Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips
May 29, 2009 – June 12, 2009

Public-safety groups support LTE at 700 MHz

June 11, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/networks_and_systems/news/700-mhz-lte-support-20090611/

On Tuesday afternoon, APCO and NENA issued a joint press release endorsing LTE — the 4G standard adopted by Verizon Wireless and AT&T Mobility, as the broadband standard for public safety. Yesterday afternoon, the NPSTC board took similar action, with the caveat that representatives for competing technologies such as WiMAX would have 30 days to try to convince the board that LTE is not the best choice.

The announcements came on the heels of eight public-safety groups expressing a desire to ask Congress to allocate the 10 MHz commercial D Block in the 700 MHz for public-safety use. The combination of the events caused Stacey Black, vice president of strategic programs/marketing in AT&T Mobility's government solutions group, to ask his company to consider including the public-safety bands in future devices.

"The announcement that public safety had gained consensus about what to do with the D Block was the first thing that we heard that helped our company get its mind on this because, up until that point, public safety was divided, and we weren't going anywhere as long as that happened," Black said during the discussion prior to the NPSTC vote. "Then, the second thing that happened was the APCO-NENA announcement, which I used to put things into motion."

Of course, neither AT&T nor Verizon have any assurances that vendors would manufacture devices that could be used on proposed carrier and public-safety networks. By opting to endorse LTE without such assurances, some participants in the NPSTC discussion indicated that public safety could lose leverage in future negotiations by ruling out the possibility of competition from carriers such as Clearwire, which is building a nationwide network with Sprint using WiMAX.

But others noted the fact that Clearwire has no spectrum assets in the 700 MHz band, while AT&T and Verizon both have considerable spectrum in the band and already have opted to follow the LTE technology path. For this reason, most in the public-safety community have expected LTE to be the eventual technology choice, but this week's announcements mark the first such endorsements from public safety.

Making the announcements more critical is the fact that agencies in several metropolitan areas have asked the FCC for waivers to build 700 MHz broadband networks early that would be interoperable with a national standard. Without a national standard, "those waivers are going to sit there for I don't know how long — months," NPSTC Chairman Ralph Haller said during yesterday's discussion.

Such a national standard would need to be established by the FCC, but most industry observers believe the agency only would be comfortable taking such action if there is a consensus within public safety on the matter.
"Deciding at the outset on a standard to build upon will give public safety the ability to immediately focus on crucial issues such as infrastructure build out and roaming access while embedding cost saving measures in the process as a single standard is used from the outset," APCO President Chris Fischer said in a prepared statement.

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Routt radios redoubled

June 11, 2009
Steamboat Pilot & Today
By Zach Fridell
URL: http://www.steamboatpilot.com/news/2009/jun/11/routt_radios_redoubled/

Steamboat Springs — Routt County is a cooperative county when an emergency is in progress.

When a fire department is called out to a potential fire, law enforcement often goes along. When a bear is spotted in a neighborhood, police often accompany wildlife experts. It's for those situations and dozens of others that at 7 a.m. Monday morning, all Routt County emergency response agencies switched to an 800 megahertz, digital radio system that connects to a statewide network.

Communications Director JP Harris said interoperability among agencies inside and outside of the county was the primary reason the county switched over to the new system. The switch to the 800 MHz system has occurred across the state in the past decade, the same length of time it has been discussed in Routt County. By moving to the new system, local emergency responders will be able to talk directly to Colorado State Patrol troopers, Colorado Division of Wildlife officers and special units from Denver, in addition to any Routt County emergency responder.

The radios arrived in 2007, but it wasn't until they could all be installed, programmed and linked together through the dispatch center that they were ready to take over for the old VHF radio system.

Harris said the switch included "several hundred" radios, between the personal radios for each emergency responder and the mobile units in each vehicle.

Because the system is digital, dispatchers will be able to see who is calling each time an officer presses the talk button. Special emergency buttons on each of the law enforcement radios also will provide an additional level of safety.

Supervisor and 911 Coor-dinator Sharon Clever said that if an emergency button is pressed — say if an officer is in a fight and unable to talk — all attention will be diverted to the call.

“We get a very loud noise on all four of our consoles. We have to go ahead and acknowledge that with a key to silence it, and we check the officer,” she said.

Routt County Emergency Management Director Bob Struble said he has used the 800 MHz system several times in the past, and he’s confident it will be an improvement.

“It gives the local emergency responders a lot more options than we had on VHF. It’s the way of the future, really,” he said.

Struble said the 800 MHz system is better able to penetrate buildings, something that is especially important to firefighters.

Even so, as with any radio system, there are several areas across the county that don’t receive full coverage, especially Oak Creek and Yampa.

