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Catalyst demonstrates bridging systems interface for radio control over IP

April 15, 2009

Government Security News

URL: <http://www.gsnmagazine.com/cms/features/news-analysis/1840.html>

Interoperability - Forest, VA-based Catalyst Communications Technologies, a provider of radio control over IP solutions (RoIP) to the land mobile radio marketplace, has demonstrated a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) bridge to five other RoIP-based interoperability solutions on the bridging systems interface (BSI), according to a company statement.

Catalyst characterizes the BSI as a DHS-led VoIP interoperability initiative, whose working group has established a list of qualitative requirements that each VoIP solution must meet. These requirements specify that each VoIP interface must be compatible and interchangeable, reliable, affordable, scalable and manageable.

The BSI core profile, published in September 2008, is currently implemented in a total of 12 bridging devices to support basic voice interoperability for the public safety community, according to Catalyst.

Catalyst's bridge supports such radio protocols as Smartnet, P25, EDACS, iDEN and LTR.

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The security of the U.S. communications network, I

April 15, 2009

HSDaily Wire

URL: <http://hsdailywire.com/single.php?id=7781>

A few vandals, equipped with pliers, last Thursday cut fiber-optics cables in the San Francisco Bay area, paralyzing wireless, Internet, phone, and emergency communication for more than twelve hours; what does this tell us about the vulnerability to disruption of the U.S. communication network?

We reported yesterday that AT&T had increased to \$250,000 the reward it was offering tipsters who offered information leading to the arrest of the vandals who last Thursday cut the company's fiber-optic cables in three San Francisco Bay area counties (see 14 April 2009 HS Daily Wire). The fact that a simple snip of a few fiber-optic communications cables could leave thousands of people in Silicon Valley and throughout parts of the San Francisco Bay Area without phone, Internet, or wireless service for more than twelve hours raises questions about the security of U.S. critical infrastructure.

CNet News's Marguerite Reardon writes that the San Jose Police Department is investigating the incidents, which took place in two different locations in San Jose and San Carlos and classified as acts of vandalism. If amateur vandals with a pair of pliers could paralyze vital communication link in a large area where major technology companies are headquartered, how difficult would it be for more sophisticated terrorists to take down the U.S. communications network? Should

more be done to protect the fiber optic cables that ring our communities and crisscross the country carrying all of our communications?

"A couple of well-placed attacks could do a lot of damage to the communications network," said Sam Greenholtz, co-founder and principal of Telecom Pragmatics, a consulting and research firm specializing in the telecommunications market. "And it's not really that hard to figure out where the fiber optic cables are laid and to get access to them."

AT&T is offering a \$250,000 reward to anyone who can provide information that leads to the arrest and conviction of the vandals. AT&T also said that following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, its networks were declared National Critical Infrastructures, which means that anyone who tampers with, destroys, or disrupts the company's network or its components is in violation of both federal and state laws.

Reardon writes that what with the recent news about how the U.S. power grid has been compromised by hacker -- who left " sleeper " applications behinds to be remotely activated at a later date (see 8 April 2009 HS Daily Wire) -- many are left to wonder how vulnerable the communications network really is. She talked to a few experts about how telecommunications networks are built and how they operate, and she writes that she concluded that while it is somewhat easy to figure out where fiber is laid and to gain access to the fiber infrastructure in the ground, it is much harder actually to cause major damage unless you know what you're doing.

Reardon explains that in the AT&T fiber cut case, it was fairly easy for the perpetrator to access the fiber-optic cables that were eventually cut. Sgt. Lopez said that it appeared that whoever cut the fibers simply lifted the manhole cover, went down the ladder, and cut two cables.

Knowing exactly which manhole cover to open and which cables to cut that would cause widespread damage to the network is another story, however. Greenholtz, who was a former manager in the Planning and Engineering Group at Verizon where he worked for nearly twenty-eight years, said that causing a network outage of this magnitude was likely orchestrated by someone who not only knew which manholes provided access to AT&T fibers, but also knew which places on the network were most vulnerable and could cause the most damage. "The manhole covers are not locked," he said. "Anybody can open them and go down there. But most of these networks have redundancy and diversity built-in to the architecture, so if you cut a cable, it reroutes itself and recovers." Greenholtz explained that someone with knowledge of the network would know the most vulnerable points in the network and could pinpoint those areas.

