Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips
May 1, 2009 – May 15, 2009

Fire Chiefs Put Out the Call for DTV Assistance

May 14, 2009
Television Broadcast
By Deborah D. McAdams
URL: http://www.televisionbroadcast.com/article/81098

FAIRFAX, VA.: The International Association of Fire Chiefs is asking local fire and rescue departments to volunteer for its DTV awareness campaign. The Federal Communication this week intensified its efforts to help people prepare for the final transition on June 12, when around 900 TV stations simultaneously cease analog broadcasts.

"The FCC is establishing call centers that will troubleshoot problems over the phone and request personal assistance from a cadre of national volunteers--including fire and emergency service personnel--if needed," the IAFC's DTV transition Web site states.

The end of the transition ultimately means more spectrum for emergency communications. First responders are set to receive 24 MHz in the 700 MHz band once TV stations move to analog-only broadcasting. Stations are using that area of the spectrum now--Channels 52-69--for digital transmission while they simultaneously broadcast in analog. Several will flash cut on June 12 and transmit their digital signal from their analog allocation.

The first responder community has already been through two DTV transition delays. The first deadline was set for Dec. 31, 2006, but there was no possible way the country was ready at that point. The next was set for Feb. 17, 2009, but President Obama pushed it to June 12 when the Fed's converter-box subsidy program ran out of money Jan. 3.

The lack of adequate radio frequency spectrum was blamed in part on the deaths of first responders who perished in the collapse of the World Trade Centers on 9/11. One lawmaker even went so far as to blame broadcasters for the fatalities, but spectrum was merely one of several problems plaguing emergency communications. Ongoing issues involved the use of different radios, terminology and tuning strategies by various public safety entities, sometimes within the same community. The lack of a uniform standard for comms gear exacerbates the problem. The National Institute for Standards and Technology continues to work on interoperability.

More information on the IAFC's DTV transition volunteer program is available at its Web site.

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We will be able to communicate better

May 13, 2009
Fremont Tribune
By Governor Dave Heineman
URL:
http://www.fremonttribune.com/articles/2009/05/13/opinion/columns/doc4a0a81a599f5a884573844.txt

This week I want to provide an update on a project with great importance - Nebraska's Public Safety Communications System. Many people have been involved in this effort and we are now moving into the final stages of development.

Nebraska has been recognized for our efforts in emergency preparedness. We are planning to take a major step forward this year as we prepare to launch a statewide communications system. Providing a way for first responders and other emergency personnel to talk to one another is an essential element for ensuring a coordinated emergency response.

In a state with vast open spaces and communities ranging from a few dozen residents to more than 400,000 people, our biggest challenge in planning this project was to develop a plan of covering our rural, urban and suburban areas in a manageable and affordable way.

The cost of building a brand new radio communications system for all agencies involved in public safety would have been astronomical. Rather than start from scratch, our plan started by upgrading the communications systems used by local and county officials. After adding new capacity to these individual networks, emergency management leaders focused on connecting these municipal and county systems into a small number of regional communications networks.

We are getting ready to take the last step, which is to connect the seven regional networks to the communications backbone being developed through a partnership between the state and the Nebraska Public Power District. This will create a true statewide network for interoperable communications for state agencies, law enforcement and other first responders in Nebraska.

Once connected, the seven regional networks and the network supporting state agencies and NPPD will complete the Nebraska public safety communications system. It will allow for emergency communication at all levels of state and local government. Nebraska's emergency communications system will also extend to portions of Wyoming and South Dakota. In some instances, it will allow federal agencies with offices in the state to communicate directly with Nebraska's first responders.

While other states have abandoned plans for similar communications systems due to the costs of building such a network from the ground up, Nebraska has been successful because we committed a substantial portion of federal homeland security funding to the project. Our progress is also a reflection of the strong partnerships we have developed in order to communicate and share resources.

While federal homeland security funds were also used for other emergency equipment and planning and training activities, the largest share of Nebraska's federal homeland security grant money was used for building sustainable regional emergency communications networks. We have also committed state general funds to upgrade the network that will connect state agencies and serve as a backbone for the statewide communications network.

