ensuring reliable communication during large-scale disasters or events?

For the U.S., it's that there are so many independent agencies with their own proprietary tools and communication methods all converging with no commonality. We need more common apps specifically for large-scale events and we need people to train and exercise them. Everything defaults to radio, where most responders have not trained or exercised for those scenarios either.

Q: How do you think agencies can overcome the limitations of traditional communication systems during emergencies?

I believe strongly in having simple apps that are designated specifically for the purpose of multi-agency events and disasters. Internal collaboration tools, computer aided dispatch, etc. fail at this because they are inevitably tailored to each specific agency, with proprietary integrations and procedures, and a focus on keeping data internal. Your everyday tool for your home jurisdiction operations is unlikely to be the tool that all your partners all use with you when there's a disaster, so you should proceed accordingly.

Q: Broadband and satellite technologies are transforming public safety communications. How do you see these technologies evolving to address the unique demands of disaster response?

LMR is the mission critical, take-it-anywhere solution that has been the bedrock of public safety communications for almost 100 years. I believe we are going to see the rise of take-it-anywhere applications and broadband, whether enabled by satellite, peer to peer comms/mesh, edge compute, and/or something else.

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | JARED VANDENHEUVEL

Director, Public Safety Solutions,
Texas Department of Public Safety

Q: Can you elaborate on how TAK (Team Awareness Kit) integrates with satellite systems to enhance situational awareness during emergencies?

TAK is network agnostic and most of its value is from relatively small bits of data, such as GPS location updates of your teammates. This fits well with relatively narrow bandwidth satellite networks like Iridium or the early T-Sat offering from T-Mobile and Starlink.

Q: Could you share a specific example of a large-scale disaster or event where communication infrastructure played a critical role in maintaining public safety?

Central Texas had the misfortune of experiencing a flooding disaster last July. Communications, both broadband and LMR were challenged by difficult terrain and an influx of first responders from across the state and country. Deployable cellular and LMR sites and satellite terminals were all critical in shoring up communications. The event really highlighted how dependent we are as a community on cellular service.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

Candid feedback. I try to be honest and forthcoming about the successes and the challenges from any initiatives I've worked on.

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I'm very excited about the continued development of satellite direct to device and device-to-device communications, such as via 5G Sidelink. I think that that will usher in a new era of mission critical communications.

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | JARED VANDENHEUVEL

Director, Public Safety Solutions,
Texas Department of Public Safety

IWCE SESSIONS

Beyond Boundaries: TAK, Satellites, and the Future of Disaster Response

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Big Games: Cross-Agency Data Interoperability for Situational Awareness

Date: Tuesday, March 17
Time: 1:45 pm - 2:45 pm
Track: Government
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Eyes on Kerrville: Building a Unified Operating Picture with Redundant Connectivity

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 3:10 pm - 4:10 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Towards Nationwide Interoperable Mission Critical Services

Date: Thursday, March 19
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | AMANDA WINANS

NC Deputy SWIC/24Hr Watch Manager, North Carolina Dept of Public Safety

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

My public safety career first began with an internship at a regional fusion center in Ohio. The fusion center, a law enforcement bidirectional information sharing hub, is where I found my love for public service. My time there directly influenced my decision to enter the 911 field. During my time as a telecommunicator, my favorite discipline to dispatch was law enforcement. I loved its highspeed nature. I then transitioned to first responder communications in state emergency management as the 24Hr Watch Manager. The 24Hr Watch is North Carolina's state warning point and bidirectional information sharing hub, which is similar to a fusion center, but focuses on all-hazards, rather than law enforcement only. In addition to being the Watch manager, I am also one of two Deputy Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWIC) for North Carolina.

Q: What are the key advancements in Next Generation 911 (NG911) that you believe will have the most significant impact on emergency response?

As a Deputy SWIC, who focuses on first responder interoperability, I believe one of the best advancements with NG911 is the enhancement of interoperability between emergency communications centers and first responders. Allowing data sharing, including multimedia data, between centers and responders provides a more holistic view of emergency situations which ultimately promotes responder safety. Additionally, NG911 allows caller (ANI/ALI) data sharing between emergency communications centers, which expedites response times.

Q: How is the transition to NG911 addressing the challenges of integrating new technologies with legacy systems?

NG911 replaces old analog infrastructure (copper lines) with digital networks (IP networks), which provide an enhanced pathway that allows real-time data sharing. This upgrade in technology gives way for centers to adopt new technology platforms which enhance caller data sharing, including location data, as well as emergency scene depictions via photos and videos. Additionally, as newer technologies become available, they will require IP-based networks to operate. For example, integrating platforms like RapidSOS increase callers' ability to provide more personal information automatically (allergies, pets in the house, known medical problems, etc.).

Q: What role does data, such as real-time video or text-to-911, play in improving emergency response outcomes?

Allowing emergency communications centers and first responders access to real-time video and picture increases everyone is understanding of active emergency situations by being able to see the scene prior to responder arrival. This vital information can not only influence how responders respond to emergencies but can also assist with investigations. Additionally, having the text-to-911 feature enhances caller safety when they are unable to speak but also has the potential to increase public reporting, as newer generations prefer texting over calling. Both features will provide a more complete understanding of emergency situations and hopefully save more lives.