AT&T declined to discuss specifics of the company's network architecture, but experts say that the Baby Bell phone companies, such as AT&T's predecessor SBC Communications, typically built their regional fiber networks in rings. The rings themselves would help provide protection against an outage, because if a line were cut, the traffic could just reverse itself in less than fifty milliseconds and go the other direction around the ring.

The phone companies also typically ran redundant lines that are spaced some distance apart from each other, so that if one line is cut, there is also a separate fiber carrying the traffic. To ensure

that the redundant line can handle excess traffic in an emergency, most phone companies run these systems at 50 percent capacity.

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DHS Testing Laboratory First Nationally to Receive Accreditation

April 13, 2009

EK Update

By Karen Lynn

URL: <http://www.prm.eku.edu/Update/?issue=124&department=0&article=1480>

A U.S. Department of Homeland Security-funded laboratory in Somerset recently became the first in the nation to receive accreditation by the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation for testing emergency response information technology.

The laboratory is part of the National Incident Management System Support Center – a program established between the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Justice & Safety Center at ECU. Evaluations conducted at the laboratory aim to verify that systems conform to interoperability standards and can exchange critical messages during disasters.

According to David Barrabee, section chief for the Indiana Department of Homeland Security and member of the steering group for this initiative, standards are necessary to ensure safety among emergency responders. “The application of NIMS standards by public safety entities promotes interoperability and compatibility...and provides these employees with a safer work environment,” said Barrabee.

To achieve accreditation status, the laboratory was required to meet general requirements for the competencies of testing and calibration laboratories, as provided in ISO/IEC 17025:2005. A laboratory’s fulfillment of these requirements means the laboratory meets both the technical competence requirements and management system requirements that are necessary for it to consistently deliver technically valid test results.

Most evaluations conducted at the laboratory today are part of the NIMS Supporting Technology Evaluation Program, which is designed to assist responders when making purchases to ensure products conform to national standards and guidelines. Since 2005, ECU has worked in partnership with the Science Applications International Corporation, G&H International Services, FEMA and other test and evaluation divisions of DHS on the formation of this program.

Another member of the steering group, Marc Berryman of the Greater Harris County (Texas) 9-1-1 Emergency Network stressed the need for testing to ensure that diverse systems will work during an incident.

“As 9-1-1 and emergency communications continue to advance, enabling increased information sharing of all types, it is increasingly important that the equipment and communications

networks relied on by emergency response organizations conform to national standards," said Berryman.

State and local purchasing agencies may request that vendors apply for an evaluation as part of this program through the one of the following Web sites: www.nimsstep.org or www.fema.gov/emergency/nims. Evaluations are conducted at no cost to vendors. The results of evaluations are made availability through the Responder Knowledge Base at www.rkb.us.

NIMS STEP is one of many emergency preparedness initiatives operating under the FEMA-EKU cooperative agreement. The Justice & Safety Center at ECU is a federally funded research, technical assistance and training center. The mission of the center is to support the efforts of public safety and security agencies by providing information and access to training, technology and best practices for the emergency response community.

###

FCC designates 4.9 GHz fixed applications as primary

April 10, 2009

Urgent Communications

By Donny Jackson

URL: http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/fcc-fixed-applications-primary-20090410/

FCC commissioners yesterday released an order granting primary status to fixed 4.9 GHz links, which previously were given secondary status in the spectrum band dedicated to public safety.

"By clarifying that 4.9GHz fixed links that connect base and mobile stations used to deliver broadband services are afforded primary status under our rules, the commission is promoting more intensive use of the spectrum for broadband applications in the band," FCC Acting Chairman Michael Copps said in a statement. "This, in turn, will provide first responders with greater ability to use emerging broadband technologies to share crucial broadband data and thereby assist those in need, address emergency situations and disasters, and save lives."

When the FCC established the 4.9 GHz band as licensed spectrum dedicated to public safety, most in the industry believed the frequencies would be used primarily to deliver broadband services in mobile environments, including ad-hoc networks created at the scene of an incident. While these mobile uses were given primary status, fixed 4.9 GHz links were given secondary status, which made many public-safety communications officials wary about using networks in the band for mission-critical applications.

With yesterday's order, the FCC removed "a lot of the regulatory uncertainty that customers had" about 4.9 GHz fixed applications, said Gregory Henderson, director of wireless broadband products and technology for Tyco Electronics Wireless Systems. As an example, Henderson noted one potential conflict between a fixed video-surveillance application at a nuclear power plant and an application that allows a law-enforcement officer to conduct a virus scan on a mobile laptop.

