

**Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips**  
**October 16, 2009 – October 30, 2009**

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## **FEMA Reaches Milestone with Integrated Public Alert Warning System**

October 29, 2009

Firehouse.com

URL: [http://cms.firehouse.com/web/online/Industry-Business-News/FEMA-Reaches-Milestone-with-Integrated-Public-Alert-Warning-System/50\\$66401](http://cms.firehouse.com/web/online/Industry-Business-News/FEMA-Reaches-Milestone-with-Integrated-Public-Alert-Warning-System/50$66401)

Earlier this month, on October 13, the Organization for the Advancement of Structural Information Standards (OASIS) voted to approve the OASIS Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) v1.2 USA IPAWS Profile as a technical specification for public alert systems. The profile will enable emergency managers across the country to use a common format for creating emergency alert messages that can travel across multiple alert systems. The availability of such a profile furthers FEMA's objective of increasing interoperability across federal, state and local alert systems.

"We are pleased with the recent progress," said Antwane Johnson, director, IPAWS. "The input received from industry and other stakeholders has been vital to developing a profile that will meet the needs of the emergency alerting community."

FEMA has informed the communications industry along with its federal alert partners it may adopt the technical standard as early as the third quarter of 2010.

Also, FEMA has recently initiated a conformity test lab to provide an independent, objective analysis of qualified products to ensure they adhere to the IPAWS technical specifications. Lists of compliant products will be published as they become available.

IPAWS is a critical part of FEMA's plan to upgrade the existing national warning systems which allows the president and authorized officials to communicate with the public in times of emergency via television, radio, telephone, cell phone, and other communications pathways.

The mission of IPAWS is to build and maintain an effective, reliable, integrated, flexible and comprehensive system that enables the American people to receive emergency alert and warning information through as many devices as possible.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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## **FCC announces more 800 MHz channels available for public safety**

October 29, 2009

*Urgent Communications*

By Donny Jackson

URL: [http://urgentcomm.com/networks\\_and\\_systems/news/800mhz-channels-available-20091029/?smtc=wl](http://urgentcomm.com/networks_and_systems/news/800mhz-channels-available-20091029/?smtc=wl)

Public-safety entities seeking 800 MHz spectrum next month will be able to apply for interleaved frequencies being cleared by Sprint Nextel as part of the rebanding process, the FCC announced in a public notice released yesterday.

As part of 800 MHz rebanding, certain interleaved channels will be cleared by Sprint Nextel and dedicated for public-safety usage, based on rebanding progress in a given geographic area. Yesterday's public notice represents the FCC's second round of applications for such frequencies.

In this second stage, 30 channels in the 809.5–810.5/854.5–855.5 MHz block will be available for public-safety application in geographic regions where at least 25% of rebanding is completed. In addition, any channels that were not claimed in the January first-stage process are available for application, FCC spokesman Rob Kenny said. A list of available channels can be found at the FCC's license search page.

The spectrum will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. Officially, the FCC will begin accepting applications on Dec. 2, but frequency coordinators can begin notifying each other at 8 a.m. EST on Nov. 11 of applications in an attempt to prevent the FCC receiving mutually exclusive applications. If conflicts arise, frequency coordinators are expected to resolve the issues before applications are submitted to the FCC on Dec. 2.

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## **Alert system looks to include cell phone users**

October 29, 2009

*The Herald (Monterey County)*

By Daniel Lopez

URL: [http://www.montereyherald.com/local/ci\\_13667015](http://www.montereyherald.com/local/ci_13667015)

When Monterey County introduced its emergency telephone notification system in 2009, it reduced the need for door-to-door canvassing to deliver important messages to people.

But until now, county residents had to have a land-line phone to receive the calls.

Under an initiative to reach every resident, officials launched a campaign Wednesday encouraging people to register their cell phone numbers so they can be included in the notification database.

The system, called AlertMontereyCounty, can also send alerts to Voice over IP phones and e-mail addresses as long as users add them to a database that requires a physical address.

