

Communications Interoperability Working Group
10 February 2004
Minutes

Meeting was called to order at 1305. There were no Public Comments. The 12 December 2003 meeting minutes were reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes was made, seconded and unanimously passed.

OLD BUSINESS:

A status of the 800 MHz I-CALL/TAC handheld radio inventory was provided by Skip Thomas in the absence of a representative from CTDHS. It was reported that approximately 95% of the LE, 55% of the fire and 60% of the EMS entities have been contacted by CTDHS seeking validation of the number of radios distributed/held. No information on the number of local emergency management directors (EMD) contacted was available. It was stated the validation of the inventory of handheld radios in the field is critical to scheduling any future training sessions on or distribution of the portables.

There was a discussion on how/when the video tapes of the 800 MHz handheld radios should take place. The group decided that it would be in the best interest of the program to get the video tapes into the hands of the local EMDs as quickly as possible. OEM has possession of the video tapes and will distribute them to the local EMDs via the OEM Area Coordinators. The group felt it was important to have the OEM Area Coordinators obtain a receipt from each EMD receiving the video.

Mike Stemmler reported that 52 of the 150 I-CALL/TAC control stations have been installed. Another 30 are on the schedule. There was a discussion on the technical capability of the 800 MHz control station relative to the number of "tones" it could handle (15 vs 8). The answer will be confirmed and provided by Mike. A question was asked about whether or not the issue of providing a control station to Coast Guard Group/MSO Long Island Sound had been resolved (see 12 Dec 03 minutes). No new information was available.

There was a discussion about providing an 800 MHz control station to Life Star. Life Star has taken on a role of air operations dispatch during a forward movement of patients operation involving aircraft donated by corporations and non-profit organizations. It was decided that a better justification was needed before the group could make an informed decision. The issue was tabled until the next meeting. Eric Fine volunteered to notify Life Star and to obtain the justification form them.

NEW BUSINESS:

The Technical Committee provided a report on the process they have decided would be best to pursue to improve the communications interoperability among first responders at the "tactical" level. The approach would be "event based" and use existing capabilities and equipment. An audit of the existing systems and working equipment on hand is needed as the first step. Keith Victor stated that he might have most of that type information. John Gustafson (MECCA) stated that his organization has done something

like that within the C-MED community. Once the “audit” has been completed, the idea would be to determine what equipment would be needed to allow the different systems to be connected via cross banding on a regional basis. A cross band system was thought to be a short term solution. There was discussion on the need to develop a concept and budget plan for a long term solution to the tactical level interoperability issues perhaps in parallel with the short term solution. Further discussion was temporarily tabled until later in the agenda.

A discussion about the articles provided to the members via e-mail before the meeting took place. The concerns and potential solutions contained in the articles validated what had been done in Connecticut thus far and what was being planned for the future.

Discussion turned to the Draft Strategic Plan. All agreed to the changes that had been provided electronically to George Pohorilak prior to the meeting. The cross band short term solution was brought back up to discuss. The concept of developing the system of the future was addressed. There was discussion about how the “Plan” could/should be used to leverage the CT Congressional delegation as well as the CT legislators to fund interoperable. There was discussion on adding the short and long term budget projections to the Plan. After a lot of discussion, the group agreed that the Plan with minor editorial changes less the Goals and Objectives and less the budget information (short or long term) needed to be provided to both the Executive and Legislative leadership as soon as possible. It was agreed that the first priority is to get the Interoperable Communications Workgroup officially chartered by the Governor or the Legislature. Once decided, the Technical sub-committee was charged to proceed in developing the concept of a cross band type short term solution to the interoperable communications problem at the tactical level.

A need to “re-educate” some 800 MHZ users on the I-CALL/TAC system was discussed. Actually the need for education was identified for municipalities that already had an 800 MHZ system thus did not bother to attend the training or draw a radio. The specific towns need to be identified. Once identified, the training curriculum will be reviewed/re-written and re-deployed as necessary.

The need for 800 MHZ radios to be provided to the Motor Vehicle inspectors was discussed. CSP stated that they would handle the issue.

The group was made aware of the 15 May 2004 exercise that will be taking place in CT as part of an 8 state regional National Burn Victim Foundation forward movement of patients drill.

The next meeting has been set for 1300 Tuesday 23 March 2004 at DPS HQ.

Adjourned at 1500.

A new draft of the Communications Plan was presented. There was a discussion about some of the new edits. All agreed that each of the bullets needed to be concise and be expressed in non-technical language keeping in mind that the document needs to be understood by legislators and other non-technical people. All were asked to review the new draft and get any comments/recommended changes to Mr. George Pohorilak ASAP but no later than 5 January 2004. A revised new draft would then be e-mailed to the committee NLT 23 January 2004 to be discussed at the next Interoperable Communications workgroup meeting scheduled for 27 January 2004.

Chief Doug Whalen, Bradley Airfield Fire Department, provided background on a developing strategic communications plan for Bradley and the surrounding towns. The Plan also would include the other State airports. The need for a comprehensive Plan is based on repeatedly documented failures of the current mutual assistance communications system in the area. The present three tiered system (airport, regional and State) relies upon old systems whose reliability is questionable. The goal would be to have one system that would be accessible to locals, on a regional scale and statewide as necessary. Chief Whalen mentioned that a possible solution would be to expand the 800 MHz system. There was discussion about the lack of available 800 MHz frequencies possibly some 806 MHz channels that have been reported "available". Mr. Skip Thomas provided some background on the missed opportunity back in the 1980s for the State to obtain and deploy a statewide 800 MHz communications system. Mr. Mona requested that the Bradley issue be added to the Communications Plan. Chief Mike Varney brought to the attention of the committee that the issue of creating a "one radio for all" system was already in the Communications Plan, not specifically aimed at Bradley but statewide.

There was a short discussion on the need to have the Department of Corrections (DOC) linked to the 800 MHz I-CALL/TAC system. DOC facilities rely upon local fire departments for fire services and the State Police for additional support. As reported at the November meeting, DOC already has 800 MHz radios and will work with the State Police on programming the DOC 800 MHz radios with the I-CALL/TAC frequencies.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting of the Interoperability Communications working group will be held at 1300 on Tuesday 27 January 2004 at DPSHQ. Members are reminded to review the draft Communications Plan document and submit comments/recommended changes to George Pohorilak NLT COB Friday 23 January 2004.

The meeting adjourned at 1420.