At a fire at South Routt Elementary School in Yampa on June 3, emergency responders were able to try out the new system, with mixed results.

“They had some issues trying to talk out of the town of Yampa,” Struble said. “The tactical channels worked great on scene, but (South Routt Fire Protection District Chief Chuck Wisecup) was having trouble talking back to dispatch.”

Harris said the “dead spots” could be resolved by installing a repeater or another tower site in the South Routt area. There are four Routt County tower sites, with another two in neighboring counties that officers can use. But even if the 800 MHz radios don’t work, all emergency responders still have the old system as a backup. Struble said that between the two systems, the county should have nearly full coverage.

The radio system was purchased during the past several years, mostly with federal grant money, Struble said.

“After 9/11, interoperability became an issue, and a lot of grant money was made available,” he said. “We’ve been picking up a grant here, a grant there, and that’s basically how we did it in Routt County.”

The new sets cost about $2,900 for each personal radio and $3,600 for each car radio.

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Spacenet Announces Award To MoDOT

June 10, 2009
TMCNet

URL: http://www.tmcnet.com/usubmit/2009/06/10/4219227.htm

Spacenet Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Gilat Satellite Networks Ltd. (NASDAQ: GILT), announced that the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) was awarded the Innovation & Technology Award for 2009 at the International Satellite & Communications Exchange Conference.

MoDOT teamed with Spacenet and Orbital Data Net, the Missouri state contractor for satellite services, to design and implement its innovative emergency communications satellite solution. The solution integrates terrestrial communications assets with satellite connectivity for a complete continuity of operations and first responder solution.

ISCe recognized MoDOT for its innovative satellite solution, which enables the agency to fulfill its mission of ensuring public safety with constant access to critical communications during emergency situations. The solution, based on both fixed and transportable satellite systems, supports full Voice over IP and Radio over IP capabilities with Quality of Service, Internet access, and can interface with trunked radio systems and analog systems. The solution enables seamless transmission capabilities and control to communicate and interconnect remote tower sites by satellite, and interoperability with legacy systems. The emergency network can be operated and controlled from virtually any location that has access to a high-speed Internet connection, enabling communications over radio across the world. The team also created a unique telephone solution, Satellite Transport Audio Circuits, that provides efficient and cost effective voice services.

MoDOT's system was tested during severe flooding and ice storms in 2008, and successfully provided voice, radio backhaul and VPN Internet access at the disaster sites, which allowed emergency managers to quickly assess the situation, make plans and coordinate the response. During widespread wireline outages, MoDOT's radio and telephone communications were uninterrupted. To read the full case study visit www.spacenet.com/modot.

The ISCe Conference, which took place June 2 - 4, 2009 in San Diego, CA, brings together military leaders, civilian officials and the business community to explore topics that shape satellite communications. MoDOT was named winner of the ISCe Innovation & Technology Award during the conference on June 3rd.

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NPSTC Endorses LTE as Air Interface for Nationwide 700 MHz Band Network

June 10, 2009
TR Daily
URL: Not Available

The National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) governing board today unanimously endorsed LTE (long term evolution) technology as the air interface for a nationwide 700 megahertz band broadband network for public safety.

The federation of 15 public safety groups took the action after vigorous discussion at a meeting in Arlington, Va., in which some members and other attendees expressed concern whether it was premature to endorse a technology standard. In the end, the vote was unanimous, with the board saying the decision would be final at the end of this month unless a board member seeks reconsideration. The decision came after the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International and National Emergency Number Association - which are members of NPSTC - announced their endorsement of LTE yesterday.

A number of board members suggested that NPSTC should seek commitments from Verizon Wireless and AT&T, Inc., which plan to deploy LTE technology, that they plan to push vendors to make handsets and chipsets for the 700 MHz band D block and adjacent 10 MHz of public safety spectrum. Some said NPSTC should also follow up with those carriers to see whether they will be able to meet other technical specifications sought by public safety, including those covering roaming.

Donald Brittingham, assistant vice president-wireless/spectrum policy for Verizon Communications, Inc., and Stacey Black, executive director-market development for AT&T, indicated in general terms that their companies want to meet public safety needs. They stressed that NPSTC's endorsement of LTE would help drive momentum for handsets and chipsets that can be used on public safety frequencies.

The industry representatives and public safety officials also said that localities that want to build out 700 MHz band networks early also need guidance from NPSTC about a preferred air interface. They added that such a consensus would help the FCC when it considers modifications to its 700 MHz band rules.

Some board members and others at the meeting said Sprint Nextel Corp. and Clearwire Corp. should be given a chance to show why the group should instead consider endorsing WiMAX technology as a fourth-generation air interface. The fourth U.S. national carrier, T-Mobile USA, Inc., is expected to choose LTE, but it hasn't yet made an announcement.

