

Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips
January 23, 2009 – February 6, 2009

Congress Delays Troubled Switch To Digital TV	2
Missouri public safety groups stress need for better radio system	4
Westmont supports DuPage County communications upgrade.....	6
Emergency Responders Could Be Charged Fee to Use Radios.....	7
Furth named acting chief of FCC public-safety bureau.....	8
OEC Requests Sample Interoperability Agreements.....	9
Groups urge broadband provisions in package.....	9
New-wave upgrade	11
Georgia Public-Safety Radio Network Years in the Making.....	12
City of Norwich Mutual Aid Group Emergency First Responders Present Interoperability Challenges, Solutions for Local Area – Possibly CT State	14
NPSTC: Proposed P25-TETRA comparison 'dead in the water'	15

Congress Delays Troubled Switch To Digital TV

February 5, 2009

The Washington Post

By Kim Hart

URL: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/04/AR2009020402584.html?hpid=moreheadlines&sid=ST2009020402856&s_pos

Congress yesterday approved a four-month delay in plans to halt analog television, the latest chapter in a troubled effort by the government to clear airwave space for emergency responders and wireless services by moving millions of households to digital television.

Fourteen million households depend on analog broadcasts. Four years ago, Congress mandated that they be converted to digital signals in 2006. That deadline was delayed until Feb. 17 over concern about issues including consumer confusion and lack of equipment.

Nearly all stations already broadcast digital and analog signals. Now, on June 12 broadcasters will be required by law to turn off their analog signals.

As the February deadline grew nearer, consumer groups and broadcasters questioned whether the government was taking the steps needed to help viewers. The Commerce Department responded by assuring Congress that a program to provide households with \$40 coupons to buy the converter boxes to receive digital signals was going smoothly. But last month, it acknowledged that the program was out of money.

The Federal Communications Commission has said that centers set up to answer consumer questions about the conversion were understaffed and that the government needed more time.

"There's no way we could have accomplished in the next 14 days what should have been done over the past 24 months," said Michael J. Copps, acting FCC chairman.

Shortly before his inauguration, President Obama asked Congress to delay the deadline. Last month, Nielsen, which tracks TV audiences, found that more than 6.5 million households were not ready for the transition. Many senior citizens and non-English speakers are in that group. More than 3.7 million consumers are on a waiting list to receive coupons.

Additional money for the coupon program is included in the stimulus package making its way through Congress. Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Communication, Technology and the Internet, said yesterday that the funds would not be available for several weeks.

"It will take some time for that program to be fully reactivated," he said. "It's now important for the FCC to rapidly establish a plan for correcting the problems with staffing its call centers."

By June, consumers who keep their analog televisions will need a converter box to get broadcasts. Subscribers to cable and satellite services should not lose programming.

The later deadline will create some new problems. Local TV stations will have to pay bigger power bills to keep both analog and digital signals on the air. Stations are allowed to cut off analog signals before June 12, and some may do so because of the additional costs.

Copps said that 143 broadcasters have already terminated their analog signals and another 60 stations plan to do so before Feb. 17. But many broadcasters say they are likely to stay on the air until June 12 if their competitors do.

In addition, public safety agencies across the country say the delay threatens their plans to build what they call essential new radio systems, creating communication problems with other first responders. The FCC is meeting today to discuss how to deal with any confusion the changes may cause.

In 2005, Congress passed the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act, mandating that broadcasters vacate their analog airwaves to make room for first responders and commercial wireless companies who said they needed more capacity over the air.

Telecom companies such as Verizon Wireless and AT&T bought licenses for soon-to-be-vacated airwaves, raising more than \$19 billion for the government. Broadcasters also expected the higher-quality digital programs to help them compete with cable and satellite providers.

Concern that the most vulnerable consumers were likely to own analog televisions led to the creation of a \$1.34 billion coupon program to help pay for the converter boxes. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, an arm of the Commerce Department, was put in charge of the effort.

More than 47 million coupons have been sent out, but the program confused consumers, requiring them to use the coupons during a certain time period. Because of the program's budget shortfall, new coupons cannot be mailed out until already-issued ones reach their 90-day expiration date.