Lynn Diebold, county director of emergency communications, said events that can trigger the alerts include ordered evacuations because of wildfires or floods, toxic chemical spills, natural disasters and power outages.

She stressed the need for people who don't have a land-line phone to make sure they are not left out.

"There won't be an opportunity for them to get a message that perhaps all their neighbors around them are getting," Diebold said.

She said the messages can be sent to specific geographic areas and reduce the need for emergency workers to canvass entire areas. Instead, emergency responders can focus on checking addresses where they know alerts were not sent.

Marina Police Chief Eddie Rodriguez, president of the Monterey County Chief Law Enforcement Officers Association, said telephone messages can help police when they need to give people instructions while searching for dangerous suspects, missing persons or kidnapped children.

"It's a fast way to get the word out to the masses in a short period of time," he said.

The system, which is essentially a reverse 911 phone call, is connected to a service in Ohio making it possible for alerts to be sent out as long as there is one working phone line in the county, Diebold said.

The messages will be composed by someone in the county familiar with the emergency situation.

Diebold said the county and every city in it are using the system and will share in the annual cost, which is about \$240,000.

Alert messages can be sent in any language, but are generally done in English and Spanish, Diebold said.

The emergency notification system has been used several times since its introduction, including last year's Indians and Basin Complex fires, Diebold said.

She said the intent has always been to make the alerts available to non-land-line telephone users, but the system was rolled out earlier than planned because of the wildland fires.

Diebold said staff at libraries in the county can assist anyone who needs help registering for the service.

To register a cell phone number, Voice over IP phones and e-mail addresses to receive emergency notifications, see [AlertMontereyCounty.org](http://AlertMontereyCounty.org).

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## **Panel tries to clarify narrowbanding mandate**

October 28, 2009

*Urgent Communications*

By Donny Jackson

URL: [http://urgentcomm.com/policy\\_and\\_law/news/narrowbanding-mandate-webinar-20091028/index.html](http://urgentcomm.com/policy_and_law/news/narrowbanding-mandate-webinar-20091028/index.html)

Entities operating radio systems operating between 150 MHz and 512 MHz should be preparing to meet the Jan. 1, 2013, deadline to migrate their systems from 25 kHz channels to 12.5 kHz channel efficiency or equivalent, panelists said today during a webinar hosted by Urgent Communications.

While there have been some in the wireless community who have questioned whether the FCC would enforce the 2013 deadline, any entity choosing not to meet the narrowbanding mandate is taking a risky position, said Roberto Mussenden, an attorney advisor with the policy division of the FCC's public safety and homeland security bureau (PSHSB).

"Non-compliant operation is prohibited," Mussenden said. "It's not secondary [usage], it's prohibited."

Mussenden said the FCC plans to issue a public notice before the end of the year to address some questions being asked about narrowbanding, but it won't include any changes in the 2013 date. In addition, he reiterated a recent statement from PSHSB Chief Jamie Barnett that waiver requests would be reviewed with a high level of scrutiny, given the fact that users have known about the 2013 date for years.

"Remember that the overarching goal of the narrowbanding proceeding was to make additional channels available for users," Mussenden said. "To go ahead and frustrate that, I can't see the commission entertaining that lightly."

While expressing full support for the 2013 deadline, Ralph Haller — chairman of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) — expressed concerns about the interim Jan. 1, 2011, narrowbanding deadline, after which equipment must have 6.25 kHz capability that may never be used by public safety and could result in operability and interoperability challenges for public-safety agencies.

Haller noted that public-safety users could receive distorted audio or audio with a low volume if the receiving radio and the base station were not in the same stage of narrowbanding. In addition, some agencies are experiencing degraded coverage after migrating to 12.5 kHz efficiency, depending on the design of the original system, Haller said.