Before today's vote, Trey Hanbury, director-government relations for Sprint Nextel, had urged the group to hold off endorsing LTE and allow his company to submit details on the benefits of WiMAX. He also said that a 700 MHz band spectrum standard for WiMAX is being developed, but the fact that none is yet available was noted by many people at today's meeting in advocating LTE. The WiMAX deployment in the U.S. by Clearwire, which is a joint venture with Sprint Nextel, is in the 2.5 gigahertz band.

Harlin McEwen, who represents the International Association of Chiefs of Police on NPSTC and is chairman of the Public Safety Spectrum Trust (PSST), was one of the most forceful advocates for endorsing LTE today and not holding off until later. "We are

making a strong statement that this is our preference," he said. He had also expressed support for firm commitments from Verizon Wireless and AT&T that they would push for devices and chipsets for public safety, which he said could create economies of scale that would result in affordable devices for agencies.

Bob Gurss, APCO's director legal and government affairs, was also a strong advocate. "This is an opportunity to take advantage of a huge marketplace," he said.

Today's LTE decision came in the wake of a recent consensus agreement by eight public safety groups on moving forward in the 700 MHz band proceeding. The groups agreed to seek reallocation of the D block for public safety use; it would be licensed to the PSST for a nationwide network. They also agreed to back early build-out at the local and regional level. The groups did not hammer out detailed technical specifications, a process that began at today's meeting.

There also was considerable discussion about the roaming needs of public safety agencies in any network. Other needs include security, such as encryption and verification, attendees said.

Also at the meeting, Chris Essid, director of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications, said that officials are on track to meet 41 of 92 of the first-year milestones in the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP), which was released in July 2008. He said 12 of the 14 nine-month milestones were met. He urged public safety leaders to help implement the NECP, which is the nation's first strategic plan designed to improve emergency communications.

Also, the NPSTC board named Joe Ross of Televate LLC, a consulting firm, to chair a working group that will study future public safety spectrum requirements.

Meanwhile, Mr. McEwen told TRDaily that the PSST board, at a meeting Friday, would consider requests by the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs (MFC) Association and the Major County Sheriff' Association (MCSA) to be part of the PSST's board. He noted that the FCC would have to approve any board membership changes.

He also said that he hadn't received a letter yet from the Major Cities Chiefs (MCC) Association asking for audits on the group and minutes of its meetings. At their summer meeting in Sun Valley, Idaho this week, MCC members voted to hold off seeking board membership until they saw that information. The group is concerned with the PSST's past relationship with Cyren Call Communications Corp., a former business adviser. Mr. McEwen said he didn't want to predict how the board would react to the MCC's request, but he said board meeting minutes are private. Some say changes in the PSST's governance must take place in order for a consensus plan to work in the long run. - Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

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Interoperable Public Safety Networks Take Many Forms, but What Is Mission Critical?

June 8, 2009
Government Technology
By Bob Galvin
URL: http://www.govtech.com/gt/articles/689180

Interoperability takes many guises, but the basic concept of communicating between and within U.S. agencies and jurisdictions is an essential issue that's being worked out, albeit slowly. Public safety agencies typically have operated independently, but 9/11 and other events showed the importance of sharing vital information to enable more effective, rapid decision-making.

Unfortunately a large percentage of public safety communities may be woefully unprepared for major incidents. These include emergency medical events; hazardous material spills; terrorist attacks; natural and man-made disasters, such as industrial accidents or structural fires; search-and-rescue operations; and hostage crises. These require a large-scale, multiagency response.

"How well [agencies] work together is entirely dependent on what they've done to plan for major incidents well before they occur," said Alan Caldwell, governing board member of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC). Caldwell was also a volunteer firefighter in Fairfax County, Va., for 30 years and operational fire chief for more than 20 years.

To achieve true interoperability, all communities ideally would have a public safety network that combines voice, data and video on an IP platform, say many public safety officials. This would enable all first responders to communicate with one another, share information and deploy assistance in a single jurisdiction or across county and state lines.

However, such networks usually come with huge price tags and may be a solution that many cities can only dream of having. So what other choices do cities have?

One alternative is to use available, affordable technology for information sharing as part of incident response. This doesn't constitute advanced interoperability, as a converged network would provide, but it's still a huge step forward.

Sharing Preincident Plan
The Canby, Ore., Fire Department uses Fire Zone software from Beaverton, Ore.-based The CAD Zone to draw building layouts. It utilizes a library containing hundreds of predrawn building templates and fire industry symbols. Each layout shows the building's floor plan and key details, like type of roof, exits, rooms, presence of hazardous materials, hydrants, standpipe location and more. Fire Zone also imports digital

photographs and converts two-dimensional prefire diagrams into three-dimensional views.