"Both of those are important, but you might argue that the video surveillance of the nuclear power plant is a more mission-critical application than the virus scan in the laptop," he said. "But, in the old rules, you would say that the virus scan in the laptop is primary and the video-surveillance link is secondary, and that's what we believe didn't make sense. It's up to the users how they want to use this spectrum, and they can make judgments as to what are the most important applications in the spectrum."

With the new rules, fixed applications and mobile applications are on "equal footing" as licensees try to resolve any interference issues, Henderson said.

"Rather than have the regulations state that some applications are more important than others, it's up to the individual users and public-safety officials to work with each other and manage interference, but they get to make the judgment about their own networks as to which applications might be more important," he said.

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Green Bay Led Departure from '10-code' Emergency Dispatches

Law enforcement increasingly stressing 'plain speak'

April 10, 2009

Gannett Wisconsin Media

By John Lee

URL:

<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/article/20090410/GPG0101/904100557/1207/GPG01>

New London Police Chief Kevin Wilkinson heard the radio call while working his city's St. Patrick's Day celebration last month: "10-61."

To Wilkinson and his department, 10-61 means an officer is clear for communication. For the State Patrol, though, it means a traffic stop.

"I responded 'Plain speak, please,' " he said, demanding clarification.

Increasingly, police and firefighters are dropping the 10-codes made popular in scores of television shows and films in favor of "plain-speak" communications favor the regular words people use in regular conversation.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration is spearheading the move after learning 10-codes that convey different information to different departments hampered efforts to cope with the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. The agency originally told agencies in late 2005 they'd need to speak "plain English" on the radio to qualify for federal grants, but softened the requirement of plain speak only for multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional communications.

Green Bay police have used primarily plain English on the radio for more than a decade. A few 10 codes remain and are used primarily as shorthand for administrative tasks and status updates.

"I've been here 15½ years and it's been clear text the entire time I've been here," Lt. Karl Ackerman said. "There are few common ones out there, but primarily it's plain English rather than having guys trying to decipher 10 codes.

"It gives you a clear understanding of what's going on."

Brown County Public Safety Communications Director James Nickel said the driving force behind clear text communication was inter-agency operation and the National Incident Management System.

Clear text became the standard in Brown County several years ago, Nickel said.

Some 10 codes are never going to go away and that's not a problem, Nickel said. The ones that remain — such as 10-4 — are the same everywhere.

"Those are so simple that everyone understands it," he said

Wilkinson said he learned one set of 10-codes when he worked in California, then had to learn them all over again when he joined the Appleton Police Department.

"You used to have to keep a little chart with you," Wilkinson said. "We have tried to de-emphasize them. A lot of them are old habit."

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Survey Finds Improved Interoperability

April 8, 2009

Radio Resource Magazine

By Sandra Wendelken, Editor

URL: <http://www.radioresourcemag.com/onlyonline.cfm?OnlyOnlineID=83>

Interoperability has improved slightly from 2008 to 2009, according to a survey of public-safety communications officials by MissionCritical Communications. In 2008, about 75 percent of respondents said their networks were interoperable with local agencies. The percentage increased to 81 in 2009.

Interoperability with federal agencies increased from about 27 percent of respondents in 2008 to one-third this year. The percentage of respondents who said their networks were not interoperable with any networks decreased slightly from about 12 percent in 2008 to 10.6 percent in 2009.

When asked what technology areas of Safecom's Interoperability Continuum respondents use to achieve interoperability, shared channels rated highest with 74 percent use. Gateways (63 percent) and standards-based shared systems (53 percent) were the next-most used technology options for interoperability.

About two-third of respondents said federal grants have helped increase at least some level of interoperability; one-third said grants have not helped. Not surprisingly, funding is the largest hurdle to interoperability, according to 86 percent of respondents. Politics was cited by 73 percent of respondents as a challenge to interoperability.

For more survey results, see Page 39 of the April issue of *MissionCritical Communications*.

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\$48.6M in 2009 Interoperability Grants to be Distributed by End-September

April 8, 2009

Radio Resource Magazine

URL: http://www.radioresourcemag.com/newsArticle.cfm?news_id=4143

Nearly \$49 million in grants from the federal government for communications interoperability will be distributed this year, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced Wednesday. Another \$33 million is available to emergency operations centers (EOCs). States that have applied could receive the funds as early as this summer, and all awards will be made by Sept. 30.