Last month Obama's call for a delay was echoed by consumer groups, some broadcast networks and Democratic lawmakers. AT&T and Verizon Wireless said that a one-time delay of the transition would not hurt their plans to use the airwaves for their own advanced wireless products.

But Qualcomm opposed the delay. The company paid more than \$500 million to access the digital airwaves, said Qualcomm chief operating officer Len J. Lauer. "It breaks an agreement we had with the government."

Republicans who opposed the bill argued that postponing the switch would undermine plans by public safety agencies to use the freed airwaves. Harlin McEwen of the International Association of Chiefs of Police said "it would be better if there wasn't any delay for public safety because there are agencies planning to use that spectrum on Feb. 18."

Public safety agencies can use airwaves as they become available.

"I'm so disappointed," said Wayne McBride, deputy director for public safety communications in Prince George's County. The new deadline will delay the county's plans to use the old analog airwaves to create an emergency response radio system for police and firefighters that will be interoperable with systems in surrounding counties. The county has spent \$76 million to buy equipment and build the system but cannot start testing it until broadcasters vacate the airwaves, McBride said.

Some broadcasters say the delay will be expensive. Christopher Lane, vice president of technology and engineering at WETA, Washington's public television station, said keeping the analog signal will cost \$20,000 a month. "But we can't be the only broadcaster in the market not to be broadcasting. It puts us at too much of a disadvantage."

Washington's Fox affiliates, WTTG and WDCA, will continue to pay power bills of \$30,000 a month to keep two analog signals for an extra four months. Both stations have finished working on the towers and transmitters for the Feb. 17 deadline, said Jeff Andrew in the affiliates' engineering department.

The bill to postpone the switch first passed the Senate last week. Two days later, House Republicans blocked the bill from getting the two-thirds majority needed to pass under the rules applied to the legislation.

On Thursday the Senate passed the same bill that had failed in the House, which gave the House another vote, this time needing only a simple majority to pass. The House voted yesterday 264 to 158 to approve the delay.

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Missouri public safety groups stress need for better radio system

February 3, 2009

Missourian

By Michael Bushnell

URL: <http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2009/02/03/law-enforcement-groups-say-statewide-radio-communications-system-vital/>

JEFFERSON CITY – Public safety officials urged legislators Tuesday to find funds for a statewide radio communications system to avoid the kind of problems that plagued firefighters and police at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11.

The House Public Safety and Corrections Appropriations Committee was reviewing a proposal to establish a statewide system that would allow police, fire and rescue personnel to communicate with one another across the state.

On Tuesday, the committee heard public testimony from representatives of law enforcement groups that support an overhaul of the statewide radio system for emergency dispatchers. They framed it as a safety issue for residents and first responders.

On Jan. 20, Gov. Jay Nixon put on hold an \$81.7 million Motorola contract that former Gov. Matt Blunt authorized shortly before leaving office last month.

Nixon spokesman Jack Cardetti told The Associated Press last week that the project was halted as a result of Nixon's reexamining of all new state contracts.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol's system does not allow real-time connectivity with responders statewide and across all radio frequencies. There are also separate systems for voice and data communication.

"Without having a communication system that is statewide, it is much harder for first responders to reach one another," said Greg Brown, board member of the Missouri Fire Education Commission, to the House committee. "We need all our responders to be able to talk to each other all over Missouri."

Emergency responders said a statewide system is needed for major disasters such as the ice storm in the southern part of the state that forced the House committee to cancel its hearing on this issue last week.

Brown said that during major disasters, such as the Mississippi River flooding, jurisdictions have brought in more equipment to help responders communicate, but that connectivity is often "tenuous at best."

Last month, Nixon said that the state does not have the funding to support this project. While nobody spoke against the need to upgrade the state system, state Rep. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, questioned whether a major construction and telecommunications project such as this is feasible in a down economy.

"I think we will agree that security is a major issue," she said. "I think the issue when it comes to this state is the cost and the amount that it will cost to implement a service of that magnitude."

Tim Fischesser of the St. Louis County Municipal League said the system would be a major project that would not be implemented right away. He said in the St. Louis area, local governments are struggling to link their emergency response systems in just a five-county region.