First Look Pro, a companion CAD Zone software program, retrieves building layouts created with Fire Zone, provides instant access to critical preplanning information, and allows instant viewing of the associated map, photos and other images. First Look Pro also has a separate user mode for police, so fire and police departments can share the same critical preincident planning information.

Val Codino, Canby fire captain and medic who also serves on the Canby Police Department's tactical entry team, decided that sharing Fire Zone and First Look Pro would benefit both fire and police personnel. "I approached my fire chief and the police chief about it, and coincidentally, our 911 center," Codino recalled. "We all decided this made a lot of sense and it was readily accepted."

Canby's collaboration paid off. Successful raids on methamphetamine labs at 300-unit apartment complexes have been launched as the city's fire, police, EMS personnel and 911 center communicated with one another by using the CAD Zone preincident planning software.

"You need to have good, solid information when you're en route [to an incident]," Codino said, "and when you're en route, you want to bring up that information quickly." So far, the software that Canby's public safety agencies are using meets this need. Codino said he believes a large-scale incident could be managed with the city's public safety agencies tied

'Operability' Is a Focal Issue

Helping public safety agencies achieve interoperability is a major priority for the Communications and Technology Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. According to Harlin McEwen, the committee's chairman, interoperability is only one aspect requiring attention.

McEwen said many public safety response systems are older analog systems that must be replaced, and most often are converted to digital systems. "You can buy subscriber equipment from more than one vendor [to build a public safety response system]," McEwen said. "But this gets into the proprietary nature of the system installed." That leads to incompatibility among equipment used by public safety agencies located in the same jurisdiction or region.

McEwen, a retired police chief and former volunteer firefighter, feels the real goal to effectively achieve uniform interoperability is to establish a national broadband public safety network. In the meantime, he and his committee are working to ensure that there's adequate federal funding to support local and state agencies in their efforts to achieve some level of interoperability, and the FCC's spectrum requirements are in place for regulating the licensing and use of radio transmitters by local government public safety agencies.

GIS Good for Planning, Tactical Use

Wayne Senter, fire chief of the South Kitsap Fire and Rescue in Port Orchard, Wash., considers GIS to be an important technology for achieving interoperability. GIS captures, stores, analyzes, and displays location-referenced information, as defined by the U.S. Geological Survey.

Senter cites two trends in sustainable emergency service information systems. The first one points to GIS as a foundation for sharing information, and the second trend favors a Web-based model for updates and access. "There is so much data available within the public safety arena that if we stay on the same system of GIS, then we can connect our data," he said.

South Kitsap Fire and Rescue has 1,300 buildings identified in its jurisdiction that require a detailed prefire diagram. Senter said there are 10 key items that responders need to know before they arrive at the scene. All of these are placed on the prefire plan for each building.

"If we put this information in a [Microsoft] Visio format, which interfaces with GIS, we're able to locate buildings on a GIS map when crews are responding," Senter explained. "Often the automated map systems used by emergency responders are GIS-based, and this reinforces the need to integrate rather than use a different format that is incompatible. An icon that says ‘prefire' comes up, they click it and then this drawing comes up," he said. "This is an inexpensive service, and yet you have the information available for planning and tactical use."

GIS also can work across a wide range of records-management systems. "We've got to get away from all the information being on a hard drive," Senter said. "Everything should be Web-based. [With this in place], the information is accessible by fire and law enforcement in the vehicle. Secondly we [fire and police] need to train together."

Wide-Reaching Network Is Ideal

There isn't an easy generalization to explain what type of public safety network a community should choose and how much to pay for it. "It all depends on how much interoperability a city wants to achieve," Caldwell said. "Do you want it just within your jurisdiction or in other jurisdictions in surrounding counties?" This choice can mean a huge difference in both the capabilities and limitations of the public safety system, plus its cost.

What's important to remember is that large-scale incidents may easily affect an entire region, not just one isolated jurisdiction. Coordinated mutual aid can be essential. The IACP's McEwen and NPSTC's Caldwell agree on one point: "The most desirable option is an interoperable backbone," as Caldwell said.

Information sharing among public safety agencies is already under way in most communities. With public safety funding still a major hurdle for many communities,

information sharing is a good start toward nationwide interoperability based on a wireless communication network.

