

Communications Interoperability Working Group
08 September 2004
Minutes

WELCOME, PUBLIC COMMENT and REVIEW OF MINUTES:

Meeting was called to order at 1303. The review of the minutes and public comment were delayed in order to accommodate Director Kerry Flaherty's schedule. However, the following additional individuals were present: Bob DiBella (Glastonbury EMD), Joseph Murray (Hamden PD), Chuck Beck (OEM), Roy Piper (OEM), Rosemary Salerno (CTDHS), Chris Marvin (CREPC), Keith Victor (W. Hartford), George Carbonell (DOT), Joan Carrasquillo (OSET), Mike Stemmler (CSP), Jerry Zarwanski (OSET), Gordon Shand (DPH), Paul Jakubson (CPCA), Skip Thomas (OPM, Chair), Richard Tsou (New Haven), Doug Whalen (Bradley FD), Eric Fine (Westport FD), Wayne Sinclair (DMV), Phil Mikan (USCG).

NEW BUSINESS: EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATIONS. Director Flaherty presented a proposal to improve the emergency management high band radio system at the local level. He sought the concurrence/approval of the committee in order to make the FY 04 SHSP grant money available to the local municipalities to improve their HF systems. It was reported that just under half of the local municipalities currently have the ability to communicate to the OEM Area Coordinator via the HF system. Other towns' HF systems made need upgrading. Upon questioning on whether the OEM HF system could be considered inter vs intra operability, it was explained that the HF system allows each town to communicate with its respective OEM Area Coordinator, with OEM HQ and each other (within their respective region). The cost of improving the current system vs the cost of a "new" system was discussed. There was discussion on the need for any equipment (radios, antennas, repeaters, etc) procured to be APCO 25 compliant. The consensus was that it would be better (i.e. more cost effective) to enhance the current system than to start over and develop/procure a new system. Licensing should not be an issue since the frequencies already belong to the OEM program. However, the OEM HF frequencies are not part of a nationwide plan. Thus there will be a need to coordinate the improvement/expansion of the OEM HF system with the States adjacent to Connecticut. It was pointed out that the improvement to the OEM HF system would fold in nicely with the plan to develop a V-TAC/U-TAC system in CT. The committee unanimously agreed that the proposal met the criteria for interoperability and supported the use of the FY 04 SHSP grant funds.

Upon the conclusion of Director Flaherty's presentation, the meeting returned to the published agenda. There were no Public Comments. The 06 July 2004 meeting minutes were reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes was made, seconded and unanimously passed.

OLD BUSINESS:

It was reported that there are 134 (58 EMS/76 EMD) more individuals that still need to attend the 800 MHz I-CALL/TAC radio training in order to receive their radio. A training session was held in Bridgeport in mid August. Another training session is scheduled to

take place in Woodstock, CT (the Town Hall) on 16 September 2004 from 7-9 PM. Although a final inventory report is still pending, it was reported that of the 865 radios distributed all but 155 (all fire department related) have been confirmed received. It was also reported that of the 140 PSAP 800 MHz control stations procured, 104 have been installed and another 25 are scheduled. It was stated that I-CALL/TAC training has been incorporated into the in-service training at POST. The CT Fire Academy is considering adding similar in-service training to its curriculum. OSET stated that it would look into adding I-CALL/TAC overview training to the in-service Dispatcher training curriculum. It was reported that the Capitol Region has established a weekly training session on communications that includes I-CALL/TAC procedures. It was also reported that the Southwest Connecticut area had conducted refresher training on the decontamination trailers which included the 800 MHz radio system and will look into establishing an in-service type communications training program similar to the Capital Region.

Chief Jakubson asked a question about the location of the decontamination trailers throughout the State. The trailers are equipped with an 800 MHz I-CALL/TAC repeater as well as 6 hand held radios with charger. There was a discussion about the Connecticut Mass Decontamination Mobilization Plan. A draft copy of the Plan was provided to the Chief. An electronic copy will be made available.

A suggestion was made that a *Telecommunications Accomplishments Guide for Idiots* document be created. The Guide would basically be a summary of what interoperable communications policies, procedures and equipment have been and are planned to be established throughout the State. DPS created a similar report in the past that could serve as a model. Gordon Shand will take the lead with assistance from Bob DiBella, Keith Victor and Mike Stemmler. The goal is to have the document available NLT that the next scheduled interoperability communications workgroup meeting.

