

2020 Report to Law and Justice Interim Committee on Statewide Public Safety Communications

The 2017 Legislature passed HB 604 which gave administrative authority of the Statewide Public Safety Communications System to the Department of Justice.

https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2017/hb0699/HB0604_x.pdf

AN ACT REVISING PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS LAWS; ESTABLISHING A STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM ACT; ESTABLISHING A STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM ADMINISTERED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE; ESTABLISHING PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE SYSTEM AND ADMINISTRATION BY THE DEPARTMENT; ESTABLISHING A STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM ADVISORY COUNCIL; ALLOWING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEES OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL; ADMINISTRATIVELY ATTACHING THE ADVISORY COUNCIL AND SUBCOMMITTEES TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE; ESTABLISHING THE DUTIES OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL; ESTABLISHING THE DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT TO IMPLEMENT, MAINTAIN, AND SUSTAIN A STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM; ALLOWING THE DEPARTMENT TO ESTABLISH RATES OR CHARGES FOR STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM SERVICES; ALLOWING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGREEMENTS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES RELATED TO A PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM; REQUIRING REPORTING TO THE LAW AND JUSTICE INTERIM COMMITTEE AND LEGISLATURE; ESTABLISHING A STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM ACCOUNT; PROVIDING A FIRSTNET EXEMPTION; GRANTING THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE RULEMAKING AUTHORITY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

This bill did not provide a funding mechanism to fund all the necessary upgrades needed to the Statewide Public Safety Communications System.

The 2019 Legislature passed SB 352 which funded the Statewide Public Safety Communications with \$3.75M per year.

<https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2019/billhtml/SB0352.htm>

The funding from SB 352 became available on July 1, 2019. The Department of Justice hired a Program Manager for the Statewide Public Safety Communications System in November of 2019, and then two technicians to maintain equipment in March of 2020.

In September 2019, The Department of Justice contracted with Motorola to replace all the radio equipment statewide that was no longer in support, and to upgrade that equipment, as needed for the next 10 years. This out of support equipment was purchased and installed years ago mostly through grants to Counties, Cities and Tribes. Interlocal agreements were needed between the local agencies and the Department of Justice for the DOJ to replace and upgrade the locally owned, out of support equipment with new, DOJ owned equipment.

Interlocal agreements have been made with every jurisdiction that had radio equipment on the system except Gallatin County which is in progress at this time.

- Counties: Silver Bow, Blaine, Broadwater, Daniels, Central Montana Dispatch (Fergus, Petroleum, Judith Basin), Flathead, Glacier, Hill, Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, Lincoln, Phillips, Richland, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Sweet Grass, Toole, Valley, Yellowstone.
- Cities: Billings, Great Falls, Kalispell.
- Tribal Nations: Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Blackfeet Nation.

With the agreements in place, radio upgrades have been completed at the following radio site locations: Nutter, Antelope Butte, Scobey, Opheim, Deadman, Plentywood, Culbertson, Windy Hill, Gideon, Saco, Antoine Butte, Hill County Sheriffs Office, Judith Peak, South Moccasin, Limestone, Boulder Hill, Knob Hill, Bull Mountain, Hogback, Wirth, Sullivan, Sunset, Stonewall, Cominco, Belmont, Mac Pass, Pinkham, Big Mountain, Red Mountain, Jette, Desert Mountain, Aeneas, Mount Royal, Santa Rita, Divide, Marion, Kalispell Water Tank, Blacktail, King Mountain, Blue Mountain. Mount Royal will be completed when the fire danger subsides, and Great Falls Pacific Steel and Flyin J are to be upgraded with their conversion to 800 Mhz.

All radio sites are connected via a microwave network. Much of the microwave network was also out of support, and in need of upgrades. In June of 2020, the Department of Justice signed a \$4.8M contract with Aviat to upgrade all the microwave network equipment. The first shipment of microwave equipment arrived in August 2020 and is now installed at the Stonewall and Sunset tower locations in Lewis and Clark County.

The radio and microwave site equipment run on batteries and rectifiers in case of a power outage. Batteries, rectifiers, and antennas were checked and where DOJ technicians found poor performing equipment, the equipment was replaced.

Rectifiers were replaced at Nutter, Antelope Butte, Scobey, Opheim, Deadman, Plentywood, Culbertson, Windy Hill, Gideon, Saco, Antoine Butte, Hill County Sheriff's Office, Judith Peak, South Moccasin, Limestone, Boulder Hill, Knob Hill, Bull Mountain, Red Mountain, Hogback, Wirth, Sullivan, Sunset, Stonewall, Cominco,

Belmont, Mac Pass, Pinkham, Big Mountain, Jette, Desert Mountain, Aeneas, Mount Royal, Santa Rita, Divide, Marion, Kalispell Water Tank, Blacktail, King Mountain, Blue Mountain, Flyin J, and Pacific Steel. Rectifier cost is \$6274.00 per site.

Batteries were checked and replaced as needed at the above sites. Batteries weigh 98 pounds each and eight batteries are required per site, and cost \$2548.

Antennas were Checked at all sites listed above. Defective Antennas were found and replaced at Deadman, Fox Creek, Nutter x2, Antelope Butte x2, Red Mountain x2, Jette, and Wirth Ranch x2. The cost per Antenna is \$611.

The radio equipment and microwave network connect 11 dispatch centers across the state. Those dispatch centers currently run on out of support (Windows 7) computers and operate on old Motorola software. The dispatch console computers are scheduled for replacement on October 26th, 2020. The new dispatch console equipment will have current software and will be upgraded as needed until 2029. The 11 dispatch centers are Flathead, Great Falls, Helena, MHP, Broadwater County, Silver Bow County, Gallatin County, Hill County, Blaine County, Central Montana Dispatch. Richland County.

In conclusion, much work has been done since funding for the Statewide Public Safety Communications System. In the last 14 months, employees have been hired, agreements have been made all across Montana, and equipment has been replaced to bring the Statewide Public Safety Communications System up to date, and to keep the system up to date for the next 10 years. The upgrades to the Statewide Public Safety Communications System are a benefit to all Montanans and anyone traveling through, especially our First Responders who rely on the system daily to ensure the safety of Montanans.

Questions concerning this report can be addressed to:

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