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NYPD looking for technology to prevent friendly fire

June 8, 2009
The Business of Homeland Security
URL: http://homelandsecuritynewswire.com/single.php?id=8108

The recent accidental shooting of a plain clothes policeman by fellow officers has prompted NYPD to seek technology to prevent friendly fire accidents; the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory will help

Incidents of friendly fire occur not only on the battlefield, but also in city streets. On 28 May, for example, a New York City police officer shot and killed Omar Edwards, 25, a cop in plain clothes. AP reports that the NYPD is now looking for a tech solution to prevent such occurrences.

The NYPD is looking into adapting futuristic technology which would allow officers' guns to recognize one another in an effort to avoid the type of friendly fire incident that left a cop dead last week. Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly asked his inner circle to compile a list of department initiatives that would help prevent confrontations between fellow officers.

On Friday, Paul Browne, the deputy commissioner for public information at the NYPD, said the department is talking with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory about the possibility of tailoring technology for the department.

One idea involves the use of radio frequency tags that would allow officers to pinpoint where other cops are in the city, Browne said. Another involves tags that would work gun-to-gun and use an infrared sensor: When a weapon is pulled from an officer's holster it would trigger a signal that would be sent to the gun of a nearby officer. The signal may be seen or heard.

The research is preliminary. A spokesman for the federal lab said some of the ideas floated by the department, like the use of radio frequency tags, may not work.

"We are scheduled to talk with the department next week," said Pacific Northwest National Laboratory spokesman Geoff Harvey. "Up for discussion will be ideas, capabilities and their limitations. ... 'Why won't this work?' will likely be part of the talk." Lewis Page notes that the U.S. and other militaries are already well down the road with their own ideas on preventing friendly fire accidents. The U.K.'s Ministry of Defense is now working on a system which would get British forces to show up on the U.S. military's blue force tracker kit. Meanwhile, U.S. efforts such as Land Warrior (and see 5 May 2009 HS Daily Wire) and the Ground Soldier Ensemble (see 29 May 2009 HS daily

Wire) seek to use GPS satnav -- perhaps enhanced with Smart Boot (see 14 May 2009 HS Daily Wire) or other inertial-reckoning kit to work inside buildings -- to show every soldier where his comrades are.

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Alabama Hams Assist During Statewide Emergency Drill

June 5, 2009
The National Association for Amateur Radio
URL: http://www.arrl.org/news/stories/2009/06/05/10870/?nc=1

During the week of May 4-8, emergency responders and support personnel gathered in Robertsdale, Alabama for a communications interoperability training and full-scale exercise, sponsored by the Alabama Department of Homeland Security (ADHS). Gathering in a field near the Baldwin County Emergency Operations Center, responders came together to test the quality and effectiveness of communications between various State agencies and support personnel. The exercise simulated a Category 5 hurricane that entered Mobile Bay, causing damage throughout the state.

According to ARRL Alabama Section Manager Jay Isbell, KA4KUN, the Alabama DHS has come to recognize the role that Amateur Radio operators play in emergencies and natural disasters; based on this, the Alabama DHS chose to include Amateur Radio in the exercise. "During Hurricane Katrina, Amateur Radio volunteers played a key part in making sure that communications between agency personnel continued uninterrupted and the public received the help and the timely response needed in this type of catastrophic event," Isbell explained. ARRL Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES®) operators from SEMA Region 1 and other regions throughout Alabama were on site to support communications.

The Alabama Emergency Management, the Alabama National Guard, the Alabama Department of Public Safety, Region IV of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, Virtual Alabama, Alabama Civil Air Patrol, local sheriffs' office, as well as eight Alabama Regional Communication vehicles also participated in the exercise.

ARRL Southeastern Division Director Greg Sarratt, W4OZK, together with Alabama Region 1 District Emergency Coordinator Patti Link, KI4JEO, worked diligently with both amateur volunteers and professional partner agencies to coordinate and facilitate the role of Amateur Radio during the exercise. According to Isbell, Sarratt was the liaison at the Incident Command Point, while Link -- working in the Baldwin County EOC -- coordinated amateurs throughout the area, dispatching them with Alabama DHS Regional Communication vehicles and to other locations in the nine-county affected area. Isbell was dispatched to a mock reception center site 60 miles north of the incident, and Section Emergency Coordinator Les Rayburn, N1LF, manned the radio at the State Emergency Operations Center.

"Since the major hurricanes of recent years, the State of Alabama and the Southeast Region of FEMA have really accepted Amateur Radio as a prime player in any major disaster," Isbell told the ARRL. "SEC Les Rayburn has grown Alabama ARES from several independent groups into a well-organized first responder team. Amateur Radio is being accepted as a critical tool during times that the daily manpower and technical resources are stretched beyond their design."

