

Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips
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VIPER System Vital to Public Safety and Emergency Response

April 2, 2009

Mountain Times

By Ron Fitzwater

URL: <http://www.mountaintimes.com/mtweekly/2009/0402/viper.php3>

As previously reported in AMT Trooper Lane McNeil of the North Carolina State Highway Patrol appeared before the Ashe County Planning Board for a public hearing to request a variance to the county communications tower ordinance of 30 feet, allowing for the construction of a Federal Aviation Authority approved, 180 foot communications tower on Phoenix Mountain that would be used by multiple non-profit entities including Ashe County first-responders.

The tower will replace the old Blue Ridge Electric (BRE) owned tower currently in place.

The 2002 North Carolina State Legislature mandated the creation of a statewide 800 Megahertz (MHz) radio system for all state emergency responders. The program was named Voice Interoperable Plan for Emergency Responders, or VIPER.

The mission of the VIPER system is to ensure that emergency responders from across different jurisdictions and agency levels will be able to communicate during times of natural or man-made disaster, and to improve the ability for state law enforcement officials to communicate across greater distances and from locations here-to-fore too secluded to permit clear communication.

To make the VIPER system a reality, the legislature tasked the Highway Patrol with the creation of the infrastructure that supports the system.

The construction cost for the new tower and supporting structure will be paid for entirely with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) funds allocated to the NCSHP from the federal agency. BRE will continue to pay the lease on the property and honor existing lease agreements with non-profit organizations using the tower moving forward.

“The funding comes through the North Carolina Department of Emergency Management (NCDEM) and are diverted out into different directions. VIPER is just one of the off-shoots of the program,” McNeil said.

McNeil explained that the VIPER Site Acquisition team has been working to get the 238-site tower system up and running in the state that would effectively create a blanket of coverage over 95 percent of the state. In Ashe County NCSHP is already working with Mount Jefferson State Park to place a VIPER site on the state owned land and the Phoenix Mountain tower is extremely important to the communications network.

“It’s all about inner-operability. If a deputy sheriff gets into a chase, the Ashe County dispatcher has to call the highway patrol dispatcher on the phone and the highway patrol dispatcher has to relay through the phone line all the details of the chase. ‘We’re turning here; we’re turning there; Trooper is putting stop sticks out on 163’ coordinating like that can sometimes be frustrating.”

The VIPER system will according to McNeil eliminate the majority of those situations because with the VIPER system in place and 800 MHz radios in all patrol cars “we can monitor each other’s traffic and respond more quickly to emergency situations.”

According to McNeil two events in recent national history proved the need for inner-operable communications; the attacks of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Those events pushed the public knowledge of the flaws in communicating between departments and varied entities.

Locally, the VIPER system proved extremely useful in late 2008, when Caldwell County sheriff’s deputy Adam William Klutz was shot and killed by Skip Brinkley.

“When the deputy was shot all the all the Sheriffs’ Emergency Response Teams (SERT) from surrounding counties showed up with their county radios and the FBI, the SBI, the highway patrol and some Caldwell County Officers showed up with 800 MHz radios. Well we were able to hand out radios to the SERT units and we could all talk to each other and communicate with the highway patrol helicopter that was assisting in the hunt for the assailant.”

Incidents such as the Klutz shooting and the need to be prepared to respond to natural disasters from Ice Storms to Hurricane spawned flooding makes the VIPER system a vital new tool in emergency response state-wide and locally.

Ashe County Emergency Management Coordinator Patty McMeans has stated that all emergency and first-responder entities in the county are fully behind the project because of the improvement in the coverage area. Chief County Dispatcher Kevin Hardy and area Ham radio operators, who are a vital part of the county’s emergency response system, have also added their support to the program.

Public comment will be entertained when the public hearing on the requested variance reconvenes on April 2 in the small courtroom on the third floor of the Ashe County Courthouse. All persons interested in commenting on the proposed variance are asked to attend.

###

Interoperability urged for border communications

March 31, 2009

Federal Computer Week

By Ben Bain

URL: <http://fcw.com/articles/2009/03/31/web-border-interoperable-communication.aspx>

The communication devices used by local, state and federal authorities working to secure the U.S. border with Mexico must be interoperable, two sheriffs of border counties said today.