"Everybody wants to move in the right direction, but it's easier said than done," he said, adding that in St. Louis County alone, the state might have to build nearly a dozen more radio communication towers. "We would probably have to build three or four towers and see if we could co-share six or eight more," he said.

When Nasheed asked how much a tower would cost the state and local governments, Fischesser said he had estimated each tower would cost \$4 million or \$5 million.

But Fischesser said interoperability was important to the safety of all Missourians. Other speakers said the state would be regretful if there were a natural disaster and lives were lost that could have been saved were responders able to communicate with one another more effectively.

In the Republican Party's response to Nixon's State of the State speech last week, Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder pilloried the governor's decision to halt funding, citing the New York City Police Department's inability to communicate efficiently with the city's fire department during the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

"The citizens of this state should never have to question how equipped we are to keep our communities safe or how prepared we are to deal with an emergency," Kinder said. On Sept. 11, "firefighters lost their lives because they never heard the police warning that the building was beginning to crumble. At this very moment, we have the same communication problem in many parts of our state."

###

Westmont supports DuPage County communications upgrade

February 3, 2009

Westmont Progress

By David Heitz

URL: <http://www.mysuburbanlife.com/westmont/news/x1452242534/Westmont-supports-DuPage-County-communications-upgrade>

Westmont, IL - The village of Westmont is looking to join a consortium of DuPage County municipalities in a plan to upgrade an emergency response communications system that will assist them in saving lives.

The village may join other communities by supporting the DuPage Emergency Telephone System Board, which is working to implement a new Motorola interoperable radio network between different emergency groups in the county.

The Westmont Village Board reviewed the resolution at its Jan. 26 Committee of the Whole meeting, which, if approved, would throw the village's support behind the plan.

The ETSB has begun an Interoperable Radio Network Project with the goal of achieving seamless communications between police, fire, public works and other emergency personnel within the agency's service area, village officials said. The system has a target date of the fall of 2010, according to the ETSB Web site.

Representatives from ETSB did not return calls seeking comment before press time.

The interoperable radio network would be a upgrade for the police department, and would help in communication between the department and other responders during an emergency, police Chief Jim Ramey said at the meeting.

He is in support of the resolution to back the plan.

“Supporting the resolution costs very little to the village, and does not commit us to the project,” Ramey said. “There is no financial risk to the village at this point.”

The village would have to pay \$765 in legal fees to develop the intergovernmental agreement, officials said.

According to the ETSB, funding for the radio system would be shared among the county, the municipalities involved, and the DuPage County Department of Homeland Security.

It is still unknown how much it would cost the village if board members approve moving forward with the upgrade, officials said.

To help with the funding, U.S. Rep. Peter Roskam, R-6th District, of Wheaton has also earmarked \$200,000 to DuPage County in fiscal year 2009 for the purchase of interoperable radios for first responders for emergency, according to the Congressmen’s Web site.

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Emergency Responders Could Be Charged Fee to Use Radios

February 2, 2009

WSAZ Channel 3

By Mike Waterhouse

URL: <http://www.wsaz.com/charleston/headlines/38830992.html>

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Just like television stations are making the transition to digital TV, many emergency crews in West Virginia are switching their radio systems over to the state's digital radio network.

It means agencies can talk across town or across the state, but soon, there could be a cost to communicate.

A "user surcharge" is one of several recommendations Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety Secretary Jim Spears recently sent to Governor Joe Manchin to revamp the state's Interoperable Radio Project (IRP) plan.

Spears submitted the recommendations on behalf of the statewide Interoperable Steering Committee, which is made up of the Cabinet Secretaries for Military Affairs and Public Safety, Transportation, Health and Human Resources, Chief Technology Officer, and the Statewide Interoperable Coordinator. WSAZ.com obtained a copy of the memo, dated December 6, 2008.

In the letter, Spears proposed that the State of West Virginia coordinate all of its communications initiatives under one group. He said that there is currently a lack of communication between

separate planning groups for projects like the digital radio system (IRP), broadband, and cellular or satellite programs.

Spears' recommendations call for the creation of a "Communications Coordinating Committee" with the State's Interoperable Coordinator serving as the liaison between all of the different communication project. Mike Todorovich currently serves as the SIC.