Mark Crosby, president and CEO of the Enterprise Wireless Alliance, said he is sympathetic to some of the interoperability issues impacting public safety that do not affect most enterprises. However, Crosby said he would prefer that such issues be handled via the waiver process instead of a dismissal or delay of the 2011 deadline, which might be perceived by some as the FCC wavering on its desire to see narrowbanding completed.

“I’m just concerned that this industry is so confused right now about narrowbanding that any extending of dates may just add to the confusion,” Crosby said.

Under the current rules, the FCC has mandated that equipment include a 6.25 kHz mode after the 2011 deadline. The commission has issued an order indicating its plans to eventually require licensees to narrowband to 6.25 kHz equivalency, but the agency has yet to set a firm date for such a transition.

Haller said the lack of a firm date for 6.25 kHz efficiency is creating uncertainty within the public safety community that it will be able to recoup its investment in 12.5 kHz technology. Mussenden noted that the FCC has been sensitive to depreciation and amortization schedules in the past and expects that approach to continue in the future.

All panelists noted that narrowbanding only guarantees the licensee a single channel with the same channel center as it currently has. Additional channels can be requested, “but you have to ask for them,” Crosby said.

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## **FCC Appoints New Members to Public Safety Interoperability Advisory Council**

October 27, 2009

BroadbandCensus.com

URL: <http://broadbandcensus.com/2009/10/fcc-appoints-new-members-to-public-safety-interoperability-advisory-council/>

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski has appointed persons to serve on the Communications Security, Reliability, and Interoperability Council. Genachowski also designated William Smith, representing AT&T, and Chris Fischer, representing the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, International as Co-Chairs of the group.

The members represent a diverse and balanced mix of viewpoints from public safety organizations, Federal, state and local government agencies, the communications industry, and public interest organizations, said the FCC.

The Council, a Federal Advisory Committee, will provide recommendations to the Commission regarding best practices and actions that the Commission can take to ensure optimal security, reliability, and interoperability of communications systems, including

telecommunications, media and public safety communications systems. On March 19, 2009, the FCC renewed the charter for the CSRIC for two years.

Under its charter, CSRIC's duties include recommending "best practices" to promote reliable 911 and enhanced 911 (E911) service, interoperability of public safety communications systems, analyzing and recommending technical options to enable accurate and reliable dynamic E911 location identification for interconnected internet telephone service. It also includes recommending ways to improve Emergency Alert System.

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## **Public safety radio system gets big boost**

October 27, 2009

*Vermont Press Bureau*

By Peter Hirschfeld

URL: <http://www.timesargus.com/article/20091027/NEWS02/910270346/1003/NEWS02>

The Department of Public Safety will use the bulk of nearly \$1 million in new federal appropriations to improve radio communications between state police, local law-enforcement agencies and other first responders in the state.

Since the events of 9/11, when large-scale disaster exposed shortcomings in emergency communication systems nationwide, the department has sought to improve communications between first-responder agencies scattered around the Green Mountains.

At the department's Waterbury headquarters Monday morning, law-enforcement officials stood with Sen. Bernard Sanders to announce a \$944,000 appropriation, more than half of which will be used to further the "interoperability" mission that public-safety officials have long sought to achieve.

"Unfortunately Vermont doesn't have the resources available to build one of the huge, modern, state-of-the-art systems some other states and cities are using," said Paul Duquette, chief of the Newport Police Department and president of the Vermont Communications Board Lifeline Project.

Duquette said initial estimates from a private contractor pegged the cost of a fully functional statewide interoperability system at more than \$200 million. The venture would have required 110 new radio towers.

Lack of financial resources, Duquette said, compelled the Communications Board to embark on a less-expensive solution. The system relies on alternate technologies to unify emergency transmissions through new radio frequencies.

"We're going to utilize the state's microwave system as the backbone and use existing infrastructure to build off of," Duquette said.

The department will use \$506,000 in new federal funding to install towers and repeaters in areas that don't currently have coverage.

"As we identify dead spots, that's where the (federal) money comes in," Duquette said.