All that said, I would be remiss if I did not mention the potential outfalls of emergency communications centers receiving pictures and real-time video. One of the biggest concerns I have is the effect of seeing potentially violent images on telecommunicators' mental health. Telecommunicators are generally not trained to process this type of data. Additionally, introducing real-time pictures and video automatically increases the workload of telecommunicators that are already task saturated. Having to analyze what a caller is saying, what images are depicting, and what videos are showing takes a greater amount of cognitive resources.

Q: What are some of the biggest hurdles local governments face when implementing NG911 systems, and how can they overcome them?

One of the biggest hurdles locals face when implementing NG911 is funding. It takes significant funding to replace aging infrastructure with modern digital networks. Additionally, because there are no national standards, it is common to see emergency communications centers operating differently than each other, with different technology and different operating policies and procedures. This makes establishing interoperability between centers challenging, as centers are not starting from the same basic foundations. Overcoming these hurdles takes proactive collaboration between local emergency communications centers and potentially state 911 agencies that can support through best practices, common standards, and financial support. Having these conversations early will streamline the process of switching over to NG911. North Carolina was able to overcome some of these hurdles by having a state-level coordination entity that collects, manages, and funds NG911 initiative via 911 fees.

Q: Looking beyond NG911, what emerging technologies do you see shaping the future of emergency communications?

I think the biggest change we will see with emerging technology is the use of AI. AI has the ability to streamline emergency call taking by transcribing caller statements in real-time, providing adaptable call-taking scripts, and enhancing analysts of pictures and videos. AI can be used to triage non-emergency calls and provide basic information to callers. This technology can speed up call taking times, which will ultimately help reduce with processing call times and responder response times. These are just my initial thoughts on current AI capabilities, but as AI continues to make advancements, the possibilities are endless.

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | AMANDA WINANS

NC Deputy SWIC/24Hr Watch Manager, North Carolina Dept of Public Safety

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

Attendees can expect to gain a better understanding of emergency technology that will aid in the identification of radio frequency interference. Not only will we discuss the technology used but we will cover use cases, team formation, and policy development.

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I am most excited to meet and network with others in the first responder communications community. Being able to learn from leaders in the field will not only enhance my personal knowledge and capabilities, but events like this ultimately breed better collaboration across the field. Communication and collaboration between differing subject matter experts can only further enhance our field.

IWCE SESSION

Hunting Interference... Easy Enough That Firefighters Are Doing It

Date: Wednesday, March 18
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | JAMES POTTER

NC Deputy SWIC/24Hr Watch Manager, North Carolina Dept of Public Safety

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

Having been born an engineer, my focus has always been about solving problems. What I have since learned along my career journey is the importance of building relationships so that those whose problems you want to solve actually trust you so they feel comfortable exposing their problems. This is where the value of IWCE comes in, the time away at a conference is perfect for building those relationships with customers and partners so we all can create the necessary solutions for the greatest problems are industry is facing.

Q: What makes Land Mobile Radio (LMR) systems a critical component of public safety communications today?

LMR systems are the lifeline for the user to call for help. They must operate in the worst of times.

Q: How do you see LMR evolving to coexist with newer technologies like broadband and FirstNet?

The need to follow open, global standards, is critical as the broadband systems are just that…LTE, 5G, and MCX. These are global standards that have been adopted by numerous vendors and users. This ensures interoperability amongst system components whereas manufactures can focus on what they do best. Devices must support multiple communication protocols and paths so that the end user is always connected.

Q: What are the key challenges in maintaining and modernizing LMR systems for public safety agencies?

Qualified technical personnel and budgets along with many being locked into their current vendor with forced obsolescence.

Q: Can you share an example of how LMR has proven indispensable in a recent emergency or disaster scenario?

A child was abducted in Alabama and because the agencies were either directly using SouthernLinc's MCX network, or were integrated into it, they were able communicate across agency, jurisdiction, and state lines to find the child and return them to their legal guardians.

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | JAMES POTTER

NC Deputy SWIC/24Hr Watch Manager, North Carolina Dept of Public Safety

Q: What steps can public safety agencies take to ensure seamless interoperability between LMR and other communication platforms?

Start with examining the culture of your primary vendor. Do they support open standards? Next is contractual pricing for interoperability components that are based on common market value.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

Attendees will learn how the technologies exist to provide interoperability between various forms of Mission Critical Communication systems.

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I am most excited about the solutions my team will be demonstrating on the show floor with our various partners. By leveraging open standards, with best of breed partners, the industry will see what tremendous solutions can be delivered by working better together.

IWCE SESSIONS

Can You Hear Me Now? Communication Between Disparate MCC Systems

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 9:40 am - 10:40 am
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

MCX Adoption in Sovereign Verticals - Utilities and Transportation Leading the Way

Date: Wednesday, March 18
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: Critical Infrastructure
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | CHUCK WILSON

Co-Founder,
Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS)

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

In addition to my work in school safety and the technology industry for 40 years, I've been to a Major League Baseball game in every ballpark. I've also been to 42 of the 62 national parks.

Q: What are the key components of the PASS guidelines, and how do they address the unique safety challenges faced by schools?

The PASS guidelines are built on the concept of layered security and multiple tiers of elements and solutions to the safety plan for each school. We then add 7 levels of components that are applied at each layer.

