

COG announces emergency plan

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Associated Press

After several months of discussion, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments on Wednesday unveiled its regional Emergency Coordination Plan, designed to improve communication between local jurisdictions.

While rescue workers responded well to the Sept. 11 attacks, Washington-area government leaders say authorities could have used a better system of communication to coordinate street closures, school closures

and work releases.

• “We have agreed to establish a Regional Emergency Communication and Coordination System — the RICCS — to provide a real-time, 24-hour, seven-day week communication tool for regional use,” said COG Chairman Bruce Williams.

If an event affects one jurisdiction, that local government will report it to a new Emergency Communications Center. The center will assess the situation and distribute information across the region within 30 minutes of a disaster, using a new communications system provid-

ing around-the-clock conference calls, secure Web sites and wireless communication.

On Sept. 11, it took seven hours before local authorities met via conference call.

“We not only feel we have, but we have tested a far better coordination and communications system,” said Carol Schwartz, the chairwoman of the Task Force on Home and Security.

Jim Estep, who represents Prince George’s County, Md., said there was some concern among emergency workers that RICCS is temporarily housed in

an area that could be ground zero in an emergency.

RICCS is now in the Reeves Center, a District of Columbia government building just a mile north of the White House. The plan is to eventually have three communication centers — one each in Maryland, Virginia and the District.

Board members unanimously approved a resolution implementing the emergency plan on an interim basis. The board will collect comments from the public and local jurisdictions over the next 60 days.