The federal homeland security grant program was made available following 9/11. It has been essential to this effort. Interoperable communication was identified early as our top priority in enhancing Nebraska's emergency preparedness.

When finished, the system will allow for interoperable communication among city and county law enforcement, medical personnel across Nebraska's 93 counties, as well as state emergency personnel including the Nebraska State Patrol, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, the Fire Marshal's Office, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Departments of Agriculture, Roads and Correctional Services.

The regional communications networks have already proven useful in recent years as communities responded to severe storms. The statewide network will be an invaluable asset, and I look forward to having the final pieces come together in the coming year.

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Santa Clara Co.: New Communication System to Link Emergency Response, Law Enforcement Efforts across Region
May 13, 2009
CBS 5
URL: http://cbs5.com/localwire/22.0.html?type=bcn&item=MICROWAVE-RING-baglm

Emergency responders say a new ring of microwave communication dishes around Silicon Valley will make it easier to track criminals and share information within the county, and someday the state.

Right now, San Jose police and other law enforcement agencies in Santa Clara County are running only their radio communication on the new $10 million system unveiled Tuesday.

But San Jose police Capt. Diane Urban said this new network holds the promise of more coordinated response for criminal investigations and emergency situations.

Urban is the city's liaison to the Silicon Valley Regional Interoperability Group, the local network of emergency responders that launched the project, dubbed ECOMM.

"It's unfathomable what this technology is going to bring us," she said.

The ring of 23 microwave dishes surrounds the county with a high-speed network independent of commercial wireless and phone systems. The circular formation allows towns to stay in touch, even if one portion of the network is flattened in an earthquake or other major disaster, Urban said.

She likened the system in its current state to an empty 10-lane Los Angeles freeway. It has the capacity to hold giant amounts of data, shared between municipalities.

In San Jose, for instance, police officers have begun testing a pager-size device that can take someone's fingerprint on-site. At some point, ECOMM will allow officers to run a print through the regional network in 60 seconds, Urban said, rather than having to bring a suspect down to the station.

"We get a preliminary hit in the field and we know what we're dealing with," she said.

Officials hope to move emergency calls to the new system, and avoid incidents like April's phone outage when vandalized fiberoptic lines left south county residents unable to call 911.

ECOMM will also allow various police and fire agencies to radio among one another on special channels. Urban recalled working in the police special operatives unit, trying to execute a search warrant in Milpitas.

"Our radios didn't talk," she said. "I had to stand hip-to-hip with my counterpart in Milpitas."

Motorists may be less excited about another proposed use for the system: sharing electronic traffic ticket records with traffic courts and other agencies.

Sharing this information on ECOMM would help traffic courts process violators more quickly and help police access traffic records for criminal investigations.

The project took 10 years to complete and required cooperation from 18 jurisdictions in Santa Clara County, Urban said. San Jose contributed to the $10.1 million cost with a variety of grants.

Urban said plans are in place for similar networks that could link the system to agencies in other Bay Area counties and, eventually, the entire state.

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Statewide emergency communications system proposal faces disconnect
May 13, 2009
The Oregonian
By Brent Walth
URL:
http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/oregonian/index.ssf?/base/news/1242185113268940.xml&coll=7

Lawmakers came to Salem two years ago to find a surprise waiting for them in Gov. Ted Kulongoski's budget: a $665 million communications system that would allow the state's public safety agencies to talk with one another on their radios.

Democrats and Republicans balked at an expensive proposal that state officials had barely explained, let alone justified. Since then, the state's economy has foundered, and legislators are about to make the deepest cuts in a generation to schools, health care, colleges and services to the state's most vulnerable people.

But the radio project -- called the Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network -- lives on.

To keep it alive, Kulongoski and public-safety agencies are battling political resistance in Salem.

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State officials have shaved the estimated cost to $414 million -- most of it borrowed. They've found a way to push costs into future budgets. They've built coalitions across the state to argue the necessity of the project. And they calibrated their argument to fit the economic times: Building the far-flung system will create jobs.

A legislative budget panel in December quietly launched the project, known as OWIN, by approving $76 million in bonds. And backers now say if they don't get more money approved now, the whole thing could fall apart.