Q: How can schools effectively use the PASS checklist tools to assess and improve their safety and security measures?

Thousands of schools now use this checklist to evaluate what they have in place and working, what they should budget for, and what technology might be in need of repair or replacement. It is an incredibly useful tool for budgeting and building out a comprehensive school safety plan.

Q: What are some common mistakes schools make when implementing safety guidelines, and how can they avoid them?

The number one mistake is believing that it can't happen here and therefore not making safety a top priority. The second most common mistake is not following the tier continuum and layered approach. You don't want to rely on just one solution at one layer or purchase non-code compliant devices as a quick low cost alternative.

Q: Can you share a real-world example of a school that successfully applied the PASS guidelines to enhance its safety?

Every day we hear from schools how following the PASS guidelines have prevented incidents, stopped violence, detected banned items, identified vandals and perpetrators. In addition we hear constantly from schools who almost installed the wrong technology in the wrong places. They are grateful that we make this available at no cost.

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | CHUCK WILSON

Co-Founder,
Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS)

Q: How do the PASS guidelines integrate with modern communication technologies, such as 911 systems and emergency notification platforms?

The communications and digital infrastructure guidance does just that. We provide expert advice on proper selection and placement of devices, recommend testing and training procedures and provide resources to support the integration of the solutions.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

To become very familiar with the PASS organization and the incredible resources we provide.

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I think it's all about reliable and effective methods of communications. We must ensure that help is on the way when we need it most.

IWCE SESSION

School Workshop: Application of the PASS Guidelines and Checklist Tools for Practitioners and End Users

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 4:20 pm - 5:20 pm
Track: School and Campus Safety
Format: Panel Session

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | JOHN FOLEY

Managing Director,
Safer Buildings Coalition

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

What my official bio doesn't mention is that I've been playing rock music before live audiences since 1976—and I'm still at it. Music has been the constant thread running alongside my telecommunications career, and it's given me some of my most meaningful industry connections. I'm proud to be part of "Band Plan," an industry band founded by former WIA President and FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein that brings together wireless professionals from across the country. We've played everywhere from Orlando to Denver to the Hard Rock Soundwaves stage in Atlantic City, there's something special about sharing a stage with colleagues you might otherwise only see across a conference table.
I also played at IWCE 2024 with "Wireless Transit Authority"—a band featuring telecom lawyer Alan Tilles, industry veteran Ira Grossman, James Smith from MCA, keyboardist Don Wilkins, and Nashville session drummer Charlie Morgan, whose credits include 13 years touring with Elton John and sessions with everyone from Kate Bush to Tina Turner. Playing IWCE with musicians of that caliber was a career highlight that had nothing to do with telecommunications, and everything to do with it at the same time. Music taught me that the best performances come from listening to each other and creating something that's special where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Q: What are the key challenges with the current Part 90 signal booster rules, and how does SBC's petition aim to address them?

The core problem is that the FCC's Part 90 rules require "express consent" from frequency licensees before operating a signal booster on their frequencies—but there's no framework for how to efficiently obtain and document that consent. It's like requiring a driver's license without having a standardized process or a defined place to store the records. This regulatory gap has real consequences. Improperly deployed signal boosters cause harmful interference to public safety radio communications—degrading the very systems they're intended to support. The record documents substantial costs: San Francisco reported $1.67 million in interference-related expenses over ten years and extrapolated a nationwide impact exceeding $1 billion across the approximately 3,000 P25 systems operating in the country. Fairfax County, Virginia spent $400,000 on testing equipment alone to address interference incidents. These aren't one-time expenditures—public safety agencies continue to expend resources investigating interference and remediating improperly deployed systems year after year.

SBC filed our Petition for Rulemaking—RM-12009—in July 2025 asking the FCC to create a clear authorization framework. We're not asking for new regulations; we're asking the Commission to provide implementation structure for rules that already exist. The framework would leverage established frequency coordinators, creating a market-based solution that reduces burden on government while ensuring systems work correctly.

The response has been overwhelming. The comment period closed with 68 filings showing 100% validation that the problem is real and 98.5% support for the FCC to proceed to rulemaking. APCO, IAFC, IACP, and NASFM all filed supportive comments. That's a remarkable level of consensus across public safety stakeholders. Our session Streamlining ERCES Deployments: Examining SBC's Petition to FCC for Part 90 Signal Booster Rules Reform (Wednesday, March 18, 11:30 am) will do a deep dive into this topic.

Q: How can streamlining ERCES deployments improve public safety and emergency response times?

When first responders enter a building during an emergency, their radios need to work. Period. If firefighters can't communicate with incident command, if police can't coordinate a response, if EMS can't call for backup—people die. Emergency Responder Communication Enhancement Systems—ERCES—exist specifically to eliminate deadly wireless coverage gaps inside buildings. But here's the problem: deploying an ERCES today is unnecessarily complicated. Building owners face inconsistent local requirements, unclear consent procedures, and a shortage of qualified installers. Fire marshals struggle with compliance verification. And improperly deployed systems sometimes cause interference to the very public safety networks they're meant to support—because there's no standardized framework ensuring they're installed and maintained correctly. Streamlining deployment means establishing clear, consistent standards that everyone can follow. It means implementing an authorization framework so systems can be registered and tracked. And it means reducing the friction that currently delays deployments while buildings remain unsafe. The public safety benefit is direct: faster deployments mean more buildings have working systems sooner. Better-designed systems mean fewer interference problems. Proper maintenance requirements mean systems work when they're needed. Every improvement in the deployment process translates to first responders who can communicate when lives depend on it.