DHS' Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced a \$48.6 million final allocation for the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP). The funds can be used for planning, training, exercises and equipment to states, territories, local and tribal governments to carry out initiatives identified in Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs) and improve interoperable emergency communications for responding to natural disasters and acts of terrorism. The original grant guidance was announced in November.

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) grant program received \$33 million to improve emergency management and preparedness capabilities by supporting flexible, sustainable, secure and interoperable EOCs to address identified deficiencies and needs. The grant provides funding for construction or renovation of a state, local or tribal government's principal EOCs. DHS began taking those applications in December.

The total fiscal-year (FY) 2009 preparedness grants for 10 federal grant programs totals nearly \$970 million in federal funding to assist state, local and tribal governments and private industry in strengthening community preparedness. Awards will be made on a rolling basis during the summer, DHS officials said.

"Today's grant allocations provide more transparency and openness than ever before, as stakeholder feedback drove significant improvements in the grant guidance and peer review process, increasing the value of what states get with their dollars," said Homeland Secretary Janet Napolitano. "As we continue to expand our state, local, tribal and private sector partnerships, our combined efforts will improve and hone our grant programs, which helps us strengthen and protect individual communities and the entire nation."

Final grant program allocations for FY 2009 also include:

- Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP) — \$388.6 million to protect critical transit infrastructure from terrorism, including \$15 million for the Freight Rail Security Grant Program (FRSGP), \$25 million for the Intercity Passenger Rail (Amtrak), \$11.7 million for the Intercity Bus Security Grant Program (IBSGP) and \$2.2 million for the Trucking Security Program (TSP).
- Port Security Grant Program (PSGP) — \$388.6 million to protect critical port infrastructure
- Buffer Zone Protection Program (BZPP) — \$48.6 million to increase preparedness capabilities of jurisdictions responsible for safeguarding critical infrastructure sites and key resource assets, such as chemical facilities and nuclear power plants, through planning and equipment acquisition.
- Driver’s License Security Grant Program (DLSGP) — \$48.6 million to prevent terrorism, reduce fraud and to improve the reliability and accuracy of personal identification documents that states and territories issue.

From 2003 through 2009, more than \$26.7 billion will have been provided in grants from DHS. Further information is available at www.fema.gov/grants.

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DHS testing lab in Somerset first to receive accreditation

April 7, 2009

Richmond Register

URL: http://www.richmondregister.com/religioneducation/local_story_097064405.html

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The laboratory is part of the National Incident Management System Support Center — a program established between the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Justice & Safety Center at Eastern Kentucky University.

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New York Statewide Wireless Interoperable Communications Network Refocused on Regional Systems

April 6, 2009

Government Technology

By Corey McKenna

URL: <http://www.govtech.com/gt/635218>

New York state spent the second half of the Bush Administration and over \$100 million developing a statewide wireless network it was hoped would provide public safety and public service agencies across the state with interoperable communications only to go back to the drawing board earlier this month.

The network, which was expected to cost \$2 billion, was the largest IT project in the state's history. The state Office for Technology awarded the contract to build the system to M/A-COM in April 2004. After problems with several rounds of testing the state officially terminated its contract with M/A-COM in January of this year.

During a testing period in November 2008 the network had 14.5 cumulative hours of down time, which is well above the U.S. standard of just 52.6 minutes per year. Nearly a third of the radios had malfunctioned, a spokeswoman for OFT told Government Technology in January.

And so the New York State's Statewide Interoperability Advisory Council met in late March to discuss the path forward. State CIO Melodie Mayberry-Stewart announced the appointment of Harry J. Corbitt, superintendent of the New York State Police as co-chairman of a refocused advisory council, and representatives of first responders provided their perspectives on moving forward.

A revised governance structure for the advisory committee will include an implementation steering committee composed of first responders who will be very involved in the deployment of the systems, Mayberry-Stewart said. The advisory board will also oversee the award of Public Safety Interoperable Communications grants, said Col. Steven Cuomaletti with the New York State Police. He sees opportunities to optimize federal stimulus funds that are tied to interoperable communications at the state and local levels. The state is committed to being part of federal homeland security committees that set policies and make funding recommendations.

According to Tom Gallagher, interoperability project coordinator for the New York State Office of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Emergency Communications has allocated \$400 million a year for competitive grants to be awarded in each of the next three years. Of that \$1.2 billion in funding over three years, 80 percent of it will be awarded to counties and 20 percent will be awarded to states. "So the more regional programs you've got the better", he said.

"As appropriate and in line with guidelines from use of stimulus money from Washington we would at least like to look into broadband initiatives that have public safety implications and might relate to our interoperability goals and priorities," said Nancy Perry, acting statewide interoperability program director.