The plan also includes adding two full-time positions to help support Todorovich and then establishing an "interoperable user surcharge" to help fund these recommendations.

Kanawha County Commissioner Kent Carper calls the proposed surcharge "ridiculous," saying it would hurt smaller departments and possibly kill the whole project. He strongly opposes the proposed fee because he says the program already gets significant funding from 911 feeds and homeland security.

Carper says only a few agencies in the county are using the digital radios, but the plan is to migrate all of the analog systems to the IRP.

In 2008, Carper voiced his concerns about the digital radio system the state put into place following a WSAZ.com investigation that exposed possible flaws other agencies across the country reported with the same system. Following the investigation, state and local officials began talking about solutions to the possible flaws -- and since then, Carper says he's been satisfied with the direction of the state IRP, except for the proposed surcharge.

Governor Manchin's office says no decision has been made yet about the secretary's recommendations. Communications Director, Matt Turner, tells WSAZ.com that the Governor will look at the efficiency of the system and take into account different factors and opinions, including those of Carper's and emergency responders.

Turner says Manchin has no specific timeline by which he'll respond to the recommendations.

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Furth named acting chief of FCC public-safety bureau

January 29, 2009

Urgent Communications

By Donny Jackson

URL: http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/furth-named-fcc-acting-chief-0129/

Acting FCC Chairman Michael Copps yesterday announced that David Furth will be the acting chief of the agency's public-safety and homeland-security bureau (PSHSB).

An FCC employee for 16 years, Furth has been a PSHSB associate bureau chief since September 2006 and has been credited by many in the industry for playing a key role in resolving a backlog of issues before the FCC that were causing many 800 MHz rebanding negotiations between Sprint Nextel and public-safety licensees to stall.

“David has worked with public safety well for many years and is somebody who is reasonable and understands public-safety issues,” Harlin McEwen, chairman of the International Association of Chiefs of Police’s communications and technology committee, said during an interview with Urgent Communications.

Furth replaces Derek Poarch, who was appointed by former FCC Chairman Kevin Martin in February 2007 as the first PSHSB chief.

Furth’s appointment will become effective at the close of business tomorrow.

###

OEC Requests Sample Interoperability Agreements

January 29, 2009

RadioResource Media Group

URL: http://radioresourcemag.com/newsArticle.cfm?news_id=3848

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) is building a reference library of documents such as interlocal agreements (ILAs) and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and has asked for sample documents from public-safety practitioners. The agreements then can be used to assist agencies with the development of their specific document needs for improving communications interoperability.

The national emergency communications plan (NECP) released by OEC last year stated, “DHS will establish a central repository of model formal agreements and information that will enhance interstate and intrastate coordination,” and “DHS will identify and refine model standard operating procedures (SOPs) for emergency communications during specific types of incidents and all-hazards response, beyond tactical communications.”

Public-safety officials are asked to forward the documents they are willing to share in Microsoft Word format to oece@hq.dhs.gov by Feb. 11. Once received, all submitted materials will be housed on a secure server. OEC will review, evaluate and generalize the collected information into model templates that stakeholders can leverage in the creation of future governance agreements. These templates, along with links to real-world examples, will ultimately be made available to the public through a secure Web site.

###

Groups urge broadband provisions in package

January 28, 2009

Federal Computer Week

By Alice Lipowicz

URL: <http://fcw.com/articles/2009/01/28/public-safety-broadband.aspx>

Public safety organizations and advocates for 911 call centers have urged Congress to include emergency response broadband provisions within the broadband spending in the economic stimulus package.

The House bill includes \$6 billion to expand broadband in rural areas and areas with little service, while the Senate measure has \$9 billion for broadband. The money would primarily pay for grants and tax breaks to build those networks. The programs would be administered by the Commerce and Agriculture departments.

Although those commercial broadband networks presumably could accommodate many broadband public safety needs, emergency response groups are calling for explicit provisions to help create a national broadband capacity for public safety.

The Public Safety Spectrum Trust hopes that President Barack Obama's stated support for public safety communications networks will result in explicit provisions for those networks in the stimulus package. The trust was designated by the Federal Communications Commission in 2007 to establish a public-private partnership that could run a national broadband network serving both commercial customers and first responders.