Q: How do you see the FCC's evolving policies impacting the future of wireless communication and public safety systems?

We're in a pivotal moment at the FCC. Chairman Carr has initiated a "Delete Delete Delete" policy focused on eliminating unnecessary regulations—and I think that's very compatible with what SBC is asking for. Our Signal Booster petition doesn't add new regulatory burden; it fills a gap that's causing confusion and wasted resources across the industry.

The Commission is also moving aggressively on spectrum. Auction authority was restored in mid-2025 after a two-year lapse, and the FCC has announced the AWS-3 auction for June 2026 with an Upper C-band auction proposed for 2027. Just this week, Chairman Carr announced that the FCC will vote to expand unlicensed use in the 6 GHz band, creating a new category of higher-power devices that can operate outdoors—supporting everything from AR/VR to IoT to indoor navigation.

More spectrum and more wireless capacity are coming—but that capacity only matters if signals can reach users inside buildings where they spend most of their time. That's also why indoor coverage assessment matters—and why SBC has communicated to the Commission on closing that gap in our Section 706 NOI comment filing, as we will discuss in our session Breaking the Outdoor-Only Tradition: Why the FCC Should Measure Wireless Coverage Where Americans Actually Use It (Tuesday, March 17, 1:45 pm). We also take a look at this topic in a session led by SBC Founder Seth Buechley: "911 Inside" - Addressing Indoor Emergency Location Challenges and Coverage Gaps (Monday, March 16, 11:30 am).
I expect we'll see increasing advocacy and public sentiment to address indoor wireless coverage in regulatory frameworks—whether through enhanced Section 706 reporting, building code coordination, or recognition of the expanding role of cellular in public safety communications, with FirstNet being a prime example. For public safety systems specifically, the FCC's policies around spectrum sharing, interference management, and equipment authorization will directly shape what's possible. Getting these policies right isn't just a regulatory exercise—it determines whether first responders can communicate inside the buildings where emergencies actually happen.

Q: What are the potential implications of this shift for public safety, particularly in areas like schools, hospitals, and high-density buildings?

Schools, hospitals, and high-density buildings represent exactly the environments where in-building wireless coverage matters most—and where current regulatory gaps create the greatest risk. In schools, the convergence of Alyssa's Law requirements for panic alert systems with ongoing debates about cell phone policies creates urgent need for reliable indoor wireless infrastructure. You can't have effective emergency communication if the building blocks cellular signals. And you can't implement smart device management policies if you don't have the underlying connectivity infrastructure to support them. Hospitals present unique challenges: critical care environments, electromagnetic interference concerns, and complex building structures with RF-blocking materials. In today's healthcare environment, physicians need continuous communication with their offices and resources as they navigate multiple practice locations, hospital affiliations, and telehealth sessions—they prefer to associate with hospitals that have reliable wireless infrastructure. First responders also need continuous coverage inside hospitals, whether transporting patients, coordinating with staff, or managing incidents.
The convergence of LMR and cellular—exemplified by FirstNet—blurs the line between these use cases and creates infrastructure investment opportunities that can serve both communities. High-density buildings—stadiums, convention centers, high-rises—concentrate large numbers of people in structures that often block wireless signals. When an emergency occurs at a major event or in a crowded building, responders face both the greatest communication challenges and the highest stakes. These are precisely the scenarios where properly functioning ERCES systems save lives. Clearer regulatory frameworks would give building owners confidence to invest, give first responders assurance that systems work, and ultimately create safer environments for the people who occupy these buildings every day.

Our Executive Director Chief Alan Perdue examines the School Safety aspect this subject in his session The Technology Gap: Why School Safety Plans Fail Without Wireless Communications (Monday, March 16, 9:40 am). A very vigorously debated policy subject, cell phone bans in schools, concerns the conflict between student emotional well-being and classroom distractions with parental rights and student safety. Our session Cell Phone Bans in Schools: Exploring Alternatives to All-or-Nothing Solutions (Tuesday, March 17, 9:40 am), led by SBC Board Member and School Safety Work Group Chair Eric Toenjes, brings both sides of that discussion in a presentation / town hall format. I would not miss that session for anything!

Q: How can wireless carriers and regulators collaborate to ensure accurate and meaningful coverage measurements that reflect real-world usage?

Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 mandates that the FCC report annually on the availability of advanced telecommunications capability to all Americans. This is a critical question that gets to the heart of what SBC has been advocating. Current coverage measurements—the data that drives billions of dollars in infrastructure investment and informs regulatory decisions—focus almost entirely on outdoor propagation models. But that's not where people use wireless services. Americans spend 90% of their time indoors, 70-80% of wireless usage occurs inside buildings, and over 70% of 911 calls originate from mobile devices indoors. You can't accurately assess coverage availability while ignoring where people actually use their phones.

The solution requires collaboration, not confrontation. Carriers have legitimate concerns about measurement complexity, competitive sensitivity, and the cost of enhanced reporting. Regulators need accurate data to fulfill statutory obligations. The middle ground involves leveraging existing data sources that both sides can trust.