"We have cities and counties now relying on the state to carry through with its promises," says Rep. Nancy Nathanson, D-Eugene, a strong supporter of OWIN.

But other lawmakers, including leaders in a position to stop the project, have doubts the state should push ahead while so many other essential services face cuts.

Sen. Margaret Carter, D-Portland, co-chairwoman of the Legislature's budget-writing committee, says she agrees a modern radio system could help save lives and help agencies respond to emergencies.

"But from where I sit, we face life-and-death situations now," Carter says. "Every dollar matters when it comes to protecting children and keeping our schools and courts open. I'm not convinced this is something we have to be doing at this time."

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., started public safety agencies nationwide talking about how to better prepare for emergencies. In Oregon, police, fire and other public agencies use different systems and frequencies.

And many police radios are becoming obsolete. The Federal Communications Commission has told public safety agencies they have to move to new bandwidths by 2013. Even without that requirement, state officials say many radios are so out of date it's getting difficult to find spare parts.

Worst-case scenarios
In 2005, lawmakers told state officials to plan a system that can allow radio communications between four agencies: the Oregon State Police and the departments of Corrections, Transportation and Forestry.

In dire warnings to lawmakers, public safety officials describe worst-case scenarios -- an earthquake crumbles Portland, a tsunami slams the coast -- as reasons the state needs the system. Still, supporters have yet to point to an incident when the current radio system failed to save lives.

The most serious case they point to came in December 2007, when a severe windstorm cut off Clatsop County's communications for five days. Ham radio operators helped keep people connected.

In some counties, supporters say, police agencies trying to coordinate chases can't talk to one another. And some fire departments carry a suitcase full of radios so they can find one that connects to other agencies' systems.

"Your cell phone gives you more of an ability to communicate than most of these public safety radios," says Jeff Johnson, chief of Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue, who has also headed up a state committee to plan for the new system.

Supporters say Oregon needs a system that works better than cell phones, which have limited coverage and can crash in emergencies.

That's why OWIN would be so costly -- it requires a seamless system that won't fail. A big part of the costs involve building or upgrading 310 tower sites across the state.

Sharing the costs
Officials have reached agreements with 35 local and seven federal and tribal agencies to share the system, and in turn share the costs of construction and equipment. For example, the state system will be able to plug into an established radio network in the Portland area, which allows public safety agencies to talk.

"One of the saving graces of this project is the way we've been able to find partners in this," says Lindsay Ball, whom Kulongoski named in 2007 to run the project
Advertisement

He says engineering changes in the original plan and partnerships with local governments have reduced the estimated construction cost to $414 million. Officials estimate it could cost another $25 million a year to operate it, and they acknowledge they don't know yet where the money would come from.

To try to persuade spending-wary legislators, Ball and OWIN officials want to delay bond sales until 2011. That would help reduce OWIN's 2009-11 budget request from $30 million to $15 million, but it would push bigger costs out to the future.

Even if lawmakers freeze or kill the project, the state would still have to pay $11.8 million the next two fiscal years on bonds already sold.

Johnson of Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue says local public safety agencies must meet the federal 2013 deadline for updating their radio systems.

"I'm respectful of the tough budget choices," Johnson says. "We have to do this. It's now just a question of timing."

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DHS Selects Labs for Project 25 Interoperability Testing

May 12, 2009
Government Technology
By Corey McKenna
URL: http://www.govtech.com/dc/articles/667728

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office for Interoperability and Compatibility approved eight laboratories for testing and evaluation of radios to ensure compliance with the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials Project 25 (P25) interoperability standards. The laboratories' goals are to give first responders a consistent and traceable way of gathering P25 compliance information on radios purchased.

There is no open, verifiable way to test the compliance of radio equipment with the P25 standard, said Luke Berndt, P25 Compliance Assessment Program (CAP) manager. Testing data is maintained by manufacturers but is not openly available on the Web.

The data to be made publicly available from the labs will include a summary of the tests performed, whether the product passed or failed, and a certification from the testing lab that the test was performed properly.

The DHS's Science and Technology Directorate (DHS S&T) will oversee program management of the P25 CAP and verify such things as whether a certain lab is part of the program and certified to perform the test in question, and if tests are done by qualified people. It also will conduct basic error checking on reports generated from the tests.