"I'm optimistic that the encouraging words of the president will motivate members of Congress to include some form of funding for a nationwide communications network for public safety in stimulus legislation now working its way through the House and Senate," Harlin McEwen, chairman of the trust, said Jan. 26.

In December 2008, the trust called for \$15 billion in stimulus spending for such a network. In Obama's homeland security agenda released on the WhiteHouse.gov Web site Jan. 22, he describes plans to name an executive with responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of interoperable communications plans for public safety. Obama also mentioned support for public safety communications networks in his radio address on Jan. 24.

A group representing 911 call centers also is seeking provisions in the stimulus legislation. "There can be no more critical infrastructure than the 9-1-1 systems relied on by the public and the emergency communications systems used by those responding to emergencies," the National Emergency Number Association, which represents 911 call centers, wrote to House and Senate leaders Jan 23.

The group is asking Congress to put a priority on 911 call center needs in the economic stimulus package. These needs include investment in infrastructure and access to advanced services networks, both wired and wireless, and the services and applications for safety organizations enabled by such networks, including the establishment of IP backbone networks and the application layer software infrastructure needed to interconnect numerous emergency response organizations, the association's letter said.

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New-wave upgrade

January 28, 2009

The Herald Journal

By Matthew K. Jensen

URL: <http://hjnews.townnews.com/articles/2009/01/28/news/news01-01-28-09.txt>

Monitoring a police scanner can be cheap entertainment, but listeners may soon be missing out on the action as police and fire agencies across the country upgrade communication equipment.

On Tuesday, technicians spent hours pulling wires through patrol cars at the sheriff's department to install new radios that will allow a deputy in Wellsville to speak with a police officer in Smithfield — something that until now could only be done with a cell phone.

The move was mandated by the Department of Homeland Security, which, according to Sheriff Lt. Matt Bilodeau, wants all law enforcement, fire and emergency response agencies in one narrow range of the radio spectrum for intercommunication.

“Since Sept. 11, the big buzz word has been interoperability,” he said. “Now we’re on one system that can be used throughout the country.”

In the past, law enforcement has used radio frequencies in the Very High Frequency or VHF range.

The new radios, which range in cost from \$2,100 to \$2,500 each, operate at frequencies above 800 Megahertz and can be configured to receive thousands of individual channels.

Communication Lt. Bryan Low says the new radios operate like cell phones by sending signals to newly built towers placed throughout the county.

“They roam to the tower — usually the closest — which has the best signal strength,” he said. “All of the towers are networked together using a microwave network. As the officer moves around the county, his radio will automatically affiliate with the best tower. The more towers, the better the coverage is.”

Two towers are operational in Cache County, and additional towers are under construction or in design phase.

Funding for the new equipment came from a large Homeland Security grant that paid for all of the agencies to upgrade to the new radios.

Police scanners that receive only VHF frequencies won't track the new radios. Low says enthusiasts who want to stay in the know may have to upgrade.

“The majority of the scanners out there are VHF,” said Low. “But if somebody runs to Radio Shack and buys a new 800 MHz scanner they can listen just as easy as they can now.”

###

Georgia Public-Safety Radio Network Years in the Making

January 28, 2009

Government Technology

By Elaine Rundle

URL: <http://www.govtech.com/gt/597845?topic=117680>

Having interoperable communications during an emergency can be priceless for first responders and the public, but rolling out the network can take years. The Georgia Interoperability Network allows statewide communication for first responders without requiring counties to replace existing radio equipment. By retaining the counties' current radio equipment, the state has achieved widespread buy-in among first responders in Georgia's 159 counties.

The Georgia State Patrol owns the network, which was funded by a multimillion dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program. The state patrol, Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) and the Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI) collaborated on the network. Production on the network began two years ago and is expected to be completed December 2009.

Click, Drag, Connect

The network will save millions of dollars by using a gateway system that lets counties use their current radio frequency infrastructure equipment. Every 911 dispatch center in the state is equipped with a public safety answering point (PSAP); and smaller counties that share a 911 dispatch center will require only one PSAP. The PSAP lets dispatchers visually connect calls on a computer screen. An icon represents each person calling, and dispatchers stack icons on top of one another to connect the callers.