Mike Stemmler raised the issue of no representation on the interoperability committee from any of the towns that have their own 800 MHz repeaters. The real issue was determined to be that there are 6-12 towns that have 800 MHz repeaters that need to "educated" on the proper use; i.e. not having the repeaters on when not necessary. OSET will identify the towns and invite them to a meeting to discuss the conditions of the license held. (It was decided that the aforementioned *Telecommunications Accomplishments Guide for Idiots* would be a good thing to distribute at the meeting with the towns.) Since lightning can activate a repeater, the dispatcher in the towns will need to get into the habit of manually checking repeaters on a regular basis. DPS has established an auto alarm system and will share the information with the towns at the proposed meeting. An alternative solution to the problem was raised. It was proposed that the Department of Public Safety should take responsibility/control of all of the 800 MHz repeaters in the State and all the towns to use them. Doing so would relieve the towns of the responsibility (and cost) for the operation and maintenance of the repeaters. OSET stated that this alternative will also be raised at the aforementioned meeting with the towns.

Chief Jakubson provided a Technical Committee report. He presented information on the progress of establishing a V-TAC/U-TAC system for interoperable radio communications at the "tactical" level. The pairing of VHF and UHF channels would allow a tactical unit with one type of radio (VHF) to communicate with a tactical unit using another type of radio (UHF) through cross banding. There is a potential problem related to other entities already having a license on some of the frequencies being considered for V-TAC/U-TAC. There may also be a problem "connecting" mobile units. It was stated that the TOPOFF 3 exercise could be a good test of the V-TAC/U-TAC system if it could be put into place before April 2005.

There was some discussion on funding a radio console for Rentschler Stadium out of the FY 04 SHSP Grant. The estimated cost for a complete system was stated to be \$250K. It was suggested that rather than using FY 04 SHSP grant funds, the Rentschler project could be either a capitol improvement project or a bond issue. Both will be investigated by OPM.

NEW BUSINESS:

There was a discussion on the progress of the technical committee's effort to develop criteria to evaluate proposals to spend the FY 04 SHSP grant money on communications projects. It was stated that Mike Varney was very close to completing a draft. The idea would be to have some simple basic criteria that would allow maximum flexibility for local municipalities/regions to improve their communications systems yet still meet the goals of the State strategy. Standard equipment, APCO compliance, inter vs intra operability could be among the criteria.

Skip Thomas provided an update on the development of the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS). The first meeting of the DEMHS Coordinating Council met in July. The Coordinating Council is a legislatively created body, part of the legislation that created the new DEMHS. All but one of the positions on the Coordinating Council (a representative from the Council of Small Towns) has been filled. A list of the members of the Coordinating Council will be provided. A presentation was made to the Coordinating Council on the purpose and work of the Communications Interoperability Workgroup. The Coordinating Council was asked to "sponsor" the Workgroup and voted unanimously to do so. The next meeting of the DEMHS Coordinating Council will be 27 September 2004. It was suggested that another Communications Interoperability Workgroup progress report be given. It was further reported that the Governor would be conducting a nationwide search to fill the DEMHS Commissioner position. A search committee has been formed.

It was reported that a request is being contemplated to ODP to delay the implementation of the FY 04 SHSP/LETPP/Citizen Corps Grant in Connecticut. The request would include a change in the performance period. The main reason is the formation of DEMHS which will change the State Administrative Agent (SAA) for the grant from the Department of Public Safety's Division of Homeland Security to the new DEMHS. The request change to the timeline is supported by delays in the federal fiscal system.

It was also reported that ODP is in the process of reviewing what States have accomplished with the past domestic preparedness/homeland security grants. Preliminary reports indicate that ODP is pleased with the actions taken by the Communications Interoperability Workgroup such as the implementation of the I-CALL- TAC system.

Representatives from the Capitol Region Council of Government's Emergency Planning Committee (CREPC) provided information on a routine regional test of the 800 MHz I-CALL/TAC system that they have initiated. The once a month test will use different repeaters within the region on a rotational basis. The test program will keep users current on the procedures as well as better establish the working range of each repeater within the region. Other entities located in the Capitol Region (CONNDOT, CSP, etc) area are invited to participate.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has received a \$25K grant from HRSA through the State DPH to purchase communications equipment. The DCF Medical Director is seeking the expert advice of the Workgroup on the type of communications equipment to procure. Roy Piper is going to contact Dr. Victoria Niman.

Rich Tsou (New Haven) provided information on the New Haven Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Grant as related to a plan to spend \$2.5M to create an interoperable communications system. The desired system would allow first responders to communicate without regard to the type of radio, band frequency or location in the UASI region. It was recognized that the UASI plan needs to support the State Strategy as well as other "regional" communications plans that involve towns in the South Central area of the State but not part of UASI. The Communications Interoperability Workgroup will serve as an excellent forum to provide the coordination of the various plans/projects.

The next meeting for the Communications Interoperability Workgroup was set for 1300 Tuesday 5 October 2004 at the CONNDOT facility in Rocky Hill. The meeting was adjourned at 1520.