Third-party measurement platforms like Ookla and OpenSignal already collect billions of indoor measurements from real user devices. This crowdsourced data reflects actual user experience without requiring carriers to disclose proprietary network details. The FCC's Broadband DATA Act explicitly authorizes using third-party data when predictive models prove insufficient—and the technical realities of 5G propagation make this exactly the situation Congress anticipated.

SBC has proposed that the Commission incorporate indoor coverage assessment into Section 706 reporting, using technology-neutral approaches that respect carrier innovation while providing the accurate picture that sound policy requires. This isn't about naming and shaming carriers—it's about understanding where coverage gaps exist so resources can be directed appropriately.

International benchmarks show this is achievable. Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea have all implemented indoor coverage evaluation frameworks. The question isn't whether it's technically possible—it's whether we have the regulatory will to align our assessments with how Americans actually use wireless services.

As stated previously, we will do a deep dive on this in our session Breaking the Outdoor-Only Tradition: Why the FCC Should Measure Wireless Coverage Where Americans Actually Use It (Tuesday, March 17, 1:45 pm).

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your sessions at IWCE 2026?

SBC's leadership and I will be participating in multiple sessions at IWCE 2026, each addressing a different dimension of in-building and challenging-environment wireless communications. Here are four session I am presenting that I'd like to highlight:

Streamlining ERCES Deployments: ***Examining SBC's Petition to FCC for Part 90 Signal Booster Rules Reform*** (Wednesday, March 18, 11:30 am) pairs me with Stephen Devine, CTO of APCO International. We'll examine SBC's proposed authorization framework and provide the latest updates on the FCC proceeding status as of March 2026.

Breaking the Outdoor-Only Tradition: Why the FCC Should Measure Wireless Coverage Where Americans Actually Use It (Tuesday, March 17, 1:45 pm) features tech analyst Dean Bubley and Bryan Darr from Ookla. We'll examine why measuring only outdoor coverage creates a fundamental disconnect from reality when Americans spend 90% of their time indoors. The session will provide updates on whether the FCC's 2025 Section 706 report addressed indoor coverage and discuss next steps for stakeholders.

Cell Phone Bans in Schools: Exploring Alternatives to All-or-Nothing Solutions (Tuesday, March 17, 9:40 am) brings together education policy expert Thomas Toch of Georgetown's FutureEd and Eric Toenjes from Graybar. We'll explore the tension between legitimate concerns about classroom distraction and parent demands for emergency communication access. The session examines cases like Uvalde and Parkland to understand how communications availability—or failures—impacted outcomes, and explores technology-enabled alternatives beyond binary ban/no-ban policies. This is a town hall format with audience polling and participation.

Communications Where There Is None (Monday, March 16, 9:40 am) brings together Joe Hanna, San Bernardino Fire Chief Dan Munsey, Brittany Haile from Qualcomm, Stephen Devine from APCO, and me to examine sidelink technology—the 3GPP-standardized approach to device-to-device communications when networks are unavailable. Whether it's in-building, heavily wooded terrain, mountainous areas, or networks rendered inoperable by disaster, first responders need connectivity. This session explores how sidelink fills that critical gap with non-proprietary, network-agnostic, interoperable capabilities.

Two additional sessions feature other SBC leadership:

The Technology Gap: Why School Safety Plans Fail Without Wireless Communications (Monday, March 16, 9:40 am) features SBC Executive Director Alan Perdue and SBC Founder Seth Buechley. Metal detectors, cameras, and secure doors are critical—but without reliable communications inside the building, emergency response will fail. This session unpacks how wireless dead zones undermine response times, complicate coordination between first responders, and increase risks for students and staff.

"911 Inside" - Addressing Indoor Emergency Location Challenges and Coverage Gaps (Monday, March 16, 11:30 am) features Seth Buechley alongside TJ Kennedy from GeoComm, retired Western Fire Chiefs' Jeff Johnson, and NENA's April Heinze. This session examines SBC's "911 Inside" initiative addressing two critical challenges: wireless dead zones where 911 calls can't be made, and difficulty accurately locating callers inside buildings when calls are possible.

The panel explores device-based hybrid solutions, Height Above Ground Level measurements, and our proposal for a National Indoor Wireless Coverage Map. Across all of these sessions, attendees will leave with actionable intelligence on the technology and regulatory developments shaping public safety communications for years to come.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your sessions at IWCE 2026?

For the Safer Buildings Coalition, IWCE is the center of our in-building wireless and mission critical communications universe. IWCE turns 50 this year! For five decades, this event has brought together public safety, utilities, transportation, and enterprise professionals to work through the hard problems in critical communications. That mission matters more now than ever. The current regulatory climate is creating real momentum. Our FCC petition demonstrated overwhelming industry consensus that current rules need updating. Legislative initiatives like Alyssa's Law are driving investment in school safety infrastructure. The Commission is moving aggressively on spectrum while also facing calls to address indoor coverage assessment. Meanwhile, the convergence of public safety LMR and commercial cellular—exemplified by FirstNet and emerging Sidelink technologies—is reshaping how we think about critical communications infrastructure.
The public safety in-building market has never been stronger, and professionals in this space need a venue to learn, collaborate, meet, and discuss. IWCE is that venue. The conversations that happen at IWCE will shape partnerships, inform product development, and influence policy for years to come.
As an Advisory Board member, I'm proud that IWCE continues to expand its coverage of in-building wireless and school safety topics. These aren't niche concerns—they're central to the mission of ensuring reliable communications when it matters most. And I'm looking forward to seeing colleagues from across the industry and sharing some war stories. We'll once again host the Annual SBC Member Reception, Dinner, and Meeting at the Convention Center on Tuesday, March 17th—always the in-building wireless social event of the year.