While the state has made improvements over the decade in its emergency communications system, Duquette said interoperability is still limited by the transmission challenges posed by rural topography.

"Currently there are limited frequencies available for interoperable communications," Duquette said. "This platform of more frequencies and interoperable communication equipment will facilitate police, fire and EMS personnel being able to talk to each other in the event of a major incident."

Lamoille County Sheriff Roger Marcoux said the technology will be particularly helpful in rural coverage areas like his, where deputies and municipal officers need an open communication line between local and state authorities.

"Interoperable communications will be especially helpful for rural police agencies," Marcoux said. "Down the road, we hope to have channels where local agencies can go when they need help from state police, and have more channels available to help handle an incident."

The federal funding, secured in the 2009 Commerce Justice and Science Appropriations bill, will also fund a quarter-million dollar initiative to install high-tech digital cameras in state police cruisers. The constantly recording cameras feed dashboard footage directly into a hard drive, and will allow troopers to record not only traffic stops, but also the 30 seconds leading up to the stop.

Col. Thomas L'Esperance, head of the Vermont State Police, said the "silent witnesses" will provide police and prosecutors better evidence. The effort will also save money, he said, by allowing troopers to submit the tape as court evidence rather than have to appear in person on the witness stand.

The appropriation will additionally fund a \$188,000 "driving simulator" for the Vermont Police Academy. RJ Elrick, director of the academy, said the device will enable recruits and existing officers to experience the kind of real-life driving scenarios they may encounter on the beat.

"It's something we'll all benefit from, and will make highways safer for both the motoring public and people responding to those emergencies," said Elrick.

Commissioner of Public Safety Thomas Tremblay said officers are statistically more likely to be killed in a traffic accident than in an encounter with an armed adversary. He noted that two firefighters have died in vehicle crashes in Vermont this year alone.



"I think that highlights the need of continued training for first responders," Tremblay said. "This training simulator is critically important to law enforcement."

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## **October 2009 MHz Update: The FCC, the LMR letter, and D-Block reallocation**

October 27, 2009

PoliceOne.com

By Doug Wyllie

URL: <http://www.policeone.com/communications/articles/1959111-October-2009-MHz-Update-The-FCC-the-LMR-letter-and-D-Block-reallocation/>

The PoliceOne MHz Update provides a quick look into what's current in mobile communications and computing for law enforcement. This month we look at a letter sent to the FCC by Harlin McEwen regarding a misconception by some that there will soon be a wireless broadband alternative to Land Mobile Radio, an ordinance in Texas that prohibits "texting while driving" and the latest developments in the D-Block debacle. What do you think are the most important problems (or solutions) for mobile data and voice communications for law enforcement? Add your comments below or send us an e-mail.

### **McEwen to FCC: Please dispel misinformation on LMR and 700MHz**

Earlier this month, Harlin McEwen, Chairman of the IACP Communications and Technology Committee, wrote a letter to FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski in which he said that there is a "growing misconception by some that in two to three years wireless broadband will be an alternative to Land Mobile Radio (LMR) mission critical voice systems. It also appears that some believe that the 12 MHz of spectrum in the 700MHz band designated for public safety narrowband voice systems should be reallocated for public safety broadband."

To dispel this misinformation, McEwen prepared a white paper which stated (in part) that there are no technical broadband standards in place or planned to provide the one-to-many communications and talk around (unit-to-unit) capability needed for mission critical public safety voice communications.

"Public safety agencies have already spent millions to deploy land mobile radio voice systems in the narrowband 700MHz spectrum with many more deployments being planned," McEwen wrote.

McEwen says in that white paper that it will be many years (if ever) before LMR systems can be replaced entirely by broadband technologies. "The public safety community has endorsed Long Term Evolution (LTE) as the preferred broadband standard for public safety data products and the latest version of that standard (V8) is strictly a data standard that does not include voice capability."

