

Communications Interoperability Working Group
12 April 2005
Minutes

WELCOME, PUBLIC COMMENT and REVIEW OF MINUTES:

The meeting was called to order at 1305 by the Chair. The following individuals were present: Mike Varney (DOIT/CFCA), Bob DiBella (Glastonbury EMD/DEMHS), Chuck Beck (DEMHS), Keith Victor (W. Hartford/CREPC), George Carbonell (CONNDOT), George Pohorilak (OSET), Jerry Zarwanski (OSET), Joan Carrasquillo (OSET), Peter Beckwith (USAR), Chris Nolan (CSP), Mike Stemmler (CSP), Matt Valteau (CSP/CAP), Gordon Shand (DPH), John Gustafson (CMED NH), Jeff Otto (QVEC), Phil Mikan (USCG), Paul Jakobson (Madison PD/CPA), Richard Tsou (New Haven/UASI), Joe Murray (Hamden PD) . Additionally, guests from ODP/ICTAP (Doug Harder and Leo Guilmette) and Nextel (Jacqueline Gallus) were present.

The 15 March 2005 minutes were reviewed, voted on and approved.

REPORT FROM WORKING GROUPS:

A. Technical Committee The final draft of the STOCS document was reviewed and approved. There was a brief discussion on the need to “reformat” the document to meet the needs of the ICTAP/FY 05 HSGP grant requirement for an interoperable communications plan to be in place NLT 30 Sept 05. Further discussion was tabled until later in the meeting. The STOCS document will be presented to the Emergency Management & Homeland Security Coordinating Council (EMHSCC) on 14 April 2005 for approval. George Carbonell solicited details desired to be built into the STOCS “black box”. He is looking for concepts of operation as opposed to technical. One concept discussed was that the system needed to be simple, usable and based on current radio capability. Training users on STOCS was deemed critical particularly based on the problems that occurred during TOPOFF 3 with the I-CALL/I-TAC system. The discussion turned into a conversation about training and other issues, initially about STOCS implementation but also on I-CALL/I-TAC. There was a suggestion that the interoperable workgroup needed to return to a grassroots approach and get feedback from the intended users before getting too further into the planning. A question was raised about the validity of trying to reduce the number of radios that a first responder might need to carry to one. Consensus was that a one radio concept was a goal and that in the near to mid term that one radio would be the working radio that each first responder already carries and is familiar with. A concern was raised about a first responder “severing” his communications to his parent organization once his radio was switched to a STOCS channel. All were reminded that STOCS is intended to be a low powered on scene communications coordination tool thus minimizing if not eliminating the concern.

B. Telecommunications Accomplishments Report. The final draft of the Telecommunications Accomplishment Report was approved and will be presented to the EMHSCC 14 April 2005 for approval. The STOCS frequency matrix will be inserted as will the I-CALL/I-TAC frequencies. A list of the members and their organizations will also be added to the Report before presenting to the EMHSCC.

OLD BUSINESS:

A. Radio Inventory:

It was reported that I-CALL/TAC 800 MHz handheld radio training was held at the Mashantucket-Pequot Public Safety building on 2/22/05. An additional 19 people were trained and 7 radios distributed. Training was also held at the Ellington Fire Department on 3/31/05 garnering 16 people trained and 5 radios distributed. The next scheduled training session is set for 4/20/05 at the New Haven Fire Academy. A question arose about who in CONNDOT was issued the I-CALL-I-TAC 800 MHz radios. CSP has a data base but updates have not been provided on a regular basis. A follow-on question was asked about who will be responsible to maintain the radio database now that the CTDHS has been absorbed into DEMHS. DPS maintains the license and the repair contract and technically "owns" the radios. Resolution would most likely be the result of a conversation between DPS and DEMHS Commissioners.

It was reported that there are 6 Control Stations that still need to be installed but the locations have failed to return telephone calls or e-mail, thus have been non-responsive. The following locations are still outstanding: CONNDOT Bridgeport, Greenwich FD, Meriden FD, Stratford PD, Waterbury PD, Stamford EOC and New Haven EOC.

B. Radio Testing and Training:

It was reported that testing of the I-CALL/TAC system has been taking place in Northeast CT and is about $\frac{3}{4}$ complete. The problem reported last month with the use of the I-CALL/I-TAC system during a fire in Putnam was determined to be "operator error".