Larry Dever, sheriff of Cochise County, Ariz., and Sigifredo González Jr., sheriff of Zapata County, Texas, said improvements are needed so authorities working to secure the border can better communicate with one another. The sheriffs testified before the House Homeland Security Committee’s Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response Subcommittee.

Dever said during an interview after the hearing that a lack of a common frequency for the communication devices was the major problem. However, he said improvements to the existing infrastructure and additional systems, such as mountaintop repeaters, are also needed, as are agreements to build common networks and language.

González, chairman of the Southwestern Border Sheriff's Coalition, said after the hearing that sheriffs in the region are working to establish communications interoperability along the entire U.S./Mexico border. He also said federal authorities must include local authorities in their plans.

"You have to include those local agencies to be able to properly and effectively do the work in those agencies' jurisdictions," González said.

The Obama administration announced a plan March 24 to help stop growing drug-related violence near the border. The Homeland Security Department said it would spend as much as \$184 million on the effort, including more than \$100 million on technology-related programs.

Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas), the subcommittee's chairman, emphasized the need for agencies to work together on problems related to border security.

"How do you coordinate if you don't communicate?" Cuellar said after the hearing. "Didn't we learn from 9/11?... At that time, those first responders couldn't communicate, and that was back in 2001. Here we are in 2009, and we have a crisis across the river, and our local, state and federal [authorities] can't communicate with each other."

###

The D-Block debacle

March 31, 2009

PoliceOne

By Doug Wyllie

URL: <http://www.policeone.com/writers/columnists/Doug-Wyllie/articles/1729089-The-D-Block-debacle/>

Editor's Note: The article below was first posted in August 2008 but remains a very good resource for law enforcement decision-makers who are looking for information on the continuing problems with the creation of a nationwide wireless broadband public safety network. The D-Block has been left in a seemingly perpetual state of uncertainty since this article was first published, but recently there was some interesting activity among some of the principals. In late March 2009, a panel of experts convened in Las Vegas for the International Wireless Communications Exposition (IWCE) Conference, and in one session sought to continue the discussion about the creation of a nationwide mobile broadband data system built in a 10MHz swath of the 700 MHz spectrum. At a general session meeting of the IWCE, Harlin McEwen (chairman of the Public Safety Spectrum Trust) reportedly said that a failure to take advantage

of the current climate regarding the development of a national interoperability network would mean the loss of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The FCC has sought to come up with a new proposal to link the D-Block commercial spectrum auction with the existing public safety spectrum. Similar in some ways to the plan that was summarily ignored by investors last time around, this solution would be paid for by commercial carriers in a public-private partnership. The re-auction is allegedly set to take place in August 2009, but much of the detail around what will ultimately be done here is likely to change. Stay tuned.

When the FCC's wireless spectrum auction came to a close earlier this year, the plan to establish a public/private partnership – through which a robust, multi-purpose, national, interoperable, wireless broadband public safety network would be built – fell short of becoming a reality. In fact, in “falling short” of attracting an investment partner, the nascent public sector broadband network virtually made an audible “ka-thunk” when it hit the ground. This surprised some and left others saying “I told you so.”

Finger-pointing and recriminations aside, the fact is that a much needed national interoperable communications network – conspicuously absent on September 11th 2001 and again during the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005 – remains undone more than decade since it was first proposed.

The reserve price for the so-called D-Block (wireless spectrum set aside for a national public safety broadband communications network) was \$1.33 billion. Considering the fact that the FCC auction (which included four other “blocks”) was a wildly successful financial venture as it netted nearly \$20 billion – nearly double the intended target – this doesn't seem particularly high a price for assuring universal communications interoperability for the nation's first responders. The Street – read: private companies that could have made bids on this valuable swath of wireless real estate – thought otherwise. The D-Block garnered just one bid (\$472 million rumored to be offered by Qualcomm) in the opening round of the auction, and after that, the airwaves both literally and figuratively went dead.