Sarratt said that the Amateur Radio participants learned a lot during the week-long exercise: "This was a good test of the ARES processes and improvements in a full-scale exercise with other agencies since Katrina. Everyone shared and learned about each other's communications capabilities. The relationships built and lessons learned here are invaluable to the Amateur Radio Service."

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Agencies, vendors prepare for hurricane season in Florida

June 4, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/mobile_voice/news/prepare-hurricane-season-florida-20090604/

With hurricane season starting this week, emergency personnel in the state of Florida spent last weekend preparing for the possibility that disaster-recovery efforts will be needed, including in the area of communications.

Organized by Ben Holycross, radio systems manager for Polk County, Fla., the four-day exercise was conducted near Arbuckle Lake in Polk County. Participants include other state and local agencies, as well as vendors Motorola, M/A-COM and Sprint Nextel.

"While the state of Florida emergency management directors, planners and ops people were dealing with the statewide hurricane exercise, we were down there testing out and verifying that the disaster-communications equipment works," Holycross said. "If it sits there [unused], after a period of time, you've got to do maintenance on it. You've got to check it and make sure it's running."

Holycross said participants "lived on site for four days" in an effort to replicate a possible disaster situation. Personnel used water from a portable 500-gallon and supplied power with 60-kw generators.

"The only things we were missing were about 1,000 first responders screaming, ‘I need a battery/My radio's broke/How do I get this to operate?' and that smell that permeates a real disaster from rotting, decaying matter," Holycross said.

During the exercise, participants shared considerable information, Holycross said. For instance, the state forestry division "did not realize that we had the ability to put VHF

repeaters on the air for them in the event of major wildlands fires" prior to the exercise, Holycross said.

This is the second year Polk County has hosted such an event, but this was the first time that vendors participated, Holycross said.

"We had Motorola, M/A-COM and Sprint Nextel all sitting at a table with us, and everybody was pleasantly cooperative," he said.

Sprint Nextel brought some one of its SATCOLT (satellite-based cellular on light truck) communications vehicles to the exercise that provides both telephones and push-to-talk for the Nextel side of the house.

"They got a chance to see our capabilities, and we got a chance to look at theirs and figure out what resources we had that we could share in a disaster situation," Holycross said.

###

PUBLIC-SAFETY GROUPS AGREE TO SEEK 700 MHZ D BLOCK

June 1, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/d-block-public-safety-broadband-20090601/

Eight major public-safety groups met last week to develop consensus on several key items, including the desire to have Congress reallocate the D Block for public-safety broadband use; finding sustainable funding for the Public Safety Spectrum Trust (PSST); and enabling local, regional and state entities to build out networks on the spectrum early.

Hosted by the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO), the meeting in Alexandria, Va., included representatives from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCC), Major County Sheriffs' Association (MCS), Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association (MFCA), National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA).

"We did get down to brass tacks and addressed the issues," APCO Executive Director George Rice said. "I think it went quite well."

The group met in April but declined to reveal any details of the discussions. This time, the group acknowledged that it "substantially agreed" to four key points, the most notable being that it would ask Congress to reallocate the 10 MHz D Block to public safety.

Currently, the D Block would be auctioned to a commercial operator. Under current FCC rules, the D Block winner would forge a public-private partnership with the PSST — the nationwide licensee of public safety's 10 MHz of broadband spectrum in the 700 MHz band — to build a wireless broadband network for public-safety use, but no commercial operator submitted a qualifying bid under that scenario.

Under yesterday's proposal, Congress would grant the D Block to public safety, meaning public safety would have 20 MHz of broadband spectrum on which to build a network.

"It's not fully decided, but the sense is that [the D Block] would still go to the licensee [PSST]," Rice said.

In addition, the group expressed consensus that a sustainable funding program is needed for the PSST, which currently has no source of revenue to support its operations.

Another point of consensus at the meeting was that local, state and regional entities should have the opportunity to build broadband networks on the 700 MHz public-safety spectrum, as long as the networks are built to national standards. Those standards have not yet been established, and doing so is one of the group's priorities and biggest challenges, Rice said.

PSST Chairman Harlin McEwen said attendees at the meeting discussed the notion of establishing a "sub-license" procedure that would grant local entities most rights of a normal licensees, if they adhered to national standards and conditions.

"There are a lot of details that need to be worked out, but there is definitely growing consensus," McEwen said.

While the details of network standards have not been completed, the group did agree on "general approaches regarding levels of service, roaming access, licensing and technical requirements," according to a press release generated by the public-safety group.

Rice said the group has not yet scheduled another face-to-face meeting, but participants will communicate during the interim.