While officials acknowledged the setback which the termination of the contact with M/A-COM presented, they were also optimistic opportunities to utilize newer technology and improve governance of cross-jurisdictional communication and data sharing would come from it. For example, instead of building a statewide communications network and offering to connect counties and other local governments to it, the state would work to facilitate the development of regional networks that connected groups of partnering counties thereby improving its usefulness.

Several counties had no desire to participate in the statewide wireless network, according to Perry. "The new strategic road map we are pursuing de-emphasizes the one-size-fits-all notion and envisions an interconnected system of systems," she said.

"Under the state's plan up until this point, local service providers would only be participating in the state plan on a voluntary basis, which could turn out to be a serious flaw in the overall plan," said John Grebert, executive director of the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police. "It could lead to the same types of communications problems that we saw back on September 11th-- State agencies and some local or county entities not being able to talk to organizations that did not elect or arrange for access to the statewide system. What seems to be working better is for the state to participate in multi-county, regionally focused systems that will have the ability to communicate with one another during those times when it becomes necessary," he said.

"Two other reasons we should continue with this new regional approach: The major emergencies that have occurred around the state are far more regional in nature than they are statewide. Whether it's a plane crash in Erie County, an ice storm in the Adirondacks or forest fires on Long Island these are all actual incidents that required a major commitment of resources. The public safety response was far more regional in nature. A regional radio network can handle these needs more directly with better local knowledge than a statewide system," he said.

Under this new model, the state would provide technical and financial assistance and the counties would build the systems, which the state would then be permitted to connect to. "In conjunction with the system of systems concept, we understand we need to maintain and upgrade aging state agency systems," Perry said. "We intend to support initiatives focused on maintenance and upgrade until a replacement vision is realized."

But not everyone was enthusiastic about the shift to a bottom-up approach. "The shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach is certainly a very all-encompassing change which I think needs a lot of discussion. If we go to a bottom-up approach I believe and I'm afraid that the [volunteer emergency medical services community] will be lost in the shuffle." Yedidiah Langsam, a professor at Brooklyn College, said.

Mayberry-Stewart said the governance structure would contain both top-down oversight and bottom-up collaboration.

Governance is a major part of all of the homeland security programs now, Gallagher said. "Your governance has to be in place. If you do not have that, your applications are null and void from the beginning. That's why New York state has been fortunate to be chosen by the National Governors Association to be on that committee to form a template for the states," he said.

The state plans to use \$50,000 it was awarded as part of being chosen by the NGA to conduct a symposium in June to discuss the issues of interoperability facing the states, counties and other local government jurisdictions. "It's not just radio communications from my perspective that we need to work on as a state," Corbitt said, "There's also a data void."

Opportunities for Collaboration

Achieving communications and data interoperability across New York will be an arduous task, but not impossible, officials acknowledge. The meeting highlighted two examples of counties who have cooperated in setting up regional radio networks and the state and counties already have areas where they share resources. "For as long as I've been involved in law enforcement,

criminal investigations have been conducted jointly by local, county and state police," Grebert said. "If you are local or a county police department with few specialized resources and you're faced with a complicated investigation of a serious crime, you're making a serious mistake if you don't request the assistance of the state police," he said. "The state police have become an excellent example of how a large state agency can make all their resources available to local agencies while asking for very little in return."

Meanwhile, Monroe and Onondaga counties have gone ahead and collaborated in building a regional radio network which officials see as a model for the rest of the state. "The major question now becomes can a regional system operated by counties also handle the critical task of communications for state agencies," Grebert said. "And while the answer is certainly not simple, there are many indicators that they can," he said.

Grebert said the state and counties should look to examples of collaboration in the areas of training, homeland security, highway safety and the deployment of SWAT teams for inspiration as the drive for interoperable communications moves forward. "Local police and county sheriffs receive their training side-by-side and have been doing so for decades. It works very well and saves money," he said.

Grebert suggested state officials who may hesitate to participate in county systems may want to heed some of their own advice. "When the topic of high local property taxes is discussed, may state leaders point to the consolidation of smaller units of government into larger units of government as a solution to and as a way to save money," he said. "What we are suggesting here is somewhat of a reverse consolidation, but with the same goals in mind. Consolidate the state effort with all its resources into the regional projects that are clearly making progress with the end result being lower overall cost and earlier completion dates."