Both the private and public sectors are working to resolve the issue and it's all but certain that a resolution will be carved out between the various interests – a group comprised of the FCC, NPTSC, PSST, APCO, IACP, DHS, wireless industry giants, technology industry titans, and others. But fundamental questions remain. How will the solution be structured; who will fund, build, and maintain it; and perhaps most notably, when it will be in operation?

Building the Information Autobahn

Little known fact: the Swiss and Austrian autobahn systems both require toll “stickers” and the German autobahn recently instituted a toll system for truckers seeking to use the ultra-fast road. The public/private national wireless broadband public safety network would effectively create a nationwide “information toll-road” on which commercial customers would pay for access to the mobile broadband network but would “pull over” to allow first responders to pass in times of emergency. Revenue raised in the collection of “tolls” would go to the ongoing improvements and upkeep that such a network would require.

Potentially at least, this is privatization in its most efficient, elegant form, and in theory would solve the massive problem of not just paying for the construction of the network – no small chunk of change, that – but also enable much faster upgrades to the communications systems than public safety entities use today. It's not atypical for major metropolitan forces (let alone smaller municipalities) to be operating communications gear reliant on decades-old technology. For all practical purposes, this new system would make that problem a thing of the past.

Rocky Road (Block)

The plan, as it originally had been conceived, was to award a nationwide 10 megahertz commercial license in the upper 700 MHz “D-Block” to a winning private sector bidder, provided that aforementioned bidder enter into an FCC-approved Network Sharing Agreement (NSA) with the Public Safety Spectrum Trust Corporation (PSSTC).

This is bureaucrat-speak for: “We’ll license to you a nationwide swath of broadband on which you can build (and sell) valuable services, just as long as you give priority access to first responders in a time of critical need.”

The 10MHz of “space” that comprises the D-Block effectively would have been divided into two 5MHz segments – one devoted to public safety and the other set up for “paying customers” with a need for a high-speed national broadband (voice + data) network. These paying customers could include, but certainly not limited to, railroad companies, long-haul trucking concerns, passenger airlines, as well as national and international enterprises with large numbers of “mobile workers” who maintain their workplace in the nation’s hotels and convention centers. This premium would represent a significant source of revenue for the winning bidder.

No dice. The stakes proved just a shade too high for investors. Many feel that the rules and restrictions outlined in the auction became hurdles set too high to make the prospect an appealing business venture, despite the potential upside.

Changing the Rules

Even before the auction began, many had said that the rules governing the auction of D-Block spectrum had preordained the outcome we’re now faced with. While the FCC is to be commended for doing something that government agencies fastidiously avoid – that is to say it tried something new and untested – we can also say that the rules were certainly part of the problem, and rule changes are a must if the re-auction is to be successful.

Earlier this month, APCO suggested changes to the FCC rules that would significantly sweeten the pot for potential bidders by doubling the offer from a 10-megahertz block to be divided two ways to a 20-megahertz of spectrum to that which is already allocated to creating a public safety network. This idea may prove workable – it certainly makes the potential payoff for the winning bidder a lot more appealing.

Another idea that’s been floated is to remove the requirement that the network be coupled to a national licensee and instead create a set of technical specifications that regional bidders would

have to meet. U.S. Cellular advocated this concept at the recent meeting of the principals from the FCC and the other parties concerned that was held in early August in Brooklyn, New York.

Under such an arrangement, the burden of the business “risk” would be shared more broadly – perhaps a half dozen or more companies would shoulder the cost and responsibility of building out the system rather than just one. This seems like an excellent idea, particularly from the standpoint of seeking to get the attention of the private sector, although many people in the public sector remain wary of the concept.

Still another solution is to simply reduce the asking price – many speculate that the original \$1.3 billion reserve price was prohibitive – for the privilege of spending some unknown sum or money to build out the infrastructure. A different but nonetheless numerically-based answer could be to drop the required population coverage from its present mark of 99 percent to something along the lines of 93-94 percent, with the theory being that a truly serious mass casualty incident (other than a downed airplane) is less likely to happen in a very rural area not covered by the network than it is to happen in an urban area that is. Similar to this solution is an idea to extend the build-out deadline (the date by which the system would be operational) by five or ten years. Considering the fact that it’s been more than a decade since the national communications network was mandated by the Congress and Clinton administration, time may not be the best variable for negotiations.