The Project 25 CAP is a joint effort between DHS S&T and the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) which is working on the development of testing standards. DHS S&T and NIST will also do some anonymous testing of radios to verify lab-certified radios do indeed meet P25 standards, Berndt said.

The establishment of these labs is a major step toward achieving communications interoperability. "Recognized labs are essential to the success of the P25 CAP program," said David Boyd, director of the Command, Control and Interoperability Division within the DHS S&T, in a statement. "[The] P25 CAP will, for the first time, allow the emergency response community to be confident that the equipment they purchase is, in fact, interoperable."

There are two independent labs -- Flom Test Lab and Timco Engineering Inc. -- and six labs associated with equipment manufacturers. Three Motorola labs have received certification under the program, as well as one Tyco Electronics lab, a Tait Electronics lab and another run by EF Johnson Technologies.

These labs have been certified by NIST to be independent and objective when evaluating products from their corporate parents, Berndt said.

Berndt said having a marketplace for testing will be good. For example, having multiple labs will enable each lab to leverage the unique capabilities of the others and not have to build-out expensive infrastructure if another lab already possesses it.

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DHS approves labs for P25 compliance program
May 7, 2009 4:59 PM
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/test_and_measurement/news/p25-compliance-labs-approved-20090507/

Eight laboratories have been approved to test equipment as part of the Project 25 Compliance Assessment Program (P25 CAP), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) announced yesterday.

Managed in partnership with the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Office of Law Enforcement Standards, the P25 CAP is designed to provide first-responder agencies with testing information that ensures that P25 equipment operates and interoperates as specified by the standard.

Public-safety officials have long sought independent testing to verify manufacturers' claims that their products comply with the P25 standard and interoperate. Within the P25 CAP, recognized laboratories will test equipment and provide detailed test reports to the manufacturers, said Luke Berndt, chief technology officer for the OIC. Manufacturers will use the detailed reports to created summary test reports, which will be published at www.rkb.us.

"What that will provide for all the first responders or other people buying equipment is a one-stop shop where … they can easily access information," Berndt said.

The initial eight recognized laboratories are:

  * Compliance Testing LLC, dba Flom Test Lab, in Chandler, Ariz.;
  * EF Johnson Technologies in Irving, Texas;
  * Motorola ASTRO System Integration and Test Laboratory in Schaumburg, Ill.;
  * Motorola GP25 HEC-PITEC Schaumburg in Schaumburg, Ill.;
  * Motorola P25 Performance CAI Subscriber Compliance Laboratory in Plantation, Fla.;
  * Tait Electronics Ltd Teltest Laboratories in Christchurch, New Zealand;
  * TIMCO Engineering in Newberry, Fla.; and
  * Tyco Electronics Wireless Systems in Lynchburg, Va.

These labs were assessed from December 2008 through April 2009, demonstrating their testing competence and their ability to operate independently, even if they are owned by P25 manufacturers, Berndt said.

"They have to operate independently and openly to be part of this program," he said.

Only P25 common-air-interface tests are ready to be conducted immediately, but Berndt said the goal is to have compliance testing methods established when products reach the market that meet P25 standard interfaces, beginning with the Inter-RF Subsystem Interface (ISSI).

"That's definitely the next interface we're going to move onto, and we hope to do that in short order," Berndt said. "We want to have the compliance-assessment program line up with the release of the first batch of equipment coming from manufacturers."

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Little-Known Federal Law is Causing Headaches for Grant Applicants
May 7, 2009
Fire Chief
By Glenn Bischoff
URL: http://firechief.com/technology/communications/fire-psic-grant-nepa-law-20090507/

Public-safety agencies vying for a portion of the $1 billion available through the Public Safety Interoperable Communications, or PSIC, grant program are encountering an unforeseen roadblock: the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA. The law requires that any program that receives federal funds, such as the PSIC — which is administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration — must demonstrate that their projects will have no significant detrimental impact to natural and human environments, including those of a cultural nature.

Laura Pettus, PSIC communications program specialist, acknowledged at the National Conference on Emergency Communications — which was presented last week in Chicago by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications — that NEPA "is a nightmare."