Monroe and Onondaga counties already dispatch state police and state park police. Grebert believed other state agencies are considering joining those projects as well.

"Some of the opportunities that we see in collaborating with the state is leveraging our new and existing tower sites that are currently being developed for not only our communications needs but broadband services throughout the state especially the rural areas," said Michael Allen, the director of the Oswego County E-911 public safety center.

"We believe that we can do this by leveraging these networks that are already built throughout the county including our microwave systems that connect, not only our sites and our perspective counties but also the interconnectability we plan to create in our consortium," Allen said.

Snapshot of County Activity

"There are existing trunk systems in Clinton, Genesee Suffolk and Tompkins counties. A number of counties have implemented new trunk radio systems including Nassau, the NYC DoIT, Onadaga County and Rocklin County are all implementing new trunk radio systems," Allen said.

A number of counties are in the procurement process for new trunk radio systems. Construction has already begun in Onondaga county. Madison county has already decided on a vendor. And

the other two counties are in the process of procuring for communications equipment. And Oswego, Saratoga, Madison, Onondaga and Cayuga county have an RFP on the street to hire a consultant to help with the migration to the interoperable communications system,

In total, 19 of the 62 counties in the state are currently operating or plan to build trunked radio systems.

State Assistance Needed

"We're looking to the state to provide guidelines and assistance to the counties' use of UHF 700 and 800 MHz bandwidths for county systems," said John Balloni, commissioner of Onadaga County Department of Emergency Communications. "P25 equipment would allow us to interoperate across many jurisdictions providing coverage on VTAC, UTAC. 8TAC, the national interoperable channels."

"Onodaga County has built out the national operational channels in our system as a first step," he said. "We need to continue that build out in our five-county region. That will give us a first level of interoperability to be able to go from county to county and operate on those national interoperable channels," he said.

It is certainly fair to allow state agencies' talk groups access regional systems as it assists in their development of other state agencies' talk groups on these systems, he said.

"We believe the state can help us encourage the development of regional consortiums," Balloni said. "We recognize in our five-county region that most often our need is to interoperate with each other. But certainly that need goes beyond our five county regional borders to the neighboring regions. We need to be able to interoperate with them."

Financial Assistance Needed

"We make no pretense. We come with our hand out. We know that we can benefit from the state's resources, from their technological expertise and their ability to help us build out and maintain these systems once they're built," Balloni said.

"We believe original SWN costs are reduced with the savings leveraged to counties in assisting to upgrades to their radio systems," he said. "The reality is that counties like Onondaga have already committed \$34.7 million to a radio project."

Balloni said county systems provide state agencies with more robust coverage than would have been available under the old network design. "County systems are designed for portable in-street coverage. Our system was designed at 95/95 meaning that portable coverage on the street and within buildings is going to be very robust throughout the system."

"State and county goals and objectives are aligned regarding public safety radio communication. They are aligned already. We want the same thing. Closest car concepts, closest first responder help to the scene. Improved interoperability between state and county agencies. Let's get us all on one system-one group of systems that can interoperate. "

Balloni is looking forward to working with the state and is confident the technology exists to marry regional systems but says counties need to develop them. The state can help encourage that. "Of course encouragement would include monetary and technical assistance. Grant assistance. Anything that could possibly be done to help us build this out," he said.

Meanwhile, Corbitt said a lesson can be learned from the adoption Compstat, the predictive policing model developed in New York City. "We really have to sit down and do an inventory of information as to where each county is," Corbitt said.

"The SAFECOM continuum dictates that the regional approach is the best approach for interoperable communications," Allen said. As counties consider their data needs "we believe there is an additional opportunity there to develop a statewide mobile data system for all emergency services throughout the state," he said. "We also believe this is an opportunity to connect our 911 centers, not only for radio and data but also for a number of state initiatives that are out there including the NYSPEN portal as well as other state initiatives for emergency communications as well as early notification, like our AAS system as an example."

Editor's Note: Shortly after the state terminated its contract with M/A-COM, the company filed suit claiming the state's mismanagement of the project, not M/A-COM, was at fault in the failure of the project. Among other claims, the company cites the state's efforts to shore up its budget with default payments available under the contract. The state's failure to get buy-in from local governments that wanted to use portable radios on a network designed for use with vehicle-mounted radios was also at fault, the company wrote in the filing.

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Putnam 'MARCS' a change

April 6, 2009

Crescent News

By Lisa Nicely

URL: <http://www.crescent-news.com/news/article/4561238>

GLANDORF -- It's about better communication and saving money.