IWCE SESSIONS

Streamlining ERCES Deployments - Examining SBC's Petition to FCC for Part 90 Signal Booster Rules Reform

Date: Wednesday, March 18
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: Government
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | JOHN FOLEY

Managing Director,
Safer Buildings Coalition

IWCE SESSIONS

Communications Where There Is None

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 9:40 am - 10:40 am
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Cell Phone Bans in Schools: Exploring Alternatives to All or Nothing Solutions

Date: Tuesday, March 17
Time: 9:40 am - 10:40 am
Track: School and Campus Safety
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

The Next Critical Communication - How Telecom Can Fight Human Trafficking

Date: Tuesday, March 17
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: Enterprise
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Breaking the Outdoor-Only Tradition - Why the FCC Should Measure Wireless Coverage Where Americans Actually Use It

Date: Tuesday, March 17
Time: 1:45 pm - 2:45 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | CHARLES LAIRD

Technology Specialist, FirstTech Program,
N.C. Department of Information Technology

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

I had only been with North Carolina's Emergency Management team for a few months when Hurricane Matthew hit in 2016. I was still figuring out my job duties when I was thrust into the fray of managing hundreds of first responders deployed throughout our state. I attribute my ability to think on my feet and learn on the fly from my time in the fire service. There, I was always working on different ideas and plans to accomplish the mission.

Q: What are the most common sources of RF interference that impact public safety communications, and how can they be identified?sess and improve their safety and security measures?

From what we have seen so far, cellular boosting equipment installed in buildings and equipment that may be operating outside of their designed frequencies are the most common sources of RF interference. Since public safety communications frequencies are in parts of the spectrum where no equipment is allowed to transmit, interference is most likely equipment that is configured to pass cellular or radio traffic from the outside into a building.

Q: What tools or technologies have made interference detection accessible to non-technical personnel like firefighters?

One of the tools we use has a mobile application that provides turn-by-turn directions. We have found that this allows us to use non-technical personnel to assist in interference detection.

Q: Can you share an example of a real-world scenario where interference was successfully identified and resolved?

In North Carolina, one of our county radio systems was experiencing interference at one of their radio sites. They have monitoring equipment and could see the interference on a spectrum analyzer. After consulting with the radio technicians, we deployed our RF direction finding equipment and were able to determine that a bi-directional amplifier at an apartment community was the culprit. The radio technicians worked with the fire marshal and the apartment management to turn off the equipment, and the interference went away

Q: How can public safety agencies train their personnel to effectively detect and mitigate RF interference?

The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has several training courses related to jamming and interference awareness. RF interference can be tricky to identify, but it is important for first responders to report any anomalies to their radio technicians so investigations can start immediately. We have found it takes time and effort in most cases to narrow down what the problem is.

Q: What role does collaboration between agencies and industry experts play in addressing interference issues?

From what our SANDi Team has seen so far, bi-directional amplifiers have a high probability of being the reason for public safety radio system interference. I think it is important for agencies to communicate with industry experts on what they are seeing in the field to help mitigate future issues with interference. Industry experts are also the ones producing the equipment that we use so being able to provide feedback on their products will assist agencies in fulfilling their mission.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

Attendees for my session will hear how our team was created and how we are tackling hard-to-reach interference (handheld direction finding), receive a brief overview of the team's use of the Team Awareness Kit for personnel safety, and learn how their agencies can create a team in their jurisdiction. Attendees will also hear about our current challenges and how we are preparing for statewide deployments.

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I am looking forward to having my teammates from North Carolina attend IWCE with me, as well as all the spontaneous conversations that happen throughout the week. I learn a lot from the sessions and interacting with vendors, and then that spurs further talks with my public safety colleagues in attendance.

IWCE SESSION

Hunting Interference... Easy Enough That Firefighters Are Doing It

Date: Wednesday, March 18
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | BROOKS SHANNON

ENP Director,
Emergency Communications Solutions, Esri

Q: Tell us something about your career journey or personal experiences that isn't included in your official bio.

Before I fell into public safety by accident, as a software engineer fresh out of college, I had no idea the challenges that 911 telecommunicators and first responders faced. Ever since I stepped foot in my first PSAP and realized how emergency response really works – not like how it looks on TV, but really works – I've been on a singular mission to provide public safety professionals with the best tools they can possibly have at hand to affect the very best response possible. It's something that I am hyper-passionate about, and I never would have gone down this path had it not been for being transferred to a tiny little 911 and GIS division the regional consulting engineering firm in North Dakota that hired me after I graduated from North Dakota State University.