Political Remedy?

The prospect of a private/public partnership to solve this problem continues to have a great deal of appeal among people presently holding and/or seeking political office – and in case you hadn’t noticed, there are several such folks getting a considerable amount of attention these days.

As recently as early July, presumptive Republican presidential candidate John McCain mentioned the need for a public safety broadband network at the National Sheriff’s Association Annual Conference. McCain last year sought to double the broadband capacity that the FCC set aside for public safety. The measure failed, and in point of fact was doomed from the outset, but the Republican surely will make an effort to help out the cause of the public safety broadband network from the “bully pulpit” should he win in November.

For his part, Senator Barack Obama, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, has spoken from the stump of the need for a national Chief Technology Officer who would hammer out the details of private/public partnership. This could prove an effective tactic since the CTO would have the bandwidth – pun intended – to get deep into the weeds on creating a framework solution with the FCC and other parties.

Regardless of who wins the Presidency, it’s abundantly clear that there will be a new regime in the White House and new faces in both the House and the Senate. Many of these people will bring to the Beltway a new energy and potentially even some new ideas – no guarantees on either front, but one can hope.

Lines of Communication

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin recently indicated that the decision on whether to re-auction the 700 MHz D-Block spectrum could happen in September. September begins next week, and thus far, no news from Martin or the other Commissioners, let alone from the private sector. We did hear from PoliceOne readers however — check out the results of our poll question in the chart below.

Even in the pursuit of this article, there has been nothing from the private sector but radio silence regarding the public safety network. Various companies in the computer technology and wireless broadband sectors contacted by PoliceOne chose to “...not comment at this time...” or opted to not reply to our outreach at all.

Ralph Haller, Chairman of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) did reply to our request for comment and said in an email to PoliceOne: “We are encouraged at the progress being made within the community to resolve the differences between some of our NPSTC members and look forward to a resolution so we can get the national broadband network built for our first responder community.”

Haller is talking about the fact that all the interested parties are talking. This is good because the viability of a public/private partnership for public safety communications interoperability and mobile broadband access will depend on these open lines of communication. Being hashed out are those lingering questions, like whether there be a re-auction in February 2009 as planned. If the re-auction happens, will licenses be made regional or will they remain national? Will the target build-out schedule stay at ten years or jump to fifteen? Will the reserve price be lowered, and if so, to what level?

Most importantly, how can the FCC be sure that the rules it sets out for the re-auction will actually result in a winning bidder, and what will it do if no one steps to the table? Maybe the thing to which the FCC will revert – notwithstanding whatever happens in November in the House, Senate and White House races – will be to ask Congress to rewrite the rules governing the rule-writing such that the national public safety network can become a publicly-funded operation.

After all, tax dollars pay for practically every other piece of public safety infrastructure.

###

DHS seeks info on Common Operational Picture

March 30, 2009

Federal Computer Week

By Ben Bain

URL: <http://fcw.com/articles/2009/03/30/web-cop-rfi.aspx>

The Homeland Security Department is seeking advice from industry on how to improve its national Common Operational Picture (COP), which is used to provide situational awareness for federal, state and local officials during disasters.

DHS activated COP in May 2006 and uses it for strategic, operational and tactical purposes at the department's National Operations Center. Officials plan to upgrade COP, refresh technology, and eventually build a new version that would accommodate improved visualization and more users.

DHS has asked companies with experience in refreshing COP technology and building a decision support system for advice. Officials want to see how difficult it would be to get the capabilities they want from the planned upgrades, according to a request for information published today on the Federal Business Opportunities Web site.

DHS said the COP and decision support system should be presented through a single user interface, be available on mobile devices, fully support Web 2.0 technologies, use DHS enterprise information-sharing tools, allow for the addition of real-time updates, and have unclassified, secret and top-secret levels. The department also wants COP to improve how sensitive but unclassified data travels between the operations center and DHS' partners via the Homeland Security Information Network, the notice states.

Responses are due by April 10.

###

States Aren't Spending Funds to Improve Communications for Emergency Workers

March 30, 2009

McClatchy Newspapers

By David Coffey

URL: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics/AP/story/975701.html>

WASHINGTON -- Nearly \$1 billion intended to improve the ability of emergency workers to talk to each other has been sitting in the federal Treasury for 18 months.