However, the NTIA recognized early on that the Department of Commerce, of which NTIA is part, failed to establish a framework for evaluating communications projects. According to Pettus, that meant that every project, no matter how big or involved, would have to be scrutinized on an individual basis, which likely would create enormous bottlenecks. So, NTIA embarked on a year-long project to identify the five primary types of communications projects to streamline the NEPA-evaluation process. The categories include the following:

- Transmission and receiving sites,
- Operations and response centers,
- Mobile/portable equipment,
- Mobile infrastructure, and
- Planning, training and exercises.

Within each category, the NTIA determined the types of activities that likely would have no significant environmental impact. For example, swapping out a base station at a tower site would fall under this designation and would automatically be deemed as complying with NEPA.

However, construction of a tower would not, and such an endeavor would require an environmental-impact assessment.

Pettus said the PSIC grant program has a technical support team available to assist agencies in complying with NEPA. "We worked with a Virginia agency that wanted to place additional towers in order to improve coverage," Pettus said. "We helped them decide where to put the towers."

Grant applicants also should be aware that the program's auditors are becoming "more stringent," Pettus said. For example, they will be insisting that 100% of an agency's match contribution is in place up front. "You're going to have to be able to point to it, demonstrate that it is allowable and the auditors have to be able to verify it," Pettus said.

States and territories also will have to demonstrate that they have in place a strategic technology reserve, or STR — which is a Congressional mandate — before the NTIA signs off on their PSIC projects, Pettus said. The STR is a cache of equipment that would be needed to reestablish communications in the event infrastructure is taken off-line by a natural or manmade disaster.

"The auditors can ask to see the STR plan, and you will lose grant money if your state doesn't have one in place," Pettus said, adding that 18 states and territories have been granted temporary STR waivers.

The auditors also will be ensuring that agencies spend the grant money in the manner in which they said they were going to spend it.

"They're going to make sure that you're doing what you said you were going to do," Pettus said. "You can't tell us that you want money to deploy more base stations so you can get more users on the system, and then redirect the money to purchase a mobile command center. If your original plans change, you need to tell us."

Pettus also advised that public-safety agencies take note of the PSIC program's requirement that a statement of work be submitted for every project. The statement, which will be reviewed to determine whether the project complies with the PSIC program goals, should detail project parameters and timelines. Pettus described it as the "way of the future."

"You're no longer going to be able to self-certify," Pettus said. "All grant programs are going to start looking like this. It isn't an anomaly, but the beginning."

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APCO expresses support for PSIC-delay legislation
May 7, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/apco-support-psic-delay-20090507/

A bill that would give public-safety organizations an additional two years to spend $1 billion federal grant money dedicated to interoperable communications received support from the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO).

As part of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005, Congress allocated $1 billion — generated from revenues realized from the 700 MHz auction — for the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP), which was used to fund the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) grant program. Under existing law, the grant money must be spent by Sept. 30, 2010.

However, many projects would have difficulty meeting the 2010 deadline for multiple reasons. In some cases, the grant money was not available for several months as legislatures wrangled over state budget issues. In other situations, issues related to procurement requirements, FCC licensing and compliance with environmental-protection laws have caused delays.

With this in mind, Rep. Anh "Joseph" Cao (R-La.), has proposed H.R. 1819, which would extend the deadline until Sept. 30, 2012.

"APCO International strongly supports H.R. 1819 and will be working to gain co-sponsors and support for its immediate passage," APCO President Chris Fischer said in a prepared statement. "APCO International further looks forward to introduction and expedited consideration of a Senate companion bill to extend the PSIC grant program for an additional two years."

Yucel Ors, APCO's director of legislative affairs, said he does not know of any opposition to extending the PSIC deadline but noted that may not be enough to guarantee passage of the bill.

"I don't see why there should be any opposition to it, but just because there are so many other issues on the table right now, their focus might not be completely on it," Ors said during an interview with Urgent Communications.

Public safety's other key issue with the PSIC grants has been the requirement for a 20% match — a commitment that has become increasingly difficult to meet as the economic downturn has left local and state governments with budget shortfalls. Ors said the Cao proposal does not address the matching question, although extending the deadline might allow more time for public-safety entities to find money to meet the match requirements.

