# ALMR INSIDER

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## Region 10 Coordinator Shares Views on New DHS Program

All incidents, no matter how big, start at the local level. For this reason, in fiscal year 2010, the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) launched its first regional coordination program.

The program was established to assist OEC in fulfilling its mission of ensuring communications operability and interoperability for emergency response personnel at the federal, state, local and tribal levels of government. Ten regional coordinators will represent OEC in the field and provide regional guidance and planning support involving OEC service offerings, national policy and the implementation and update of the national emergency communications plan (NECP).

The coordinators will accomplish this goal by fostering intergovernmental partnerships and by providing OEC stakeholder communities with a full understanding, and subsequent support, of its service offerings and activities. Even though some needs may be different from region to region, it's important for the regions to be connected, because they can also learn from each other's experiences. It's all about building relationships.

The regional coordinator acts as point of contact within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the program will allow regions to use DHS resources. Coordinators will also be able to share lessons learned during weekly conference calls, and six times a year the regional coordinators will gather together to share their information.

Alaska is located in Region 10. Therefore, only his comments are provided in this article.

Regional coordinators increase awareness of the NECP, as well as statewide communication interoperability plans, said Bruce Richter, regional coordinator for Region 10, which includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska.

"From the Region 10 perspective, I have seen the benefits of networking, preplanning and enhanced communications and information sharing during participation in regional tactical communications interoperability planning (TICP) and State communications interoperability planning (SCIP) implementation workshops," Richter said. "As a regional coordinator, these meetings give me the opportunity to answer the questions from stakeholders regarding the actions and intentions of OEC and explain the requirements of the NECP. An OEC presence at these events, through the regional coordinators, reinforces the message that though emergencies start and end at the local level, there are many other agencies and resources available to assist the local agencies, and effective interoperable emergency communications saves time and lives."

Richter said it can sometimes be a lonely job being the only person at a state, local or tribal public-safety agency with the responsibility for emergency communications, "but by working together, information is shared and success in one region can be expanded into other regions," he said.

According to Richter, the program has been received favorably. "In its relatively short existence, OEC has already built a solid reputation for working with state, local and tribal partners — from first responders to government officials," Richter said. "Having an identifiable OEC point of contact who actually lives and works in the region, and has more localized awareness of its unique geography and concerns, resonates with first responders, building on the knowledgeable and reliable information and assistance regional partners have come to expect from OEC."

Claudia Wayne, director of the regional coordination program, added, "The more the coordinators are delivering to their state and local governments, the more those governments are starting to depend on them and allowing their position to rapidly grow. We are seeing more value as we move forward." (Article extracted from Radio Resource Magazine, Jan 5, 2011)

## Intrinsically Safe Batteries for Land Mobile Radios

The January issue of the Insider included an article discussing the proposed changes in intrinsically safe battery standards and cited the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) concerns regarding the impact to public safety communications systems such as ALMR. Below is an excerpt from a letter sent by the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) on February 14, 2011 to the organizations proposing the standards changes to express support for the positions expressed by the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council1 (NPSTC) in its "***NPSTC Position Paper on Proposed Changes to Intrinsically Safe Standard***"[1].

TIA concurs with the concerns expressed by NPSTC that the recent publication and imposition upon land mobile radios (LMR) of ISA 60079-11, combined with the subsequent testing established in UL 913-7 and FM 3610-10, will drastically hinder LMR performance and thus the ability of first responders to protect the public. Replacement products will by necessity be larger and heavier. Battery life expectation, typically exceeding ten hours, will be significantly reduced. Existing infrastructures designed for traditionally high-power portable LMRs will no longer provide reliable radio coverage, putting the users' very lives in danger. The only possible solution would require substantial expansion of virtually every public safety communications system in the country, including a massive proliferation of radio towers, all of which will be prohibitively expensive. Even such a solution will, in most cases, be impossible, given the lack of additional available spectrum to support such massive system expansions.

In response, Pinellas County, Florida, wrote a white-paper[2] outlining the potential system impact costs associated with the FM intrinsically safe proposed changes. Additionally, the Communications Chair for International Association of Fire Chiefs also sent a letter to FM Approvals[3] outlining their concerns.

TIA respectfully asks that FM Approvals (FM) consider the following actions to mitigate immediate, near-term concerns, while simultaneously setting the stage for long-term solutions:

1) Postpone until some future date the effective date of FM 3610-2010. TIA further suggests that the date be delayed until January 1, 2017, if not indefinitely.