The problem? States aren't spending the money. Some, such as New York, are just getting started on upgrades that their grants will cover. Others, such as North Carolina, say they can't pay the one-fifth of the cost that federal grants require.

"For God's sake, get with it!" growled Kentucky Rep. Hal Rogers, the ranking Republican member of the House Subcommittee on Homeland Security, at a recent hearing on the matter.

The Sept. 11 Commission, in its 2004 analysis of the World Trade Center collapse, cited the inability of first responders to communicate as a large and deadly problem. Some firefighters, for example, never got the evacuation orders carried over police radios because of confusion over which personnel were assigned which frequency.

Kentucky offers a more recent case in point. A January ice storm killed 36 people in the state, many in counties with no way to handle emergency calls after their normal phone lines and cellular networks failed, according to Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward Tonini, the head of the state's National Guard.

A \$1.6 million federal grant to help Kentucky purchase satellite phones for use in such emergencies is unspent thus far. In fact, Kentucky hasn't requested any of the \$15 million it was awarded, said Michael Embry, a spokesperson for the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security.

The money comes from a September 2007 appropriation of \$1 billion intended to help states pay for multichannel radios, satellite phones, radio towers and training to use them. An earlier grant of \$2.1 billion had left some communities well-prepared and others untouched.

Rogers said that only 6.4 percent of the 2007 grant has been spent.

The lag doesn't mean that work isn't under way, said Chris Essid, the director of the Office of Emergency Communications at the Department of Homeland Security.

States pay for the work and equipment themselves, Essid said, and may not have applied for reimbursements yet. They have until September 2010 to do so.

A survey of state activity produced some more complicated explanations, however.

For example, New York, which plans to spend \$60 million on new radio towers and technology upgrades, is "nowhere near completion" on any of the projects, said Amy Bonanno, a state spokeswoman.

North Carolina hasn't started on a \$22 million upgrade to its statewide first-responder radio system, said Capt. Everett Clendenin, a spokesman for the State Highway Patrol. That's because it's not clear where the state's fifth of the money will come from, he said.

But in Louisiana, projects are moving ahead, and reimbursements are requested weekly, said Brant Mitchell, a spokesman for the state's Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

Louisiana has received nearly \$9 million of its \$19 million grant, Mitchell said, and reimbursement takes about 24 hours.

###

Ala. Homeland Security marks milestone

March 30, 2009

Montgomery Advertiser

By Markeshia Ricks

URL: <http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/article/20090330/NEWS02/903300303/1009>

By many standards, six years isn't a long time.

That is how long the Alabama Department of Homeland Security has been in existence as of this month.

In that short time, the fledgling department has racked up an impressive resume.

Because of homeland security, the state has a mutual aid system that allows emergency and law enforcement personnel to respond wherever disaster strikes, and it has used technology to create a nationally recognized virtual visualization tool that is the envy of many states. But with a new administration at the helm nationally and a 2010 governor's race on the horizon, officials are looking toward the future.

Jim Walker, the department's director, said his department is the new kid on the government block, but it's tried to establish a foundational legacy that the next person in his shoes can build on.

Walker is a cabinet-level appointee, who serves at the pleasure of the governor and he could be replaced with a change of administration.

"I'm a former Army officer, so I'm looking at the other side of the hill," he said.

On the other side of the hill is a new secretary of homeland security -- only the second secretary in the department's short history -- who serves at the pleasure of a new president that has sought to distance himself from many of the policies of his predecessor.

Walker, who serves on the executive council of the National Governors Association Homeland Security Advisors Council, said he hasn't had an opportunity to meet Secretary Janet Napolitano yet, but he's optimistic about her leadership and what it means for states.

"She's a former governor and I believe she has a keen understanding of what state governments and local governments face," he said.

Lauree Ashcom, a spokeswoman for the Alabama Emergency Management Agency, said the biggest challenge that state and local governments face is continuing to build capacity to respond to natural and man-made disasters as well as potential acts of terrorism.