"It connects through technologies that are installed at the PSAP; it allows for interoperable communications across all of the radio spectrums that we use in Georgia," said Ralph Reichert, the project's GEMA sponsor and the director of GEMA's Terrorism Emergency Response and Preparedness Division. "It does not increase the radio footprint of a jurisdiction, but it does allow other jurisdictions to communicate as they come into a specific area."

According to Dan Brown, the Georgia State Patrol's network project director, the state holds workshops with each county to collect buy-in and formulate a plan for day-to-day interoperability. The Georgia State Patrol provides each county with the necessary equipment: a radio gateway unit; workstation gateway unit; router; firewall; multiprotocol label switching circuit; and a common platform in the form of VHF radio, which is a Motorola CDM1550.

GTRI staff meet with each county to customize the network for its individual needs and provide technical assistance and training.

The network costs an average of \$130,000 to \$135,000 per county, according to Brown. "It is completely federally funded with the exception of the network recurring costs, which is a state endeavor."

Counties can make additional investments if they desire. Several counties have added more radio gateway units to get additional radio frequencies, Brown said. The provided radio gateway unit has eight ports; the first port is used by the statewide radio VHF, which leaves seven ports available.

"I think the thing that works for Georgia about this technology is that locals don't have to replace their systems because that would be very cost prohibitive," said Leigh McCook, a GTRI principal research associate. "It doesn't make those systems obsolete, but it makes the systems talk and work with each other with their existing technologies."

Combining Efforts

The state patrol hopes to increase buy-in by covering future maintenance. "If you leave it up to individual collaboration, you don't get the level of participation you would like to occur," said Brown. By providing and installing the network equipment for the counties, the state doesn't have to worry that some counties won't be able to allot money for it. "Maintenance and all the issues are taken care of, and the state also pays for network recurring costs, and gives us a common platform that all can use without people determining that it's not as big a necessity as we believe interoperability in Georgia is."

The provided training enables county participants to be comfortable with the network and ready to use it when needed.

The GTRI's role is working with each county to determine what type of equipment is needed to implement the system. Brown said the GTRI is acting as an independent validation party and a technical resource. "They provide technical assistance to the locals in implementing the network, and they are also working to provide training for the locals," McCook said.

GEMA works as the grant manager to ensure the cost is reasonable, according to Reichart. The agency is responsible for the U.S. National Response Framework's emergency support function No. 2 -- interoperable communications, and emergency and disaster response -- so it's important to have a robust, statewide communications system.

"We come from different perspectives, but the idea is to meet the goal for the citizens of Georgia and determine the best, most cost-effective strategy to solve whatever problem arises," Brown said, later adding that the network isn't a panacea.

"It doesn't reach the Level 6 form of interoperability that we would all like to achieve, but it does give us a Level 4 opportunity whereby we can be financially responsible."

According to research from the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center, Level 4 interoperability is called "pragmatic interoperability" -- when systems exchange data with some expectation of meaning. Level 6, called "conceptual interoperability," is the topmost level, when systems can make full use of data passed between them.

Reichert recommends that all counties find a reliable person to train on the network. "The 911 industry is, by its very nature, one that has a great deal of turnover," he said. "One thing that we found is we need to train the trainer within each of those PSAPs that has the equipment with someone who will be longstanding." Find the person who has the best chance of continuing with the agency. Since the technology isn't used every day, it's important to keep people up-to-date on the information.

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City of Norwich Mutual Aid Group Emergency First Responders Present Interoperability Challenges, Solutions for Local Area – Possibly CT State

January 27, 2009

SOA World Magazine

By Business Wire

URL: <http://in.sys-con.com/node/820724>

Yantic Fire Engine Company Chief Frank Blanchard presented the communications interoperability solutions that have been implemented throughout the City of Norwich Mutual Aid Group, affecting the numerous first responders from around the mutual aid group who also attended the event. Congressman Joe Courtney, 2nd District, CT, also attended the event and discussed the importance of these efforts and the implications they have on the community, and potentially the entire state.