State and Putnam County officials gathered Sunday at the county's Office of Public Safety in Glandorf to kick off the Ohio Multi-Agency Radio Communication System (MARCS). The System allows law enforcement, first responders, emergency personnel and others to communicate with each other to better serve the community. The voice and data network provides statewide interoperability to subscribers.

"Our vision is that if a trooper is out to the road at 3 o'clock in the morning and called for help from anyone, someone could hear them and help," said Darryl Anderson, director of the Ohio MARCS, who was at the meeting. "The beauty of it is that it doesn't have to be a state trooper, it can be any of us.

"We started working with Putnam County in November 2004," he noted. "We started talking to county officials on how to build a system for northwest Ohio that would meet northwest Ohio needs."

Putnam County is the first county in the state to fully implement the MARCS technology with acquired grant funds.

The county received a federal Public Safety Interoperable Communications grant to implement the communications upgrade. Thirteen other counties in the state received funds for the system.

"This really is a big day," said Steve Odenweller, coordinator of the Putnam County Office of Public Safety. "We wanted to make the communication systems for Putnam County as thorough as we could. We will still grow. There will be changes and improvements on how we handle the communications in the county. With this project we are leaders in helping northwest Ohio."

Odenweller thanked the communications committee for its hard work in making the project a reality. He especially thanked W.D. Miller, who was instrumental in applying for the grant funds.

The cost of a MARCS portable/mobile radio is \$240 per unit a year with a control station costing \$480 a unit a year. A mobile data unit costs \$4,200 a unit per year and a computed-aided dispatch is \$21,000 per unit a year.

Anderson said the system has two main goals -- to save taxpayers money by having a partnership of agencies with the state and to put tools in the hands of law and emergency personnel.

MARCS started in September 1994 with a vision of five state agencies being connected at an approximate cost of \$211 million.

"Instead of five we have 600-plus now," Anderson said. "We have township, municipal, county, state, federal and people in the private sector connected. We have 33,000 (individuals) on the system instead of 8,000. We are working with six additional states. I know a lot of folks if you go into Indiana on a call you might as well have dropped off the face of the earth. Within the next two or three months we will be operational so if you go to Indiana you will be able to talk directly to them."

Putnam County is part of the northwest Ohio regional communication plan in which Putnam, Henry, Van Wert, Allen, Hancock, Auglaize, Mercer and Hardin counties will have the MARCS technology to better serve the area.

The counties have received \$11.5 million in federal funds and \$2.5 million in state funds to make this possible.

The other seven counties should have MARCS implemented by the end of the year, Anderson said. Hancock may be the next to implement the program, he added.

Anderson said the federal government is examining the northwest Ohio regional communication plan in a positive aspect.

To help ensure a clear coverage area, towers are being constructed or technology is being installed at existing towers to ensure entire counties are covered. A tower near Continental has already been equipped with MARCS technology.

"We are working with commissioners in Van Wert to build a new tower to greatly improve coverage in southwestern Putnam County," said Anderson. "We're doing that all over northwest Ohio -- all will federal money. If you need to respond to an emergency somewhere else in the state, or someone else in the state needs to respond to another flood in Ottawa, they can be talked to with this system."

Hugh Quill, director of the Ohio Administrative Services, said the system is important and utilizing grant funds for it really saved taxpayers money.

"We are stronger together at the end of the day," he said. "When we leverage our investments, people's lives are safe and we become more effective. This is very important work I know you've been engaged in. We have a greater responsibility and duty to do our best when people need us the most. That is the high level view I have of MARCS. It allows us to communicate, to talk to each other. When you talk together you can coordinate, buy smarter."

Quill said that the state is aware that MARCS is an investment and it will help the community. He said in the budget bill there will be a task force formed to tackle some of the fundamental issues of the system that may be burdensome to local communities. MARCS subscribers in the state are responsible for the maintenance of equipment and its purchase.

"We know that we are stronger together," he said. "We are going to try every day to get there. We are appreciative of what you do for your communities and the state of Ohio."

John Love, Putnam County commissioner and communications committee member, said MARCS will be an valuable tool for the county.

"The concept is one where we have all public safety forces being able to talk on the same channel," he said. "Anytime you have an exercise or incident, the first thing we found is that we could not talk to each other."

The cost of the MARCS radio system was \$1.8 million for Putnam County alone. That included 330 base, mobile and portable radio units. Love said with the support of the communications committee, emergency personnel and others the county was able to secure grant funds for the system.