"Our challenges are the same as other agencies and even the citizenry of Alabama," she said. "We are always looking for more efficient ways to perform our tasks so that we get the most use of the funding we have."

Will Ware, policy analyst for the homeland security and technology division of the National Governors Association, said Napolitano has signaled that she shares many of the same priorities that state directors of homeland security have.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices released a survey of homeland security directors earlier this month that found that their top five priorities were: coordinating the efforts of state and local agencies; developing interoperable communications for emergency responders; identifying and protecting critical infrastructure; and developing a state intelligence fusion center and strengthening citizen preparedness.

"In total, Secretary Napolitano has released 12 action directives," Ware said in an e-mailed response. "Some of these -- critical infrastructure protection, state, local and tribal integration, interoperability -- also were cited by state homeland security directors as top priorities in the survey."

Walker said 87 percent of Alabama's ability to respond to any kind of disaster is at the local level, and the funding that flows from the federal government should reflect that.

He said it's easy to dismiss rural America when it comes to domestic disasters because there aren't any big buildings or millions of people to consider.

Walker said that mindset is seen in the struggle at the national level over funding that pits the 50 biggest cities in the country against everybody else. Those struggles often end in rural America getting a lot fewer resources.

"But when you look at it, who is better able to respond in time of crisis ... you have to recognize that rural America is relevant," he said. "There is a place for rural America because we would be able to respond to a city that has been incapacitated."

For a testament to what it means to have a coordinated state and local response, he points to disasters caused by hurricanes like Katrina and Ivan, during which Alabama was able to marshal response teams and equipment while housing more than 10,000 people who evacuated from other states.

"No other state has been able to do that," he said.

Walker said when he became director his goal wasn't to take over the responsibilities of any other department, but to use homeland security resources and expertise to empower local and state governments and citizens to respond in times of crisis.

He's taken the same approach to how Alabama uses the funding it receives from the federal government for homeland security activities.

Instead of treating the state's department of homeland security as a granting agency that doles out money to applicants who seek it, stakeholders from every region of the state have a hand in deciding how the money is spent once it gets to Alabama.

And stakeholders aren't limited to law enforcement and emergency management, but also public health, transportation and agriculture.

Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries Commissioner Ron Sparks said much of the training and upgrades in the security of state labs wouldn't have been possible if his department hadn't worked so closely with the state Department of Homeland Security.

"It has been extremely important for us to lay out our priorities and work with other local and state officials," Sparks said. "Alabama has really shined in that regard and we haven't had any turf battles.

"Jim Walker and his agency have respected us, and we've built a system that other states look to as a model."

Walker said he believes the relationships between state departments, local governments and law enforcement will be among the biggest legacy left when someone else is in the governor's office next year. But he hopes that the next administration will continue to build on the progress of its predecessors.

"We want people to have a sense of personal responsibility when it comes to homeland security," he said. "You have a vested interest and it's your responsibility to reach out and take care of you family and you community. We hope we've been a stepping stone for empowering people."

###

First responders get linked up wirelessly by WPI and BAE

March 27, 2009

Mass High Tech

By Brendan Lynch

URL: <http://www.masshightech.com/stories/2009/03/23/weekly8-First-responders-get-linked-up-wirelessly-by-WPI-and-BAE-.html>

Local researchers are using wireless technology to bridge the frequency gap between different communications systems used by police, firefighters and other first responders.

At Worcester Polytechnic Institute, assistant professor Alexander Wyglinski and his team of student researchers are developing cognitive radio applications to help first responders communicate without worrying about clogged frequencies at emergency sites crowded with multiple agencies.

"It's like a Tower of Babel situation," he said. "You have police, fire, Coast Guard — all with different wireless standards," he said.

A software radio device based on cognitive radio could determine which piece of the wireless spectrum — the frequencies occupied by mobile phones, radio, broadcast television or wi-fi devices, among others — is the best one for efficient emergency communications. If radio frequencies are jammed, it could reconfigure to the cellular band. If a police officer has a cell phone and a firefighter has a walkie-talkie, it could bridge the gap — without the user even knowing, Wyglinski said.

Wyglinski and his students are working on artificial intelligence algorithms using cognitive radio platforms, including a software radio beacon to allow first responders to announce their presence, and the ability to break messages into components, transmit them over several frequencies, and reconstitute them at the other end.