CSP/CTS provided an update on reports of past problems and determinations/resolutions. It was reported that the CREPC January 20th test of the I-CALL/TAC system was held. It was discovered that the Granby control station was inoperable. First trouble reported by Granby Police to CSP was on 02 March 2005 and indicated that radio would not transmit or receive. A replacement was requested. Motorola responded and replaced radio, which was returned to CSP HQ for diagnosis/repair. It was discovered that the radio functioned normally, but that it had been reprogrammed with ITAC 3 removed and "Intercity" (859.3875/814.3975 MHz PL 6Z) installed. A search of the FCC database revealed that these frequencies are licensed to either Alarm Room Inc.(WPGG232) or CROCG Inc (WPXD997) with both transmitter locations listed as 50 Birch Mountain Road, Glastonbury. Subsequent service requests from Granby on 16, 17 and 23 of March for radio outages were the result of power abnormalities and failed surge arrestors (supplied by Granby). The control station has been connected to a different outlet in the Granby radio room with no further problems reported.

It was reported that the CREPC 20 Dec 04 test of the I-CALL/TAC system was held in Enfield using the Bradley Airport repeater. Coverage of the repeater was reported as limited to the south of the region. The Bradley repeater had been installed to provide coverage at the airport thus worked as designed. The Bradley Airport repeater is not one of the 34 DPS "dual repeater, ICALL receiver" sites indicated in the ICALL/ITAC training.

It was reported another test of the I-CALL/TAC system was conducted in the CREPC region on 20 October 04 and did not go well apparently due to two vs one repeaters being energized causing interference and confusion on the net. A check of the database at the DPS/NCC indicated that only one DPS repeater was activated during the time in question. An interference problem of this type should have been reported by the field personnel conducting the test to the DPS Message Center and/or NCC. A request to change to an alternate ITAC channel would have eliminated the problem of two repeaters on the same channel, especially if the offending repeater could not be identified and/or disabled.

On Sept 20th, CREPC conducted a no notice test of the I-CALL/TAC system. Only 8 of the communities responded. This may be caused by an interference problem. There seemed to be a problem with an odd noise (relay type noise) that is causing dispatchers to turn the volume down on the 800 MHz control station. The CTS engineering personnel conducted extensive tests relative to the "beeping" complaints. The dispatchers "turning down the volume" appears to be a policy or procedural issue. The "beeping" noise appears to be the Morse code station identification that is transmitted without PL encoding. This transmission will be heard only if the control station is operated in the "monitor" mode. It should be noted that the control stations default to the monitor mode if the supplied desk microphone is not plugged into the front microphone jack of the unit. Some stations that utilize the remote capability to locate the unit in a "radio room" are being operated without the supplied microphone connected.

All were appreciative of the update.

A question was raised about the "voids" in coverage of the Statewide DPS repeater system. All were reminded that from the beginning of the interoperable communications workgroup, filling in the voids was identified as an issue that had to be resolved. However, from the beginning the priorities were established as follows: 1) command and control interoperability, 2) on scene interoperability and 3) infrastructure improvement. As time and funds permit, the voids will be addressed as part of the infrastructure improvement plan. In the meantime, the repeaters on the decontamination trailers are capable of filling a "dead spot" known to exist or discovered in the course of tests, exercises or practical needs.

A need to have "other" I-CALL/I-TAC support units attend the monthly interoperable communications workgroup meetings was raised. Several municipalities maintain their own 800 MHz radio systems and support the I-CALL/I-TAC system via their repeaters. At times it is these repeaters that may be left on thus interfering with the use of the I-TAC channels by others. These municipalities are required to comply with the FCC rules, regulations and procedures but enforcement is difficult at best. In order to keep the interoperable communications workgroup at a "manageable number of participants, another solution needs to be pursued like separate meetings with them.

A need for “operating guidance” was expressed in order to curb the installation of STOCS frequencies into I-CALL/I-TAC radios and control stations. There is no legitimate need to install the STOCS frequencies into the I-CALL/I-TAC radios.

C. Letter to PSAPs;

The draft letter intended to be sent all PSAPs reminding them of the “rules and regulations” that they are obligated to follow with respect to the I-CALL/TAC equipment and system was discussed. There were no recommended changes. The draft letter will be presented to the EMHSCC on 14 April 2005 for approval..

D. Common Language Protocol: Nothing new to report. The draft document will be re-sent with a request for input.

E. Protocol on use of I-CALL/TAC: Nothing new to report.

F. UASI and ICTAP: Nothing new to report.

G. FY05 SHSP Grant: The FY 2005 HSGP Grant has been approved and is within the State. Informational meetings on the FY 2005 HSGP have been held throughout the State. A question was raised about the “OEM radio system” and whether or not a local municipalities request to spend its allocation on the system had to be approved by the interoperable communications workgroup. Short answer is yes. Director Flaherty presented his case before the workgroup previously and received approval for the OEM radio system expenditures. All were reminded of the requirement of the FY 05 HSGP for a State to complete a Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan NLT 30 Sept 2005. Twelve months from the submission of the Plan, a significant exercise must be conducted.