2) Affirm in writing there are no safety issues with the current FM 3610-1988 standard, and that products approved to the 3610-1988 standard can be safely used after 2011 in the atmospheres for which they were originally approved, provided that there have been no design changes requiring re-certification.

3) Affirm that products approved to FM 3610-1988 may continue to be manufactured after January 1, 2012, with the caveat that there are no design changes to the product that would impact intrinsic safety considerations.

4) Agree that all accessories, including batteries, linked to products originally approved under the FM 3610-1988 standard can continue to be manufactured and sold as replacement parts for those originally-approved products for the life of those products without invalidating their FM intrinsically safe approval, provided that there have been no design changes requiring re-certification.

TIA further asks that FM Approvals, the International Society of Automation (ISA), and Underwriters Laboratories (UL), along with support from TIA, its manufacturer participants, and end-user associations collaborate on the following action items:

1) ISA, UL, and FM Approvals support the creation of a new equipment category for LMR portable radios that recognizes the "Division" concepts set forth in section 500 of NFPA70 / National Electric Code.

2) ISA should revise, with FM Approvals' and UL's support, the underlying ANSI/ISA 60079 standard to include the Division-rating system, the 1.5 safety factor on energy, and other key criteria in the FM 3610-1988 standard. a. Alternatively, FM could adopt a two-tier standard which would include the new ANSI/ISA 60079 Zone-oriented standard for products requiring a global, harmonized approval applicable in North America and Europe, and the FM 3610-1988 Division-oriented standard (or equivalent) for products requiring a North America-only application.

TIA believes that TIA, ISA, UL, and FM Approvals should rapidly collaborate to identify and develop a reasonable solution set of standards activities that addresses both the near-term objectives and the long-term requirements of end-user organizations and associations whose members must operate in incident areas defined as hazardous (classified) in section 500 of the National Electric Code.

TIA appreciates your consideration, and stands ready to work with all stakeholders on this vital issue.

*1 http://npstc.org/documents/TIA_Support_NPSTC_FM_Position_110214.pdf*
*2 http://npstc.org/documents/Pinellas%20County%20Intrinsically%20Safe%20Analysis.pdf*
*3 http://npstc.org/documents/FM%20IS%20Issue%20letter_101122.pdf*

# Pre-/Post-Narrowband Statewide Interoperability (OP) Zone

In order for ALMR to comply with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) narrowband mandate, several modifications have been made to the Statewide Interoperability (OP) Zone. These changes will require every radio on the System to be reprogrammed prior to 1 January 2013.

Along with the wideband to narrowband change, the old Command and Control (CnC) channel has been replaced with the National Search and Rescue (SAR) channel (155.1600 MHz), and the old Emergency Medical Services (EMS) channel has been replaced with the National EMS channel (159.210 MHz).

The VCALL10 and VTAC11 through VTAC14 channels will remain analog, but will require the use of a common Continuous Tone Controlled Squelch System (CTCSS) tone of 156.7 Hz on the transmit frequency. Below are the current and new channel lineups.

### ALMR Pre-Rebanding/Narrowbanding

| ALMR Statewide Interoperable Zone Channels/Talkgroups | | |
|---|---|---|
| Channel Name | FREQ./TG | Purpose |
| LE SX | 155.2500 | Non P25 Conv. (Wideband) |
| CnC | 155.2950 | Non P25 Conv. (Wideband) |
| EMS | 155.1600 | Non P25 Conv. (Wideband) |
| CH 6 | Marine | Emergency Use Only |
| CH 16 | Marine | Emergency Use Only |
| CH 17 | Marine | Emergency Use Only |
| CH 22A | Marine | Emergency Use Only |
| VCALL10 (Conventional) | 155.7525 NAC293 | National P25 Hail Channel (Narrow) |
| VTAC11 (Conventional) | 151.1375 NAC293 | National P25 Channel (Narrow) |
| VTAC12 (Conventional) | NAC293 | National P25 Channel (Narrow) |
| VTAC13 (Conventional) | 158.7375 NAC293 | National P25 Channel (Narrow) |
| VTAC14 (Conventional) | 159.4725 NAC293 | National P25 Channel (Narrow) |
| ASTT | AST Trunk | Coordinate/w AST |
| EMST | EMS Trunk | Coordinate/w EMS |
| DECT | DEC Trunk | Coordinate/w DEC |
| DNRT | DNR Trunk | Coordinate/w DNR |