In a report released last November, ABI Research estimates the market for wireless terminals used by emergency first responders will grow from more than \$1 billion last year to more than \$3.6 billion by 2013. The report says increasing standardization will fuel the market, and that over time, more federal funds will flow to companies.

One of those companies, BAE Systems Inc. in Hudson, N.H., has developed a wi-fi-based interoperability system that has spread to first responder units outside New England and could soon expand beyond voice transmission.

BAE's First Intercomm is a device stored in a police cruiser or fire truck that lets the agencies communicate with on another regardless of what kind of communications equipment they use. The system uses an ad-hoc mesh network, similar to a household wi-fi network, to bridge the gap among different communications systems.

Mike Greene, BAE's director for homeland security solutions, said the First Intercomm has moved from trial runs in Maine and New Hampshire in late 2007 to being deployed in those states as well as Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Georgia and Oklahoma. Of those, Connecticut, Georgia, New York and New Jersey are paying customers, while the others are conducting trials.

Feedback from New Hampshire and Connecticut led to recent tweaks, Greene said. Users can now see which municipalities have arrived at an emergency scene and what equipment they have brought. They also are able to track the arrivals and departures of police or fire departments. BAE is developing transmission of video and other data besides voice. First responders from different groups could use the system to instant message, video chat, or share maps, arrest records, chemical data sheets, property violations and infrared camera footage, Greene said.

"Some people say, 'That's like the TV show '24,'" he said.

###

NIST publishes guide for emergency communications testing

March 26, 2009

Government Computer News

By Patrick Marshall

URL: <http://gcn.com/articles/2009/03/26/nist-emergency-communications.aspx>

The National Institute of Standards and Technology has published the 2009 edition of NIST Handbook 153, titled "Laboratory Recognition Process for Project 25 Compliance Assessment."

The guide, published as part of NIST's Project 25 Conformity Assessment Program aimed at ensuring interoperability of communications for first responders and the military, details the procedures agencies and departments can employ to evaluate the ability of independent testing laboratories to determine whether public safety and emergency communications devices meet Project 25 interoperability standards.

The Project 25 suite of interoperability standards is being developed by representatives from local, state and federal public safety associations and agencies.

The handbook can be downloaded [here](#).

###

New program evaluates labs for emergency communications tests

March 25, 2009

By Michael Newman

URL: http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2009-03/nios-npe032509.php

To help ensure that first responders, public safety officers and military personnel can always talk with each other no matter what communications equipment they are using (a characteristic known as interoperability), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have teamed up to create the Project 25 Conformity Assessment Program (P25 CAP).

The latest milestone of the recently launched program is the publication of the 2009 edition of NIST Handbook 153, Laboratory Recognition Process for Project 25 Compliance Assessment. The guide details the procedures by which independent testing laboratories can be evaluated for their ability to determine how well public safety and emergency communications devices meet the performance standard for interoperability known as Project 25 (P25).

NIST Handbook 153 – Laboratory Recognition Process for Project 25 – Compliance Assessment, January 2009 may be downloaded from the OLES documents Web site at www.eeel.nist.gov/oles/Publications/NIST%20Handbook%20153%20edition%202009.pdf.

Initially, P25 CAP focuses on the most mature of the nine interoperability standards that will eventually make up the P25 suite—the Common Air Interface (CAI). The CAI is the standard that describes the physical and logistical characteristics of a link between the two stations that make up a radio communication system—the base and mobile handsets. A radio using P25 CAI should be able to communicate with any other P25 CAI radio, regardless of what manufacturers produced the two units.

As other interfaces become better defined, they will be added to the testing lab assessment criteria.

NIST's Office of Law Enforcement Standards (OLES) designed the P25 CAP protocols that are being used by DHS's Office of Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) to recognize

independent laboratories across the country capable of offering interoperability testing of equipment to manufacturers and users.

The P25 suite of interoperability standards is being developed by representatives from local, state and federal public safety associations and agencies. It is administered by the Telecommunications Industry Association.