After I completed my very first professional software development project – a GIS-based set of tools that analyzed airspace around airports to determine suitability for new construction sites per Federal Aviation Administration rules regarding the height of structures in proximity to runway centerlines – the only other home for me within the firm was that little 911 and GIS division, called BullBerry Systems. I thought to myself, "why not give it a shot? 911 sounds cool and interesting," and, all these years later, I can't believe how blessed I was to find my way into this industry by complete accident.

Q: How can GIS technology be effectively used to create detailed indoor maps for emergency response and building safety?

GIS technology offers many ways to create indoor maps. Methods run the gamut from manually creating maps by hand, digitizing them using editing tools in desktop GIS data, to creating them automatically by importing them into GIS with tools that convert existing detailed indoor maps in non-GIS data formats into GIS data. For many modern buildings, digital architectural drawings exist that were used in their design and construction. While those drawings, produced in computer aided design software, may not be reflective of a building's current configuration, starting with them first and updating them as needed can save a lot of time compared to drawing them in GIS from scratch. Similarly, many facilities use facilities management software that often has detailed indoor mapping data available. That data, referred to as Building Information Model data, can be imported directly into GIS just like digital architectural drawings.

For buildings that don't have existing digital maps, other kinds of GIS tools can be used to speed up the creation of indoor maps. LiDAR scanning devices can be used to produce 3D point clouds that GIS tools can automatically convert into GIS-based indoor maps. Photogrammetry equipment can be used as well, collecting 3D imagery that can be converted into GIS data. And, indoor maps that are available as image files and PDFs can be converted into GIS data as well, by using tools powered by AI and machine learning to "vectorize" the points, lines, and polygons within the PDF map. Technologists are even exploring the use of AI to process streaming video recorded indoors to create GIS-based indoor maps. Once indoor maps exist in GIS, it's easy to enrich and modify them to keep them up to date. Desktop applications used by GIS professionals and mobile apps designed for people with little to no GIS experience allow many different kinds of people to collaborate together to ensure that indoor maps don't go out of date. Automated processes using GIS technology can also be implemented to ensure that if changes are made to the indoor maps used by other systems, like facilities management systems, those changes can be automatically imported into GIS to ensure the maps are kept in sync. Methods like these can be employed to ensure that when first responders need indoor maps, the maps provide as trustworthy intelligence as possible.

Q: What are the key challenges in integrating GIS with existing building safety systems, and how can they be addressed?

While other challenges might exist, from my perspective there are general classes of challenges that exist. Both are not impossible to overcome, but may require a little – or a lot – of work to overcome. The first challenge is ensuring that if building safety systems use an indoor map, that the systems are capable of using a GIS-based indoor map. Some might be able to, while others not. If a building safety system cannot use a GIS-based indoor map, the system should be enhanced to ideally use GIS data directly, or at the very least, be enhanced to be able to accept the data updates that can be easily and frequently made to indoor maps in GIS. The second challenge that exists is obtaining information from building safety systems, so that it can be integrated into GIS. If a building information system collects real-time telemetry data that could indicate, for example, a fire or an intrusion, that data can become much more useful if it can be integrated into GIS. GIS offers a seamless way to integrate data like this with public safety systems for real-time situational awareness and post-incident analysis. If a building safety system cannot expose data like this via an application programming interface (API), it should.

Q: Can you share an example of a successful implementation of GIS for indoor mapping that improved safety outcomes?

I can share four interesting examples that highlight a variety of ways that indoor maps can improve safety outcomes. The first two examples took place in the City of Frisco, Texas. In the first example, during the 2021 snowstorm known locally as "Snowmageddon," a severe winter storm caused widespread infrastructure failures, including frozen pipes that disabled fire suppression systems in hundreds of buildings – putting these buildings on a fire watch status. First responders were inundated with fire alarm calls and needed to navigate unfamiliar facilities quickly. Thanks to integrated indoor maps, responders understood the nature of the suppression system failure and determine the best entry points and routes through the buildings.

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Firefighters could, for example, use the map to locate the riser room and determine that the fire suppression system was nonfunctional due to frozen pipes. They could enter through the nearest door, navigate directly to the affected area, and mitigate the risk before the situation escalated. Without the indoor maps, responders would have had to rely on outdated paper maps or would be forced to navigate buildings with no maps at all; in either case, that could have added many minutes to their response times.

In the second example, a fire started in a high school's laundry room dryer ventilation system. Smoke was detected through real-time CCTV camera feeds integrated into the indoor maps. The first responder on scene used the indoor map to identify the exact location of the fire and directed incoming units to the correct exterior door. The ability to see the layout of the building and pinpoint the fire's location allowed responders to arrive on scene as close to the fire as possible and navigate to its location indoors in the least amount of time possible. ***This incident demonstrated how indoor mapping can reduce the "zero impact period" (ZIP) – the time before effective action begins because responders are still assessing the situation – by giving responders the information they need before they arrive on-scene. For the City of Frisco, that, ZIP time is reduced since company officers can know exactly where to go, versus searching for the hazard and are able to assess the situation more quickly before arriving on scene. For example, first responders can review the building's floor plan, look at data inside the facility such as nearby infrastructure and live video feeds, and understand where they need to go and what they need to do to solve the problem, allowing them to jump into action better prepared once they arrive on-scene***

Two other interesting examples occurred in the state of Illinois. In the first example, indoor maps were used in what initially appeared to be an active shooter situation. A person called 911 and said he was going to kill high school students, he was headed to the school, and he has a gun. Approximately two minutes later, he called back and the 911 call taker could hear shots being fired in the background. The incident triggered responses from multiple agencies – agencies that typically worked outside of the school's jurisdiction and weren't familiar with each other's jurisdictions. The indoor mapping system showed all the responders – even the ones from outside of the area – the layout of every building, down to which doors to use. The maps helped coordinate their responses. Responders notified incident command of every room they cleared and dispatch and incident command on scene were able to track their activity in real time. Fortunately, the incident turned out to be a false alarm – criminal harassment known as swatting. But the response revealed how effective indoor maps could be when agencies needed to coordinate quickly across unfamiliar territory.