“During catastrophic structure fires, such as the recent fires at Stonington Estates, the Peachtree Apartments and the Phelps Dodge Factory, first responders experienced serious communication issues due to the need for multiple responding agencies, who currently communicate on different radio frequencies,” said Chief Blanchard. “A lack of interoperability between those various responding agencies detracts from the timeliness and overall operational success of the various first responders – today, we now have a solution.”

Chief Blanchard, who served as incident commander at numerous mutual aid fires throughout the City of Norwich Mutual Aid Region, presented how interoperability communications challenges are being addressed and resolved, and how that resolution addresses problems facing the entire state and other parts of the country. The event was held at 1 p.m. on Friday, January 16, 2009 at the Mohegan Tribal Public Safety Building, where more than 30 guests in attendance, including Congressman Courtney and City of Norwich Mayor Benjamin Lathrop.

“I am pleased to be able to stand with our first responders to provide the technology and resources they need to address the critical interoperability challenge,” said Rep. Joe Courtney. “When first responders arrive on scene with different radios on different frequencies, tools like BAE Systems’ First InterComm™ solution bridge the communications gap and provide our first responders with the seamless communications necessary when every second counts.”

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), available through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, awarded \$282,000 to the City of Norwich Mutual Aid Group to address and resolve interoperability challenges. The funds were then used to purchase units, such as the First

InterComm system from BAE Systems, to meet the emergency response needs of 17 fire departments in the Norwich Region, including the Yantic Fire Company.

“The First InterComm system has been an excellent resolution to the challenges we’ve been facing, helping to save time, lives and personal property – which ultimately results in less widespread catastrophe in emergency situations,” said Blanchard. “The AFG grant did exactly what it was intended – provide funds for firefighters and departments to obtain the technology they need to help save lives.”

The First InterComm system is a voice interoperability solution that allows first responders throughout multiple emergency response departments to communicate among varying radio frequencies using the fire departments existing equipment, ultimately expediting response times, improving coordinated relief efforts and helping save lives.

For more information about the First InterComm system, please visit www.baesystems.com/firstintercomm.

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NPSTC: Proposed P25-TETRA comparison 'dead in the water'

January 26, 2009

Urgent Communications

By Donny Jackson

URL: <http://urgentcomm.com/project25/news/proposed-p25-tetra-0126/>

A proposed comparison of Project 25 (P25) and Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA) technologies—focal public-safety communications standards in North America and Europe, respectively—will not be conducted, according to an official for the National Public-Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC).

“Basically, the comparison is dead in the water,” said Tom Sorley, NPSTC’s technology committee chairman. “It’s not going to happen.”

In November, NPSTC board members voted to proceed with an effort to provide a written comparison of radio systems using P25 and TETRA technologies to educate users on the differences between the technologies. NPSTC agreed to provide a format for the proposed comparison, but the organization said it lacked the resource to do the comparison work and asked for help from the TETRA Association and the P25 Steering Committee.

Sorley said the TETRA Association claimed the proposed scope of the comparison was “way too big” but indicated it might be willing to participate if the scope of the project was narrowed. Meanwhile, representatives of the P25 group said it believe the TETRA Association should pay all costs regarding the proposed comparison, which effectively ended discussions on the matter, he said.

“I’m a little disappointed, but you have to recognize when you can’t really roll the rock up the hill,” Sorley said. “You have to stop at some point.”

Although no formal comparisons have been done, most public-safety officials believe TETRA works well in dense urban environments that are commonplace in Europe but would be too expensive to deploy in vast rural areas that are prevalent in United States.

Other barriers to introducing TETRA in the U.S. include the fact that the European technology was not designed to handle the interference found in the U.S., that such a move could undermine the efforts to make P25 a national interoperability standard, and that vendor giant Motorola—owner of most TETRA intellectual property—has not licensed its TETRA patents in North America.

However, Motorola has said it would license its TETRA patents in the U.S., if TETRA is adopted as a standard by the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) in the country.

“Previously, Motorola has gone on record and stated that it will license its TETRA IPR in the US after it becomes a TIA/US standard, and will do so in a fair and reasonable manner according to the policies set forth by the TIA/US organization,” Motorola said in a prepared statement for *Urgent Communications*.

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