

# Virginia State Crime Commission

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## First Responder Authentication Credentials

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2007

## FIRST RESPONDER AUTHENTICATION CREDENTIALS

At the Crime Commission's May 22, 2007, meeting, the Honorable Robert Crouch, Jr., Assistant to the Governor for Commonwealth Preparedness, presented the Commission with information on the use of First Responder Authentication Credentials ("FRAC") in Virginia. Mr. Crouch reported that recent, tragic events around the nation have served to highlight concerns regarding the need to expeditiously verify the identity of public and private members of the emergency response community at natural and man-made disaster sites.

In many high profile incidents, the lack of identity trust between jurisdictions resulted in the inability of emergency responders to reach incident scenes, and response and recovery activities were significantly delayed because incident scene commanders could not rapidly verify an individual's identity. In some instances, first responders from other parts of the country who arrived at a scene to render assistance experienced delays while waiting for their identities to be verified. In other cases, individuals falsely claiming to be first responders have taken advantage of unsuspecting, and vulnerable victims. There have also been cases of individuals reporting to be someone they were not and taking advantage of another person's assets. These incidents and others have shed light on the need to have a standard credential for emergency response officials. Such a credential would verify the identity and other pertinent information of emergency responders at incident scenes and allow access into, and out of, secured areas and across different jurisdictions. It was emphasized that there needed to be a standard process and requirements to obtain the credentials.

It was reported to the Commission that a Federal Credentialing Standard, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 ("HSPD-12"), signed by the President in 2004, is mandatory for executive branch agencies such as the FBI, the DEA, the Secret Service, and the Pentagon Force Protection Agency. It established a mandatory federal government-wide interoperable standard for secure and reliable forms of identification that (i) can verify an individual's identity, (ii) are strongly resistant to identity fraud, tampering, counterfeiting, and terrorist exploitation, (iii) can be rapidly authenticated electronically, and (iv) are issued through an official accreditation process. The Federal Information Processing Standards ("FIPS 201"), were created by the National Institute of Standards and

Technology in response to HSPD-12, and define requirements for identity proofing, registration, and the issuance of identification credentials.

Mr. Crouch emphasized that state, local, and private sectors need to agree upon common credentialing standards for members of the emergency response community. FRAC is a standards-based smart card that is issued to the emergency response community that will be recognized and accepted as a true representation of their identity and other pertinent data. It is the only interoperable identity credential for all federal, state, local and private sector emergency responders. It facilitates rapid identity verification for response and recovery efforts.

The Commonwealth is the first state to develop a pilot FRAC program with federal funding. Over 2,200 FRACs were issued to members of the emergency response community in Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. The pilot FRAC is designed to securely establish emergency responders' identities at the scene of an incident, and confirm first responders' qualifications and expertise, thereby allowing incident commanders to dispatch them quickly, and enhance cooperation and efficiency between federal, state and local first responders. The Virginia Department of Transportation has acted as the leader of the initiative and has received \$700,000 in federal funds to issue cards, which cost about \$35 each, to emergency responders in the national capital region of Virginia.

Following Virginia's lead, other states and localities are electing to adopt the HSPD-12 and FIPS-201 standards, thereby achieving multi-jurisdictional interoperability. Maryland, for example, has developed a standard FRAC that is interoperable with Virginia's FRAC. Pennsylvania is also in the early stages of developing a FRAC program.

Mr. Crouch reported to the Commission that Virginia has submitted a grant application to continue the FRAC program in other regions. The Commonwealth will continue to educate state and local officials on the FRAC program and its interoperability with partners and will continue to work with state agencies, such as the Virginia Department of State Police and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, to implement the FRAC programs. It will also continue to support state and local agencies' adoption of FIPS-210 compliant credentials for employee identification and physical access control.

Commission members expressed concerns over the selection process for card holders, the availability of continued federal funds to support the costs, and the

fact that FRAC cards may create barriers for certain groups, such as volunteer fire departments and rescue squads that are so prevalent in rural areas. Mr. Crouch reported that one of the long term goals is to include volunteers. An additional concern was raised concerning the length of time needed to check cardholders at an incident scene. Mr. Crouch replied that there are 100 readers being distributed in Arlington County and that they are very quick and easy to use. The Commission requested that the Governor's office receive input from, and understand the priorities of, the Virginia State Police, the Virginia Sheriff's Association, and volunteer fire and rescue squads and to involve those agencies and groups in the process.