

Communications Interoperability Working Group
09 November 2004
Minutes

WELCOME, PUBLIC COMMENT and REVIEW OF MINUTES:

Meeting was called to order at 1308 by the Chair. The following individuals were present: Skip Thomas (OPM), Bob DiBella (Glastonbury EMD), Chuck Beck (OEM), Roy Piper (OEM), Keith Victor (W. Hartford/CREPC), Steve Brown (CONNDOT), George Carbonell (CONNDOT), Jerry Zarwanski (OSET), Gordon Shand (DPH), Richard Tsou (New Haven), John Gustafson (CMED New Haven), Phil Mikan (USCG), Mike Varney (DOIT/CFCA), Phil Halibozek (CSP), Mike Stemmler (CSP), Bob Labanara (CCM). Paul Jakubson (Milford PD). Additionally, two guests from New Jersey were present: LT Anthony Melia and Raymond Hayling both of the NJ Attorney General's Office. The 05 October 2004 minutes were reviewed, voted on and approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

Radio Inventory: In the absence of a representative from the CTDHS, the Chair stated that Rosemary Salerno had provided him with an e-mail update on the 800 MHz handheld radio distribution and training. The e-mail stated that all of the radios distributed to the LE community had been verified. It was also reported that Chief Varney now had the lead on verification of the radios distributed to the fire community. No mention was made of the EMS or EMD communities. The Chair briefly raised the issue of warranty costs in the future but discussion was deferred to New Business.

Mike Stemmler provided an update on the installation of the 800 MHz control stations. He reported that there were only 12 more control stations to install; one OEM and 11 HLS. He also stated that 6 were scheduled to be installed in November. The other 6 may be delayed due to renovations taking place in the PSAP/EOC locations.

Radio Testing and Training: It was reported by Keith Victor that another test of the I-CALL/TAC system was conducted in the CREPC region on 20 October. He stated that the test did not go well apparently due to two vs one repeaters being energized causing interference and confusion on the net. A lengthy discussion took place relative to who energized the second repeater. Mike Stemmler will look into the matter by reviewing the logs at DPS. There was also a discussion relative to I-TAC-2 being energized constantly over the last two months. There was also discussion on the need to be able to identify which repeaters (non-DPS) are energized and interfering with the I-CALL/TAC system.

The discussion turned to the need to train the municipalities who have their own 800 MHz repeaters on the proper use relative to the statewide system. All were reminded that at the 08 September meeting OSET had committed to providing the training to the municipalities. The problem discussed at the 05 October meeting (an odd rely switch type noise that is causing dispatchers to turn the volume down on the 800 MHz control station) was not discussed. DPS Message Center was to put in a trouble ticket to investigate the problem. It was reported that a Region 8 meeting was held on Thursday 4 November 2004. Testing of the I-CALL/TAC system among the states of NY, NJ & CT will commence soon.

Tech Sub-Committee Update: Jerry Zarwanski reported that all of the VTAC/ UTAC channels had been reviewed and that there are lots of users that will be potentially impacted if the VTAC/UTAC system is pursued as a solution to establishing regional communications interoperability for the tactical level. The NJ guests stated that they had the same issue and had used monetary incentives to get some municipalities to switch to another frequency. After some discussion, all agreed that the next step would be for the technical sub-committee to draft a plan on moving current users of the VTAC/UTAC frequencies to another system. The work on the Plan would require a frequency by frequency review. (The need for the Plan and the frequency review had been discussed at the 05 Oct 2004 meeting as well. All acknowledged that money and available frequencies would both be a problem.

Mike Varney provided a summary of how the VTAC/UTAC system would be built around existing systems throughout the State. He further explained that the system would be low wattage, non-repeater grouped frequencies. The “keeper” of the regional VTAC/UTAC system would fall to whoever had the most robust capability in a particular region. A concern was raised about being able to “unbundled” one or more of the banded frequencies to preserve the integrity of the system should there be a problem with one of the designated frequencies. Discussion once again returned to the need for a Whit Paper (concept paper) that would establish clear goals and objectives as well as the intended process for establishing the VTAC/UTAC system. There was also discussion about the need to select an area of the state to conduct a pilot project. The technical sub-committee will have a draft Plan for the next meeting.

Communications Project Requests: The Chair provided a summary of the need to drive local municipalities to regional solutions with respect to communications projects. There was discussion on the need to create a tool to evaluate and score local/regional/state proposals to improve communications interoperability using the SHSP grants. The idea was raised at the 05 October meeting and a draft document was provided by Mike Varney. All members of the committee were again asked to review the draft Grant Document and provide recommended changes to Mike Varney as soon as possible. There are some rules that have been imposed by the federal government; AVCO 25 compliance for instance. There is also a licensing rule change that is to become effective 01 January 2005.