DHS Asks for Nearly $1 Billion to Protect Critical Networks, Systems
May 7, 2009
Nextgov.com
By Jill R. Aitoro
URL: http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090507_9685.php

The Homeland Security Department requested about a 15 percent increase in funding for fiscal 2010 to defend the nation's critical infrastructure such as the electrical grid and financial sector, and for cybersecurity to protect government systems, according to the administration's budget released on Thursday.

DHS asked for $918 million to support the Office of Infrastructure Protection, which leads coordinated efforts with industry to protect the nation's critical industries, including transportation and energy systems. Some of the money will be applied to information technology and cybersecurity, although the DHS did not break out technology spending.

The amount also included funding for the Office of Cybersecurity and Communications, which includes the National Communications System, the Office of Emergency Communications, and the National Cyber Security Division. Homeland Security wants to use about $400 million of the $918 million to expand the national cybersecurity protection program, said DHS Chief Financial Officer Peggy Sherry. The amount represents an increase of $87.2 million, or 22 percent, from fiscal 2009, and would support development of the third version of Einstein, the intrusion detection system that the U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team uses to monitor federal networks for suspicious activity.

The department budgeted an additional $37 million to address "critical capability gaps identified in the Comprehensive National Cybersecurity Initiative," said a DHS spokesperson. The initiative is the largely classified government-wide cybersecurity program introduced during the Bush administration. No specifics were provided about how the additional funds would be spent.

"That is a plus-up from what we expected, and probably the appropriate amount based on functions the National Cyber Security Division [is expected] to execute," said Gregory Garcia, who served as assistant secretary of cybersecurity and telecommunications at DHS during the Bush administration and now runs his own information security consulting firm, Garcia Strategies.

He added that the more than $500 million remaining for infrastructure protection may fall short, however. "From my perspective, the program [that protects] infrastructure control systems needs substantial resources to ensure a national reach across the relevant sectors," Garcia said.

Recent reports about cyber intrusions against the nation's electrical grid resulted in measures from Congress to better protect the computer systems that control those operations.

A large percentage of cybersecurity funds typically come from alternative sources within the federal budget, as former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff noted last year. Results of the Obama administration's 60-day review of federal cybersecurity programs, scheduled to be released any day, likely will provide additional insight into how the administration will pay for the new initiatives. Dollars allocated to the Secure Border Initiative, a multi-year plan aimed at stemming the flow of undocumented immigrants and possible terrorists from Mexico and Canada, remained flat at $779 million, compared with fiscal 2009.

DHS recently announced construction of physical barriers along the United States' southwestern border with Mexico is nearly complete, and it would shift its focus to the technology portion of the program, which incorporates a combination of sensors, cameras and control towers to monitor activity along the border. No funds were allocated to fencing along the border, a DHS official confirmed.

The department also pegged $356 million for the U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology program, which it developed in 2003 to check the identities of foreign travelers entering and exiting the United States at airports and seaports. The 2010 budget figure represents an increase of $56 million from fiscal 2009.

DHS requested $144.9 million to support implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which requires citizens and other travelers coming into the United States by land and sea from countries in the Western Hemisphere to present secure identification documents, such as passports.

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Public-safety representatives seek united 700 MHz front
May 5, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/mobile_voice/news/united-700-mhz-front-20090505/

Eight public-safety organizations plan to meet later this month to establish consensus regarding the future of the 700 MHz band for broadband applications for first-responder organizations, according to representatives of two participating organizations.

Last month, the Major Cities Chiefs (MCC) and the Major County Sheriffs' Association (MCSA) hosted a meeting of eight public-safety groups, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International (APCO), National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) and Metro Fire Chiefs (MFC).

"The meeting we had on April 20 was very productive," said Chris Moore, chairman of MCC's spectrum working group and deputy chief of the San Jose Police Department. "It was an opportunity for the major public-safety organizations to sit at the same table and hear each other out.

"What we all heard was a desire to move forward in a unified front. Although there are some details that certainly have to be fleshed out, we hope to accomplish that at a subsequent meeting."