H. Update on ICTAP Activities:

In response to the 16 February 2005 letter signed by Commissioner Thomas sent to ODP requesting Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) to service all of CT, the concept has been approved. However, due to the crush of work created by the FY 05 HSGP grant for UASI towns, work on the CT plan by ICTAP may be delayed. The ICTAP representatives feel that CT has a leg up on the process with STOCS. However, ODP still needs to be convinced to treat CT as “one metro area” vs having several urban areas. The ICTAP representatives are pursuing a decision from their superiors.

The ICTAP representatives served as observers/data collectors during the TOPOFF 3 exercise at the request of the Chair. Their observations will be part of the AAR. The representatives were able to observe all of the communications assets brought to bear on the exercise as well as what was used/not used. They will provide an opinion on the training and/or additional equipment needed

I. Other:

George Carbonell reported that he and several others had a discussion with Manchester Fire about their use of one of the dedicated STOCS frequencies. George reported that the meeting went very well and that Manchester completely understands that they may have to use a backup voice communications system/frequency should STOCS be activated.

Matt Valleau reported that he was present to answer questions about the Civil Air Patrol request for part of the communications grant funds. The problem is that nobody present has seen the request. Matt will provide the request to the workgroup for consideration.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Initial TOPOFF Review:

As previously reported, the ICTAP and others served as observers/evaluators specifically on communications related issues. They attempted to distinguish between the real world, control and TOPOFF related communications needs and capabilities. Their quick observation was that there was a tremendous amount of communications hardware available on scene; not all of it needed or used.

There was a discussion on the use of the MEDNET system during TOPOFF 3. The system operated as designed but the type of information requested using the system was at times confusing.

There was a discussion on the use/misuse of the I-CALL/I-TAC system during TOPOFF 3. Multiple repeaters were energized on the same Tactical channel causing interference. The source of the multiple repeaters ranged from State, decon trailer and possibly repeaters located on Long Island, NY. There were reportedly few if any calls to the message center about any “problems”. There was a lack of a written communications plan before the exercise and at least through the first day.

B. Appointment of a Training and Exercise Workgroup

C. Appointment of a Governance Workgroup

D. Appointment of an Operational Workgroup

The need to establish all three of these sub-workgroups under the interoperable communications workgroup was discussed. The Chair asked for members to contact him and “volunteer” to participate in one or more of the groups.

E. CEDAP

The Commercial Equipment Direct Assistance Program was discussed/explained. CEDAP is a program that makes certain equipment available directly to a municipality on a competitive basis. A copy of the table of contents was provided to show the types of equipment being offered. Only one piece of communications related equipment is being offered at this time; an interoperability gateway switch. However, the switch runs counter to what is being established with STOCS.

F. ODP Bulletin 158:

ODP Bulletin 158 provides guidance for the developing of a tactical interoperable communications (TIC) plan. As previously discussed, the ICTAP representatives feel that CT is in a unique situation. New Haven was a UASI jurisdiction last year but not this year. Thus, CT can either base the Plan around New Haven or another jurisdiction. CT has requested to be considered a jurisdiction (statewide) or for a region of the State to be considered as a jurisdiction for the purposes of the TIC.

The issue will be discussed at the EMHCC meeting on 14 April 2005. It will also be pursued with ODP. There are informational sessions planned throughout the US. The Eastern Region session will be held 14 July 2005 in Charlotte, NC. The Central Region session will be 3 June 2005 in Columbus, OH.

G. Upcoming Training Programs:

The CT Council of Municipalities (CCM) is hosting a technical workshop 24 May in New Haven. This would be a perfect opportunity for STOCS and the Accomplishments document to be presented. The TIC informational sessions were discussed. The Windsor Locks Fire School will be hosting a communications forum on 6 June 2005.

H. Other:

There was a discussion on the USAR handheld radio dilemma. USAR was provided CSP radios purchased with Byrne Grant funds. CSP revoked the radios recently due to a pressing need to distribute them to a new recruit class leaving the USAR team without any radio communications capability. It was reported that the USAR leaders had made an arrangement with the "owners" of the decon trailers to provide the I-CALL-TAC radios contained in the trailers to the USAR team upon request. This plan is not supported by the interoperable communications workgroup as it would degrade the capability of the trailers and the decon mobilization system. Another solution needs to be pursued.

One idea was that the radios purchased for the 12 decon trailers not yet in service could be used as a very short term solution. However, nobody could confirm that the radios for trailers 23-34 have been purchased yet.

It was reported that the local office of a federal law enforcement agency may be obtaining 2 ACU 1000 gateway switches which may be made available for use by the State during an emergency.

Next Meeting: The next meeting for the Communications Interoperability Workgroup was set for **1300 Tuesday, May 10, 2005** at the CONNDOT facility in Rocky Hill. The meeting was adjourned at 1540.