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Driving Interoperability Improvements with the National Emergency Communications Plan: Communications Unit Leader Training

June 1, 2009
IAFC On Scene
By Chris Essid
URL: http://www.iafc.org/displayindustryarticle.cfm?articlenbr=39354

When I was appointed Virginia's first interoperability director in 2003, I didn't fully understand the complex nature of interoperability issues. It wasn't only a new position

within the Commonwealth, but the first of its kind across the nation. That kind of clean slate can be exciting, but it is also a challenge.

When I joined DHS's Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) in 2007, I brought with me the single greatest lesson I learned from Virginia: to go to the source—our emergency responders—because they know what works in the field.

As many of you know, DHS submitted the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) to Congress in July 2008. To develop the first national plan, OEC followed my lessons learned from Virginia and created the NECP with input from over 150 emergency responders nationwide.

The NECP is the nation's first strategic plan to improve emergency-response communications. It addresses gaps and determines solutions so emergency-response personnel at all levels of government and across all disciplines can communicate as needed, on demand and as authorized.

The NECP guides the development of resources, training and procedures that will enable jurisdictions to move toward their interoperability goals. OEC partners with public-safety groups to implement all NECP goals, initiatives and milestones.

In particular, Initiative 5 of the NECP focuses on improving emergency responder skills and capabilities including training and exercises. A key part of Initiative 5 has been understanding what training is needed in the field and training emergency responders to serve as communications unit leaders (COMLs) during critical incidents.

COML Training

Most readers of On Scene know all too well that interoperable systems are only part of communicating successfully during an all-hazards event. Technology is important, but coordination, collaboration and planning are the cornerstones of effective on-scene communications.

For years, the forest service and the fire service trained communication managers for large wildland fires. These leaders of the communications units enabled effective response by following the Incident Command System.

For more information on COML training, course prerequisites and upcoming dates, visit the SAFECOM website.

The National Emergency Communications Plan (PDF) is also available on DHS's website.

For more on OEC, visit DHS's Office of Emergency Communications webpage.

The importance of having an incident commander and the need to train those who hold this position emerged from the 2006 regional exercises that developed tactical

interoperable communications plans. To respond to this need, the emergency-response community, supported by DHS, developed a formal all-hazards type III COML training program, building on the model used for many years in the wildland fire scenarios.

COMLs serve as the leader of communications units during all-hazards emergency operations, significantly improving communications across the multiple disciplines and jurisdictions responding to an incident. OEC drew on what was working in the field—the system used by the fire service—and gathered input from emergency responders from across the country to create the Type III COML training course. As part of NECP implementation, training is being offered on the national level so more jurisdictions have COMLs trained to the same baseline. Students who complete the Type III COML course receive a certificate of completion; it's then the responsibility of the respective states and territories to certify their students as COMLs.

Training includes operational and technical aspects of leading communication units during all-hazards events, such as creating a communications plan and determining appropriate radio channels or talk groups to be used. Students identify resources and available tools in order to have an inventory of resources assembled when they need it.

In addition to the technical and operational skills learned, students have the opportunity to improve coordination and collaboration among emergency responders. As students work through their exercises, they're able to share ideas, hear from people that have similar issues to their own and strengthen relationships with agencies they may need to work with in the future.

Proven Success

In April, OEC hosted the first National Conference on Emergency Communications in Chicago, bringing together over 450 members of the emergency-response community. During the conference, OEC provided emergency responders the opportunity to share success stories and offer suggestions for programmatic improvement during NECP implementation. Many attendees took the opportunity to encourage OEC to provide more COML training and several jurisdictions shared stories of how COML training helped effective emergency response during critical incidents.

Two examples illustrate the significant impact COML training has during emergencies.

In August 2008, three dozen public-safety communication specialists from the Houston, San Antonio and Dallas/Fort Worth areas gathered in Houston for COML training just as Hurricane Gustav was moving toward the Gulf Coast. The instructors incorporated the coming storm into the students' exercises, and many of the students went directly from the training to storm preparation and response.

During training in January 2009, students gathered from Kentucky, Georgia and Tennessee at the State Fire Academy in Bell Buckle, Tenn. Immediately following the three-day training, a major ice storm crippled Tennessee and Kentucky. Students who had

just completed the COML training course were deployed to help with the storm response and use their newly learned skills.

These types of natural disasters remind us why it's so crucial to have individuals in every region of the country who are trained to manage communications during an emergency. And in these specific cases, the training made those who were deployed into emergency situations better prepared to serve their communities.

By November of this year, 1,000 students from nearly all 50 states will have attended COML training. In order to increase the number of COMLs trained, OEC is launching a train-the-trainer course, beginning this summer. More qualified COML training instructors means more regions have the ability to conduct training on their own.

The COML training program and each of the goals and initiatives of the NECP are driving improvements to emergency communications nationwide. An effective national plan would not be possible without input from emergency responders. OEC values the expertise from the emergency-response community and will continue to partner with those in the field.