Harlin McEwen, chairman of the IAFC's technology committee, echoed this sentiment.

"We had a good meeting with the major cities," McEwen said. "The general tone was very positive and very upbeat."

As part of an agreement reached during the April meeting, Moore and McEwen both declined to address the specifics of the topics discussed.

McEwen also serves as chairman of the Public Safety Spectrum Trust (PSST), which holds the nationwide license for 10 MHz of broadband spectrum in the 700 MHz band. Last year, the FCC tried to auction the D Block — 10 MHz of spectrum adjacent to the PSST frequencies — to a commercial operator that would work with the PSST in a public-private partnership to build and operate a broadband wireless network for public safety. However, no operators made a qualifying bid.

Since the failed auction, the MCC expressed a desire to have the D Block earmarked for public-safety use, allowing local and regional entities to pursue their own network buildouts. While the methodology for building the networks could differ — for instance, some may build private networks, while others might opt for public-private partnerships with a commercial carriers — each would be built to specified interoperable standards.

Moore emphasized that the MCC wants to help develop a plan that can work for all public-safety entities, not just those in major metropolitan areas. During the April meeting, "it became clear that we didn't necessarily disagree on a lot" and that developing a consensus position for public safety is possible, Moore said.

Establishing such consensus is important, if the first-responder community want federal policy-makers to take action, Moore said.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," he said. "It's in all of public safety's interest to move this along as expeditiously as possible and present a united front to the FCC and Congress."

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Who moved my standard?

May 1, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Bill Fredrickson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/commentary/lmr-standards-changes-200905/

We all must navigate through the maze of land mobile radio (LMR) changes, especially in the area of standards. This is made more difficult by the "moving of the standards cheese," a phenomena that is creating lively debate.

The LMR community has spoken and demanded open standards-based solutions, similar to what's found in the IP sector. There are several well known and several lesser known LMR standards that address this demand.

Project 25 is a user-defined open standard developed specifically by and for the needs of North American public safety. The European Telecommunications Standards Institute developed TETRA for the public-safety community, but has expanded its reach. The British established MPT1327 in the late 1980s, just as P25 was getting started. It is the most widely used open LMR standard in the world, but is not as well known in North America. MPT's successor — the open digital mobile radio (DMR) standard — uses TDMA to deliver 6.25 kHz channel efficiency.

So where is the debate?

It seems to be over which standard is suitable for which vertical market. Is P25 suitable for markets outside public safety? Is TETRA suitable for North America public-safety agencies or utilities — or both? What are MPT and DMR anyway and why do I care?

The short answers are: all could be suitable and it depends.

P25 was designed to do a lot of things, including interoperability and encryption. But it also was designed for coverage. The North American market is mostly characterized by large geographies with relatively less population density, especially when compared to Europe. P25 technology needs to be able to provide very similar coverage characteristics to technologies it is replacing.

P25 has features and costs that are less attractive outside of public safety. But there are examples of utilities, oil and gas enterprises, and public-safety agencies outside of North America that selected P25.

In contrast, TETRA was designed more for capacity. There are other technical and commercial issues with TETRA that have been discussed. Even if those hurdles could be overcome, TETRA is at an economic disadvantage, as it requires more sites to cover a given geography as compared with P25, MPT or DMR. But there are applications, such as a large campus, where TETRA may be the best fit.

MPT was designed for scalability and coverage. It can range from one to 960 sites and provides the same coverage as conventional radio. MPT is similar to other digitally accessed technologies such as EDACS or SmartZone. MPT is very popular with utilities and transport verticals. But it is used by some public-safety agencies also.

DMR is the new kid on the block with the standard being first published in 2005. It might seem overly simplistic, but we can refer to DMR as a "digital MPT." DMR, like P25 and MPT, was designed for coverage. Like TETRA and P25 Phase II, DMR delivers 6.25 kHz channel efficiency. So it is an excellent fit for North America, especially for utility and transport vertical markets.

Which technology is the right fit? It depends. What are your requirements, coverage needs and budget? Debate is good and healthy, as is an informed LMR community. All technologies should be considered — TETRA, P25, MPT and DMR.

Stay alert and be ready. Hey, who moved my standard?

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