"The idea of being on the statewide MARCS has been great for us," Love said. "Putnam County is going to benefit and is fortunate to be part of this system."

Sheriff James Beutler echoed Love's statements and said that the grant money truly helped make the system a reality for the county.

Beutler said his office was experiencing an aging radio system and had talked to other sheriffs in the region about what could be done to resolve the issue.

"We were all having the same issues," he said. "Quite honestly, MARCS wasn't part of the discussion. It was a state operation and who could afford \$5,000 radios? We thought about developing our own radios system. We started meeting together with the rest of the agencies. Then W.D. (Miller) and others got grants that made MARCS available.

"It's because of them we can provide better safety to our officers, our EMTs and others out there. We're setting the example of what collaborative efforts between many people can accomplish. We hope things continue. We want to thank everyone for all the hard work you have done."

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Louisiana National Guard Tests Disaster Readiness

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By Staff Sgt. Jerry Rushing

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NEW ORLEANS – The Louisiana National Guard, in coordination with local, state and federal emergency management agencies, teamed up to test its disaster response capabilities at training exercises around the state, with major operations at the Lakefront Airport in New Orleans and in Hackberry, La., April 4.

The exercise tested the LANG's response plan to identified deficiencies prior to the 2009 hurricane season and also to evaluate LANG's ability to respond to multiple missions simultaneously.

"Training exercises like these help us to evaluate our overall plan and enables us to make the necessary modifications as needed," said Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau, LANG adjutant general. "A lot of the times we focus on hurricanes, but it has to be an all-hazards approach. This exercise allows us to showcase just that, in order to respond to whatever the situation may be."

"This exercise is to validate our hurricane exercise plan and to make sure that it fits well with the state emergency response plan," added Brig. Gen. Glenn H. Curtis, LANG director of the joint staff. "We want to make sure that our citizens know that we are prepared and able to come to their aid."

The training showcased the LANG's ability to respond quickly to any and all emergency situations by conducting simulated air, water and ground search and rescue operations, while also maintaining sound coordination throughout.

"Our overall goal is to continue to refine our services and challenge our Soldiers so that they can know what to expect and how to react in case we have to respond," stressed Capt. Joshua Davis, commander of the 2225th Multi-Role Bridge Company in Marrero, La. "They are put in realistic situations to define what we need to improve on, and it gives them a chance to showcase the tools that they have been taught."

Other areas of training tested included security training, commodities distribution and interoperability communication operations.

"Good communication enables us to coordinate better between ourselves and other agencies that we work closely with," said Col. John Angelloz, officer in charge of the disaster response exercise. "If you can communicate and everyone is clear on what has to be done, you can always make a positive impact on any situation."

With the addition of the more enhanced training, Soldiers say that they are more capable of assisting and saving lives during disasters.

"It gives us a better insight on how our unit operates and reiterates the fact that we want our guys to be well trained and know what they are doing," added Staff Sgt. Bobby G. Branton of the State Aviation Command in Pineville, La.

This training exercise is meant to not only test the level of preparedness, but to provide an opportunity for each participating agency to become familiar with each other and their way of aiding and approaching emergencies.

"It's just tremendous to see the local, state and federal agencies come out to assist the National Guard with the training exercise," said Landreneau. "It really demonstrates how important it is to have a joint-coordinated effort and support to be able to do a better job for the citizens of our state."

"I feel very confident that we'll be more ready than before because of the partnerships that are represented here today," added Mark Cooper, director of GOHSHEP. "We can have all the plans in the world, but if we don't have the partnerships and communications, we are not going to be successful."

Hackberry was selected as the site to be used in Cameron Parish after Hurricane Ike left a majority of homes flooded and many citizens stranded in high water.

The Hackberry High School served as the Incident Command Post from which all helicopter "lily pad," search and rescue, and the commodities distribution operations were directed.

"Our mission in Hackberry is to handle the lily pad operations," said Capt. Jeremy D. Falanga, commander of A Company, 3rd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. "The lily pad is a temporary staging area for evacuees who are rescued; from here, we prepare to move them to a safe place."

"It means so much to the residents of Cameron Parish," said Magnus "Sonny" McGee, president of the Cameron Parish Police Jury. "It's great to have the Guard's presence here in Hackberry. It makes everyone feel more at ease if another hurricane comes this way."

Participating agencies included: the Governor's Office for Homeland Security and Emergency Preparation, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Louisiana State Police Department, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Louisiana Department of Transportation, the Louisiana SPCA and more.

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