THE ELECTRONIC JAMMING THREAT

First responders across the country face increased illegal jamming threats to GPS, radio, and wireless systems. These threats interfere with responder communications equipment and can compromise critical situational awareness. Although jammers are illegal to manufacture, import, market, sell, ship or operate in the United States, they are inexpensive and easy to obtain from foreign manufacturers. These illegal devices can delay emergency response times, escalate hazardous situations, result in loss of life, or facilitate illicit activities.

In 2015, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a joint bulletin with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) condemning the deliberate interference of “operational channels commonly used by first responders” and the disruption of “vital communications or affecting emergency operations.”

UNITY OF EFFORT

The DHS S&T First Responder Electronic Jamming Exercise hosted first responders from more than 40 federal, state, and local agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Coast Guard, the FCC, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, the Harris County Texas Fire Marshall, and Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. Academic institutions and industry representatives also attended to provide subject matter expertise.

The 2016 First Responder Electronic Jamming Exercise After Action Report outlines results of the exercise, lessons learned, training recommendations, and mitigation strategies for first responders. The report is available to first responders and federal agencies on request to the DHS website.