Laboratories wishing to be reviewed for their P25 testing ability should contact Dereck Orr, dereck.orr@nist.gov, (303) 497-5400. For more information on the P25 CAP, contact Orr or Luke Berndt, DHS, at luke.berndt@dhs.gov, (202) 254-5332.

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LA-RICS program to ease emergency communication snags

March 24, 2009

San Gabriel Tribune

By Bethania Palma Markus

URL: http://www.sgvtribune.com/news/ci_11986145

After disasters like the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks and raging Southern California wildfires, fire and police departments have worked toward improving regional emergency communication.

Area public safety agencies are banding together to form the Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications System, or LA-RICS. The system would allow police and fire departments to communicate with ease during a disaster.

"What's going on is a result of many years of short-comings and frustrations, where you've got multiple agencies trying to operate together on the same incident," said L.A. County Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman.

Currently, Freeman said, the methods for inter-agency communication are clumsy at best.

Fred Latham, Santa Fe Springs city manager and chairman for LA-RICS governing body, said the federal inquiry into Sept. 11 identified the inability of agencies to communicate with each other as a major concern.

"The fire departments and police departments in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. couldn't talk to each other, sometimes the police and fire departments couldn't talk within in the same city," he said.

The LA-RICS program aims to ease communication for emergency responders by designating radio frequencies for inter-agency communication.

"LA-RICS takes advantage of all frequencies that are allocated to the greater L.A. area, plus all the infrastructure," Freeman said.

It will cost anywhere

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from \$700 million to \$1 billion to build, Latham said. Officials will discuss applying for federal stimulus money to help fund the project at an April steering committee meeting.

Most area cities, like Pasadena, West Covina and Whittier, are participating. But Diamond Bar was one of the few cities that voted to opt out at its last City Council meeting. City officials said there was no need to participate since the L.A. County Sheriff's Department runs their public safety.

"It would be important for larger cities," Councilman Jack Tanaka said. "But for a city like Diamond Bar, we do rely on county fire and sheriff's for public safety."

The LA-RICS governing board allows the contract cities one seat for representation. Larger cities with their own public safety agencies, like Los Angeles and Long Beach, have dedicated seats.

Officials hope the system will be up and running within two or three years.

"This is being put in place so we can overcome the obstacles we have right now," said West Covina Fire Chief Paul Segalla. "We're looking at it as a great enhancement to aid in our every day incidents, not just catastrophes."

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Speaker: National Emergency Communications Plan making 'huge progress'

March 23, 2009

Urgent Communications

By Glenn Bischoff

URL: http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/national-emergency-communications-plan-20090323/

Only eight states had statewide interoperability plans in place when the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP)—an initiative that established nationwide goals for emergency communications—was launched in July 2008. Today, all 56 states and territories have such plans, according to Chris Essid, the Department of Homeland Security's director of the office of emergency communications, who last week provided an update on the plan during the International Wireless Communications Exposition (IWCE) in Las Vegas.

"That's a major accomplishment and huge progress," Essid said.

Essid said he was encouraged that 51 of the 56 states and territories had requested workshops that would provide guidance on how to best implement the plan. Many of the workshops already have been conducted, and the remainder should be completed sometime in June, he said.

There's still plenty of additional work to be done. The NECP established 92 milestones, of which only the first 11 have been completed. However, Essid noted that each of those initial milestones was completed on time. "That's pretty good," he said.

Essid likened the task of getting the NECP in place—and the progress made to date—to running a marathon.

"We've only completed the first five miles of the marathon," he said. "But no one ever finishes a marathon without completing the first five miles."

Also encouraging is that public-safety officials are beginning to understand that achieving interoperable communications—the primary goal of the NECP—depends on much more than technology, he said. "It's not about technology. Rather, it's about establishing a common way of doing things."

The ability to establish a common approach depends on public-safety officials leaving their silos and thinking regionally. Significant progress has been made in this area, but there's still a long way to go, according to Essid. The NECP is aligned with the goals of DHS' SAFECOM grant guidance, but only about half of the grants submitted reflect this guidance.

"That's not good enough. We need this guidance used across all grants," Essid said. "We're not done."

The DHS has scheduled an NECP workshop in Chicago for April 22-24. More information can be obtained at www.nationalecconference.com.

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