



# NEWS

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## THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

### Anaheim's safety score high

U.S. Homeland Security gives the city a perfect rating for how it set up emergency communications.

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By DENA BUNIS

WASHINGTON – Anaheim and Orange County on Wednesday got good grades from federal Homeland Security officials for a system they say smoothes the way for first responders to communicate with one another.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said his department is determined that within two years all police, fire and other first responders nationwide will be prepared for any catastrophe.

The department surveyed 75 U.S. communities and released report cards. The Anaheim region, which is combined with Santa Ana, got a perfect grade for the way the regional communication system was set up. It got the equivalent of a 75 percent grade in the other two categories: how good the operating procedures are for the communications system and how well the community uses that system. Only six areas surveyed got perfect scores across the board.

"The governance structure developed by Orange County can serve as a model for other jurisdictions," the report said. Federal officials based that assessment on the breadth of local and state participation, how often local officials meet to review the system and the way regional leaders pay attention to short-term and long-term communication needs.

Some improvement is warranted, Homeland Security officials said. The report called for more participation of state and federal agencies in the system.

"I think it's probably not only a justifiable score but very acceptable looking at the circumstances," Anaheim Mayor Curt Pringle said. Pringle said that while many other areas across the country have one major law enforcement agency, the Homeland Security response team in Orange County encompasses 34 cities, the county Sheriff's Department and the Fire Authority.

Pringle said setting up the structure the federal government is praising took a decade. Anaheim wasn't alone in needing better coordination with other agencies. The report found that while first responders in more than 60 percent of the communities surveyed could communicate across local agency lines during a crisis, only 21 percent could show "the seamless use" of the equipment needed to make sure that communication extended to state and federal responders.

"I think that's a very good place where we should look to see where we can improve," Pringle said.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., incoming chairman of the homeland security committee, said, "The only way to truly address this problem is to create an interoperability grant program that provides guidance and exclusive funding for states and cities to wisely build out their communications systems without forcing them to choose between funding their bridges and water supply." Homeland Security officials said in the past four years \$2.9 billion has been spent for regional communications efforts.