Telecommunications Accomplishments Guide for Idiot: The group (Shand, Victor, Stemmler, DiBella) that agreed to draft a document that would explain in simple terms what had been accomplished by the interoperable communications workgroup had not met.

Rentschler Stadium Radio Request: The Chair reported that Captain Masek (CSP) had decided to pursue a different funding source for the radio system needed for Rentschler Field. If unsuccessful, the request for SHSP grant funding might be revisited.

Educating Municipal 800 MHz Repeater Operators: See discussion above.

NEW BUSINESS:

ICTAP: Mike Varney provided an update on the interoperability communications support service provided through ODP. The Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) has visited New Haven as one of the Urban Area Security Initiative cities. (New Haven and its 6 contiguous surrounding towns is a UASI city.) ODP is still considering allowing the ICTAP to be applied to all of CT due to the size of the State. The ICTAP process will involve a technical inventory of communications equipment, a current capability assessment and a needs projection.

DEMHS: The Chair provided an update on the development of the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS). The new Department will become official on 01 January 2005. The next meeting of the DEMHS Coordinating Council is slated for 18 November 2004 at the USAR facility at Brainard Field. It was further reported that search to fill the DEMHS Commissioner position was ongoing with a goal of providing the top three candidates to the Governor by mid-November.

CCM Article: The Chair distributed a copy of an article critical of the lack of communications interoperability that appeared in the October edition of the CCM newsletter "Town & City". The article appeared to be a bit outdated most likely due to the CCM representative missing several Interoperable Communications workgroup meetings. The content of the article served as an example of why it is necessary to draft and distribute a *Telecommunications Accomplishments Guide for Idiot* type document. The article also served as an example of why representatives to the working group are obligated to keep their respective organizations informed.

Rhode Island VoIP E 9-1-1: The Chair provided an article about RI being the first State to be able to identify the location of a 9-1-1 call made from a VoIP call. The article created some discussion on the potential need to regulate VoIP to insure that the public safety community can respond to the location of emergency calls.

Virginia Interoperability Plan: VA has published a Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability FY 2005-2007 document. The Chair provided a summary of the 87 page report which is available on the web via Government Technology (<http://www.govtech.net>). Members of the workgroup were encouraged to review the VA Plan. The Key Strategic Goals listed in the VA Plan are exactly the same that have been discussed by the CT interoperable communications workgroup.

- Establish communications interoperability as a high priority
- Expand the statewide use of common language and coordinated communications protocols
- Increase interoperability capabilities and coordination by maximizing the use of existing communications systems and equipment and by planning for future technology purchases
- Enhance the knowledge and the proper use of existing and future communications equipment by providing frequent and routine training for public safety personnel

Naugatuck Valley Community College: NVCC submitted a letter request to the Chair for two I-CALL/TAC radios for their Public Safety Department. The letter was the result of a previous telephone conversation. There was discussion about the need to have a current inventory of “spare” radios. There was also discussion about the need to identify other public safety entities throughout the State that may have not been accounted for yet. It was mentioned that about a year ago, CTDHS had agreed to the need and committed to identifying all such entities via a CSP database.

Warranty Issues: There was discussion on the need to establish a warranty system for the I-CALL/TAC radios that have been provided to the public safety community in the “out years”. Bottom line is that funds will need to be identified to continue the repair/replacement of both the hand held and control station radios. There will also be a need to provide additional and/or spare batteries for the hand held radios. It was mentioned that there has been a plan to provide a second battery for the hand held radios. It was thought that the procurement of the batteries had been planned as part of the FY 03 SHSP grant but someone would have to check with CTDHS. The need to take action to create a State budget for matters such as this was discussed. The projection is that the federal preparedness grants will diminish.

800 MHz Re-banding: There was discussion about the plan to re-band the 800 MHz radios. 821-824 MHz radios held by the public safety community would be shifted to the 806-809 MHz frequencies. Users of the 806 MHz frequencies will be shifted to the 810+ frequencies. The timeframe for the move is over the next 4 years. The shift should have a minimum impact on the system being created in CT since the radios procured can be reprogrammed to the new frequencies. Nextel is supposed to cover the costs since it will be the recipient of the vacated frequencies for its system.

The next meeting for the Communications Interoperability Workgroup was set for 1300 Tuesday 7 December 2004 at the CONNDOT facility in Rocky Hill. The meeting was adjourned at 1510.