With a national plan and strong partnerships in place, we are focused and poised to produce extraordinary results.

Chris Essid is director of the Office of Emergency Communications in DHS
IAFC Communications Committee and the Narrowbanding Mandate

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IAFC Communications Committee and the Narrowbanding Mandate

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IAFC On Scene
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The IAFC Communications Committee focuses on wireless radio communications issues that affect the fire service and public safety. The committee, made up of nine IAFC members and three adjunct members from the communications industry, analyzes current issues for their impact on the fire service, reviews legislative proposals from Congress and works with federal agencies on communications issues, especially the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Communications Commission.

The committee also works with other public-safety organizations on issues of interest to the IAFC and its members. Committee members represent the IAFC on important government and industry committees and boards, such as the DHS SAFECOM Project, NPSTC, PSST, IMSA and NFPA.

Narrowbanding

Licensees in the private land mobile VHF and UHF bands, including all public-safety licensees, traditionally have employed systems that operate on channel bandwidths of 25 kHz. Narrowbanding refers to a requirement by the FCC that on or before January 1, 2013, all existing licensees implement equipment designed to operate on channel bandwidths of 12.5 kHz or less or that meets a specific efficiency standard.

These requirements apply to applicants for and licensees of mobile radio systems—both voice and data—in the following spectrum bands:

VHF:
150–174 MHz: available nationwide
UHF:
421–430 MHz: available only in Detroit, Buffalo, and Cleveland
450–470 MHz: available nationwide
470–512 MHz: shared with UHF-TV; available only in 11 cities

The only exception is that paging-only channels are not subject to the FCC's narrowbanding requirements.

In the public-safety radio pool, only two channels are designated as paging-only: 152.0075 MHz and 157.450 MHz. Many fire departments utilize alert paging on their dispatch channels. The exception doesn't apply to these channels, so your operations will be subject to mandatory narrowbanding.

Licensees may meet an efficiency standard instead of satisfying the requirement to operate with a bandwidth of 12.5 kHz or less. For voice operations, the efficiency standard is satisfied if the equipment is capable of transmitting at least one voice channel per 12.5 kHz of bandwidth.

In other words, voice equipment operating on a channel bandwidth of up to 25 kHz will be permitted if the equipment supports two or more voice channels.

For data operations, the efficiency standard is satisfied if the equipment is capable of supporting a minimum data rate of 4800 bits per second per 6.25 kHz of channel bandwidth.

One common misconception is that narrowbanding is a requirement to "go digital." The FCC's rules don't require licensees to employ any particular type of equipment or satisfy other technical standards in order to meet this requirement; either analog or digital modulation is permitted. You may continue to operate analog equipment, even after the January 1, 2013, deadline, provided your equipment meets the 12.5 kHz standards.

The purpose of mandatory narrowbanding is to promote more efficient use of the VHF and UHF land mobile bands. Today, these bands are highly congested, and there often isn't enough spectrum available for licensees to expand their existing systems or implement new systems. As licensees convert to equipment that operates on narrower

channel bandwidths, new channels will become available for licensing by parties that need them.

The FCC expects licensees will ultimately implement equipment designed to operate on channel bandwidths of 6.25 KHz or less. However, there currently is no deadline set for making this transition.

Narrowbanding is not optional. Licensees can't simply ignore the FCC's narrowbanding rules. If you're licensed in the VHF or UHF land mobile bands and aren't currently operating on narrowband (12.5 kHz) equipment, you'll be affected. Your existing wideband system will need to be modified or replaced by January 1, 2013, and failure to comply may have serious consequences.

You must modify your FCC license to add narrowband emission designators before you switch to 12.5 kHz operation and the application must be reviewed by a designated frequency coordinator before being submitted to the FCC. The IAFC, in cooperation with the International Municipal Signal Association (IMSA), provides frequency coordination services for the fire, EMS and public safety pool frequencies. Visit www.IMSAsafety.org and click on Frequency Coordination for more information.

The IAFC and IMSA have developed FCC Narrowbanding Mandate: A Public Safety Guide for Compliance, a comprehensive brochure to provide guidance to state and local public-safety entities on narrowbanding requirements. Also available is Narrowband Easy, developed by the IAFC/IMSA fire/EMS frequency coordinator for those who need to amend their FCC licenses. Both resources are available on the IAFC's Communications Resources webpage.

Chief Douglas M. Aiken is chief of Lakes Region Fire Mutual Aid (N.H.) and chair of the IAFC's Communications Committee. If you're interested in serving on this committee, email Chief Aiken or call him at 603-528-9111.

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