### **Austin cops exempt from “texting while driving” ordinance**

It was reported in the Austin American Statesman in mid-October that that a proposed ban on “texting while driving” unanimously passed a vote of the City Council and will take effect on November 2, 2009. From that newspaper article — written by staff writer Sarah Coppola — are instructions to local drivers in the Texas Capitol City that “the ordinance will prohibit writing, sending or viewing electronic messages on a cell phone, BlackBerry, iPhone, or any wireless communication device while driving.” Sending, e-mails, posting on sites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc., as well as entering ‘a command or request to access an Internet site’ will also be prohibited, according to the report.

Of interest to law enforcement is the fact that drivers of public safety vehicles will be exempt from this ordinance.

Coppola wrote that the ban has drawn fire from the local chapter of the ACLU. “Debbie Russell of the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union questioned why public safety employees would be exempt, saying texting while driving poses the same risks for them. She added that the ban could be tough to enforce and may lead to intrusive searches of wireless devices as police or prosecutors gather evidence against violators.”

Regardless of the exemption to police officers, Travis Yates writes in an excellent PoliceOne Mobility Tip related to driving that there are specific ways in which you can manage the many tasks (reading a mobile display terminal, changing radio frequencies, and yes, checking your mobile phone) in a safe manner. Check out that tip here.

### **Getting closer to a national interoperable communications network?**

This month marks the 20-year anniversary of the Loma Prieta earthquake that rocked Northern California. In the two decades that have transpired since then, we’ve had several major natural disasters, myriad “little” ones, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Still, despite multiple efforts by many great minds, there remain significant impediments to the types of truly interoperable voice and data communications that will be required in the event of another catastrophe.

PoliceOne had a phone conversation with Deputy Chief Eddie Reyes of the Alexandria, Virginia Police Department during the IACP Conference in Denver, and learned that some indicators show movement toward a resolution to that problem.

“It is well established that public safety personnel need a wireless broadband network with priority access that has a nationwide footprint, is interoperable and shared, and incorporates the latest technologies utilized by the private sector,” Reyes of the told PoliceOne. “The fact is, today the general public has better wireless communication capabilities than most first responders. These robust broadband wireless networks available to the public have created the expectation that public safety personnel can communicate with one another, regardless of discipline or geography. In an effort to expedite the transition and deployment of this spectrum to the public safety community,

the FCC, public safety organizations, and industry representatives developed a proposal to create a network that would be based upon a public-private sector partnership model.”

Reyes told PoliceOne that the Major Cities Police Chiefs 700MHz Working Group will take the lead in pursuing congressional action to remove the D-Block from auction and to allocate it directly to public safety as part of the nationwide public safety broadband license now held by the PSST.

“The good news is that the spectrum remains reserved for public safety,” says Reyes.

Read the full report on our conversation with Eddie Reyes by clicking here.

### **Congress may move to reallocate D-Block public safety**

In related news, Paul Kirby at TRDaily reported in mid-October that Jamie Barnett (who serves as chief of the FCC’s Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau) that the “national broadband plan that the FCC must complete by next February will likely provide ‘a rank order of recommendations’ on how to move ahead on a national public safety broadband network.”

Barnett reportedly told Kirby at TRDaily “that recommendations will be based on actions Congress might take, such as reallocating the 700MHz D-Block to public safety, as most in the public safety community want.”

Kirby wrote in his brief (sent to PoliceOne via e-mail so no link is presently available) that “Barnett said he’s been trying to stress in every speech the need for everyone to push for a national public safety broadband network.”

Whether that national network emerges as a single, unified entity or whether it evolves as a patchwork of regional networks all meeting a set of national standards (read more about that possibility here) remains to be seen.

As always, stay tuned...

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### **Disaster tweets hit snags**

October 21, 2009

*American Police Beat Magazine*

URL: <http://www.apbweb.com/featured-articles/1312-disaster-tweets-hit-snags.html>

"For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for Nature cannot be fooled." That quote from physicist Richard Feynman is particularly relevant when it comes to the increasing use of technology in public safety and the challenges that these technologies present. According to an article by Alan Gomez for USA Today, many cities across the nation are having second thoughts about alerting residents to natural disasters and catastrophes via their cell phones and computers. City

officials say they are worried because of the cost of these technologies and serious questions about whether they work.