### ALMR Post-Rebanding/Narrowbanding (1/1/13)

| ALMR Statewide Interoperable Zone Channels/Talkgroups | | |
|---|---|---|
| Channel Name | FREQ/TG | Purpose |
| LE SX | 155.2500 | Non P25 Conv. Narrowband |
| EMS | 159.2100 | Non P25 Conv. Narrowband |
| SAR | 155.1600 | Non P25 Conv. Narrowband |
| CH 6 | Marine | Emergency Use Only - Intership Safety |
| CH 16 | Marine | Emergency Use Only - Distress, Safety, & Calling |
| CH 17 | Marine | Emergency Use Only Maritime Control |
| CH 22A | Marine | Emergency Use Only USCG Liaison |
| VCALL10 (Conventional) | 155.7525 TX CTCSS - 156.7 Hz | National P25 Hail Channel (Analog-Simplex) Narrowband |
| VTAC11 (Conventional) | 151.1375 TX CTCSS - 156.7 Hz | National P25 Channel (Analog - Simplex) Narrowband |
| VTAC12 (Conventional) | 154.4525 TX CTCSS - 156.7 Hz | National P25 Channel (Analog - Simplex) Narrowband |
| VTAC13 (Conventional) | 158.7375 TX CTCSS - 156.7 Hz | National P25 Channel (Analog - Simplex) Narrowband |
| VTAC14 (Conventional) | 159.4725 TX CTCSS - 156.7 Hz | National P25 Channel (Analog - Simplex) Narrowband |
| ASTT | AST Trunk | Coordinate/w AST |
| EMST | EMS Trunk | Coordinate/w EMS |
| DECT | DEC Trunk | Coordinate/w DEC |
| DNRT | DNR Trunk | Coordinate/w DNR |

# SAFECOM Grant Guidance for 2011

The fiscal year (FY) 2011 SAFECOM guidance on emergency communications grants was posted to the SAFECOM website for use by grantees in drafting 2011 applications. The document provides guidance on eligible emergency communications activities and equipment standards.

Unlike former grant guidance documents, this year's SAFECOM guidance is directed toward grantees, including state, local and tribal recipients. Other key changes to the FY 2011 SAFECOM guidance for FY 2011 are that grantees are encouraged to allocate grant funds to plan and implement activities that will ensure compliance with the FCC narrowband mandate by the Jan. 1, 2013, deadline. With the increase in federal funding for broadband and next-generation technologies available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, next-generation activities to existing cost categories are added, as well as new standards for broadband and next-generation technologies.

In addition, updates have been made to the Project 25 (P25) standard to provide basic information and additional resources for grantees on the suite of standards for digital radio communications. Because many federal grants require grantees to submit a system life cycle plan with grant applications, a sample life cycle plan for grantees is included in the guidance.

SAFECOM grant guidance can be found at http://www.safecompro-gram.gov/SAFECOM/library/grant/1638_fy2011.htm

(Article extracted from Mission Critical Magazine)

In addition to the SAFECOM grant program, the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) can now use unobligated Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) and Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) funds from prior years for narrowbanding and have been working narrowband solutions into local projects since November. For more information on applying for these funds, please contact Leon Morgan, 428-7139, at DHS&EM.

## More Radios Approved to Operate on ALMR

There are many benefits for public safety agencies to implement APCO P25 standards-compliant systems when developing a communications system such as ALMR. One is the move from the proprietary architectures of the various system vendors that severely limited interoperability between agencies and limited the choice of subscriber units to those capable of operating on their respective systems, especially from a cost perspective.

The open, P25 standard architecture allows many vendors to develop and manufacture subscriber units capable of operating on systems with P25 infrastructure. Also, P25 has enabled many system vendors to develop numerous P25 compliant systems, thereby increasing competition for system market share, more choices for first responder agencies, and ultimately driving down cost of the units operating on those systems.

An example of the increase in choices is the number of vendors who are manufacturing subscriber units capable of operating on ALMR has essentially tripled since 2007. ALMR users were initially limited to acquiring either Motorola or EF Johnson subscriber units.

With the recent approval of Relm BK radios to operate on the ALMR System, there are now five different subscriber manufactures whose units are have successfully completed the ALMR Acceptance Test Procedure (ATP) and are approved for use on the System.

The others are EF Johnson, Kenwood, Motorola, and Tait. Icom and Thales have completed some initial testing in the past year, but need to resolve some issues with features that had not been fully implemented in their products at the time they tested, but are required features before they can be approved for operation on ALMR.

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**Push to Talks on ALMR from 2/1/2010 - 2/1/2011**

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