The other example occurred during a medical emergency. A student was choking in an elementary school, and the caller was able to provide a room number where help was needed. The room was on the far side of the building near a driveway, and the responding ambulance and fire truck both drove up to that door, went into that doorway, and walked a few feet and found the student. If they had used the main entrance, response could have taken up to five minutes longer.

Q: What role does GIS play in ensuring that first responders have accurate and detailed building layouts during school emergencies, minimizing response times and improving safety outcomes?

Like in the examples above, GIS plays a key role in ensuring that during school emergencies, 911 telecommunicators and first responders have access to the intelligence and situational awareness they need to provide the best response possible. GIS makes it easy to share detailed information about building layouts, ingress and egress points, and additional information that can be accessed directly from the map, such as CCTV camera feeds. This data can be shared among all responders, so if multiple agencies respond to an emergency, they can share a true common operating picture, ensuring everyone is aware of the situation at all times.

Q: What steps can organizations take to ensure their GIS data is accurate and up to date for building safety applications?

My biggest recommendation is to develop a plan to review the dates that indoor maps were last updated, to perform outreach to the providers of those maps to update them as necessary and provide tools that allow the providers of those maps to easily update them. Without an easy way to update indoor maps, building owners and facilities managers may not update them frequently, or at all. Sometimes, companies will update indoor maps on behalf of building owners, and in that case, I recommend that organizations work with those companies to understand how often they update their maps, and determine if a more frequent update cadence might be required.

Q: What can attendees expect to gain from your session at IWCE 2026?

My hope is that attendees leave my session with a better understanding of the power that indoor maps bring to public safety, and all the ways that they can be used to improve emergency response. The investment made in building and maintaining indoor maps can be leveraged in many different ways. For example, attendees will leave the session knowing that if an indoor map is initially created as part of a fire incident pre-plan, that same map can be used if an emergency occurs at a school, and vice versa; if an indoor map is created to be used during tactical response at a school, that same map can be used to produce detailed fire incident pre-plans.

And lastly, attendees will leave with an understanding that indoor maps are easier to create in GIS than a lot of people believe, and we can come together to create indoor maps at scale to ensure the safety and security of the public and first responders inside of schools, and may other kinds of buildings.

Q: What are you most excited about for IWCE 2026, and how do you think the event will impact the industry?

I am most excited about all the opportunities that everyone will have to come together and elevate public safety. The collaboration that occurs at IWCE is phenomenal, and the mix of attendee backgrounds and expertise provides a perfect opportunity to work together on solving some of our toughest challenges. IWCE 2026 will open peoples' eyes and their minds, and will help everyone think bigger than ever before. If innovation in public safety is like a race car, IWCE 2026 will be the nitrous oxide that the industry needs to help us all achieve the goals we're working towards, and the primary goal of improving public safety itself – not just someday far in the future, but now.

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT | BROOKS SHANNON

ENP Director,
Emergency Communications Solutions, Esri

IWCE SESSIONS

A Forest Guide and Data Interoperability - A Path Forward for Neighboring ESInets

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 9:40 am - 10:40 am
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Bringing Maps Inside: GIS for Safer Buildings Everywhere

Date: Monday, March 16
Time: 4:20 pm - 5:20 pm
Track: First Responders
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

Nobody Left in the Dark: Making School Safety Work with 911

Date: Wednesday, March 18
Time: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Track: School and Campus Safety
Format: Panel Session

Find out more

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IWCE isn't just an event, it's the premier gathering for professionals in critical communications and wireless technology. This is your chance to be part of the future of connectivity, innovation, and collaboration. Here's why you need to be there:

Exclusive Insights from Industry Leaders: The speakers featured in this ebook are just the beginning. At IWCE, you'll hear from the brightest minds in wireless communications, public safety, and technology innovation. Their expertise will empower you to tackle challenges and seize new opportunities.

Unmatched Networking Opportunities: Connect with professionals across industries, including public safety, utilities, transportation, and enterprise. Forge partnerships, share ideas, and build relationships that will drive your success.

Cutting-Edge Solutions and Trends: Explore the latest advancements in wireless technology, critical communications, and infrastructure. IWCE is where innovation meets application, giving you the tools to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving industry.

Hands-On Learning Experiences: Participate in workshops, panels, and interactive sessions designed to deepen your knowledge and provide actionable takeaways. This is your chance to engage directly with experts and peers.

Shape the Future of Communications: IWCE is more than an event—it's a movement. Be part of the conversations and collaborations that are shaping the future of wireless communications and critical connectivity

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