Public safety alert systems that issue e-mails and text messages warning of everything from traffic jams to terrorist incidents are now commonplace. As is usually the case the response from agencies and individuals is mixed. Although many communities are satisfied with the systems, others say their experiences have been less than satisfactory.

For instance, when a tornado was reported near Fort Collins, Colorado last June, about 100,000 people who were supposed to receive alerts via their cell phones and e-mail inboxes never got the message. Thankfully the tornado fizzled out but the notification failure led the local police agency that operates the program to retrain personnel as well as asking the software company that developed the software to rework the system. Kimberly Culp, executive director of the Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority which oversees the Fort Collins program, said such glitches are expected with a program that isn't even a year old.

"Of course there's going to be hiccups along the way," she told Mr. Gomez in a recent interview. Even a bigger issue is the cost. In a time when line personnel are forgoing raises or getting laid off, some question the wisdom of spending money on gadgets instead of bodies. Some agencies pay annual fees to wireless service providers.

Larimer charges \$95,000-a-year to send an unlimited number of messages. Other companies charge by the message. In Houston the automated alert system is a flop. City and public safety officials aren't happy with the cost and want the telecommunications industry to chip in. "We're trying to get out there and say, 'This is for emergency purposes,'" Joe Laud of the Houston Emergency Center told USA Today. "But of course, (wireless providers) are not in the public sector. They are in business to stay in business. That's where the static is."

For profit public safety efforts such as private correctional facilities and programs where municipalities sell advertisements on their cruisers to defray costs have been met with mixed reactions. As is almost always the case when it comes to innovation, the federal government is way behind cities and counties. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) just started a two-year study to analyze the available technology, and the Federal Communications Commission is working with wireless carriers to figure out how best to use their systems.

"We're going to wait and see what the feds develop," David Maxwell, Arkansas' emergency management director told USA Today. A federal warning system, if it ever occurs, won't happen before 2010, said Ann Buckingham, acting assistant administrator for FEMA's National Continuity Programs Directorate.

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## **Governors protest changes to FEMA grant programs**

October 20, 2009

*CongressDaily*

By Chris Strohm

URL: [http://www.govexec.com/story\\_page.cfm?articleid=43835](http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=43835)

A policy shift by the Homeland Security Department on how state and local governments can spend grants could put critical programs at risk of being stalled or killed, the National Governors Association said Monday.

But a department spokesman said Homeland Security is "undertaking a thorough review" of its grant efforts and downplayed tension with the nation's governors.

In a letter sent to Homeland Security and White House officials, the NGA complained that a recent policy change by the Federal Emergency Management Agency will prevent homeland security grants from being used to support current projects. The association believes the change will restrict the ability of state and local governments to sustain critical programs, and asked for the policy to be altered.

Without greater flexibility to use grant funds, "critical national capabilities that have been strengthened over the past several years, such as interoperable emergency communications, intelligence and information sharing, hazardous materials (HAZMAT) response and search and rescue, will be severely weakened or lost entirely," the letter said.

"For example, information technology projects that support interoperable communications systems or intelligence fusion centers are dependent upon the maintenance of software agreements, technology upgrades, and user fees throughout the life of the system," the letter added.

An NGA spokeswoman said the policy applies to using funding under the State Homeland Security Grant program and the Urban Area Security Initiative program -- two of the largest sources of national emergency preparedness grants.

She said the policy shift is also unfair because state and local governments are in the middle of their grant cycles. The states were notified of the policy shift Sept. 22, she said.

The department spokesman said Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano "appreciates the NGA letter and is committed to working with all of our partners for a more fully integrated and responsive process that recognizes the operational and fiscal needs of first responders."