Homeland Security
Office of Emergency Communications

Chris Essid, Director

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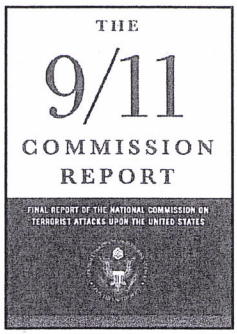
Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network



Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the 9/11 Commission recommended the establishment of a nationwide, interoperable public safety communications network to resolve the communications challenges faced by emergency responders nationwide.

Since then, the public safety community has made progress in advancing emergency communications capabilities through enhanced coordination, governance structures, planning, training, and equipment. At the same time, private sector developments in high-speed, wireless communications technology have presented public safety with a platform to enhance information sharing and communications during emergencies and day-to-day operations. Through broadband technology, public safety users can have the ability to access video images of a crime in progress, download floor plans of a burning building, or connect rapidly and securely with personnel from other communities.

For the past decade, public safety has worked with State and local government officials, the Federal government, and Members of Congress to gather support for establishing a nationwide interoperable network. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), through the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) has helped set a broad policy framework for a nationwide interoperable networkto ensure it meets the needs of its users and aligns with existing emergency communications policy.

On February 22, 2012, President Obama signed into law H.R.3630, the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, which includes provisions to fund and govern a Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network. OEC is working with the Departments of Commerce and Justice to ensure it meets the needs of users in the public safety community.

BENEFITS OF THE NATIONWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY BROADBAND NETWORK

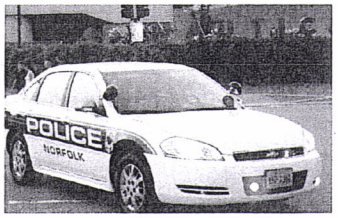
The Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network will provide a secure, reliable and dedicated interoperable network for emergency responders to communicate during an emergency.

Supporters secured the "D Block" – a 10 Megahertz (MHz) section of radio spectrum adjacent to 10MHz currently licensed to public safety – to be used for the nationwide network. This will provide 20 MHz of spectrum solely dedicated for the use of emergency responders and ensure they have adequate network capacity, which often becomes congested during an emergency situation.

NATIONWIDE GOVERNANCE: FIRSTNET

A key provision of the law creates the First Responders Network Authority (FirstNet), an independent authority within the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). FirstNet is responsible for deploying the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network.

The Act licenses the existing public safety broadband spectrum and the 700MHz D Block spectrum to FirstNet. FirstNet is responsible for, at a minimum, ensuring nationwide standards for use and access of the network; and issuing open, transparent, and competitive requests for proposals (RFPs) to build, operate and maintain the network. It is also responsible for leveraging, to the maximum extent economically desirable, existing commercial wireless infrastructure to speed deployment of the network; and overseeing contracts with non-federal entities to build, operate, and maintain the network.



There will be 15 members of the FirstNet Board. There will be three permanent Federal members: the Department of Homeland Security Secretary, the Attorney General, and the Office of Management and Budget Director. The Commerce Secretary will appoint the other 12 members of the FirstNet Board. At least three members of the Board must represent the interests of State, local, territorial, or tribal government and at least three members must have public safety experience. In addition, FirstNet will establish a standing public safety advisory committee to assist FirstNet in carrying out its duties. To ensure the input of State and local stakeholders are recognized, the Act also requires FirstNet to consult with State and local entities throughout network deployment.

FUNDING

The Act also establishes the Public Safety Trust Fund to direct funding from voluntary incentive spectrum auctions for the following priorities:

- **State and Local Implementation Grant Fund** The Act establishes a grant program to assist State, regional, tribal, and local jurisdictions with identifying, planning, and implementing the most efficient and effective means to use and integrate the infrastructure, equipment, and other architecture associated with the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network to satisfy the wireless and data services needs of their jurisdiction. Up to $135 million will be available to NTIA for the State and Local Implementation grant program. NTIA must establish requirements for this program not later than six months after the date of enactment (i.e., August 22, 2012).
- **Network Construction Fund** The Fund provides $7 billion for FirstNet to deploy and operate the NPSBN, not including administrative costs.
- **Research Funding** The Fund provides $100 million to NIST in consultation with the FCC, DHS, and DOJ, to research and develop standards, technologies, and applications to advance wireless emergency communications.
- **NG9-1-1** The Fund provides $115 million to support deployment and operation of 9-1-1 services. These funds are only available after $20.4 billion is raised for deficit reduction.
- **Additional Research Funding** After all previous funding priorities, an additional $200 million is allocated to NIST for further research efforts.

SUPPORT FOR STATE, LOCAL, AND TRIBAL IMPLEMENTATION

Since OEC was established by Congress, a key component to our efforts has been, and will continue to be, engagement and collaboration with public safety and government at the Federal, State, local, and tribal levels. As this new network is developed and deployed, this engagement will be more important than ever.

OEC is offering on-site support through its Technical Assistance (TA) Program to assist users with an understanding of broadband technology and early planning for its use in public safety operations. The TA Program is also supporting States in incorporating broadband planning into their Statewide Plans through workshops being held across the country. State and local agencies can begin preparing for wireless broadband implementation by analyzing their existing Statewide Plans and Governance Bodies and determining if changes need to be made.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact OEC@dhs.gov or visit www.dhs.gov (keyword OEC).