

ALMR INSIDER

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What is SATS and How Does It Relate to ALMR?

The State of Alaska Telecommunications System (SATS) is a system of 160 microwave sites and leased fiber optic lines owned and maintained by the State of Alaska (SOA) Department of Administration (DOA) Enterprise Technology Services (ETS) that provides two very important functions to Alaskans. It is important to understand that while SATS is not an “application,” it is an essential element in the delivery of services using applications.

Basically, SATS is the communications medium that allows many of the functions of government that provide protection and services to the public to occur effectively and efficiently day in and day out. If SATS (which is currently only funded in a break/fix status by the SOA) fails, all of these services will be lost/seriously degraded.

In the first instance, it is the “backbone” that enables the SOA computers to operate on a wide-area network (WAN) providing connectivity between far flung facilities and offices. The SATS infrastructure allows e-mails, seismic, differential GPS and SCADA data to be delivered and/or reported on by agencies in accomplishing their respective missions. SATS ensures that an Alaska law enforcement officer can instantly determine if a person contacted during the course of his/her activities is being sought in Alaska or another state.

Video conferencing and long-distance Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) telephone services between State offices is also a function provided by SATS. It results in a substantial savings to the State with regard to travel and commercial long distance charges. SATS is also instrumental in the delivery of Alaska Rural Communications System (ARCS) television programming to more remote areas of the State.

Additionally, the Department of Transportation’s Intelligent Transportation System

(ITS), highway call boxes, and the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) Communications System depend on the SATS infrastructure to provide the necessary WAN to assist Alaska’s emergency response communities and the traveling public.

The second important function that SATS provides is the “backbone” for an extensive 1 two-way radio/paging communications system, primarily located outside the current ALMR service area. The radio paging system involves an infrastructure of 240 transmission and repeater sites, which support radios in areas outside the ALMR coverage area.

Finally, the conventional system provides paging resources to hundreds of emergency responders around the state.

Although some in Alaska mistakenly assume that ALMR and SATS are one in the same, it is important to understand that ALMR is a critical public safety support function that utilizes SATS to deliver important government public safety services to the citizens of Alaska along the major roadways. ALMR was formed under a consortium approach between DOD, Federal Non-DOD, SOA, and local agencies.

For example, ALMR would not be able to provide radio communications between Juneau and Fairbanks, as it currently does, without SATS providing the wide-area connectivity. SATS is a key element in the success of ALMR, but even without ALMR, SATS would still be required to deliver the many important government services set out above. If you need additional information on the importance of SATS and ALMR to the delivery of critical communications in Alaska, please contact the ALMR Operations Management Office. Contact information can be located on the ALMR web site at http://www.alaskalandmobileradio.org/team_members.htm or by calling the Help Desk.

New Operations Management Office (OMO) Contract - Changes In Effect

A new contract governing services provided by the Operations Management Office (OMO) was solicited and rebid over the past several months. The cost of the contract will be divided equally between the Department of Defense (DOD) and the State of Alaska (SOA) Department of Administration (DOA). The new contract covers the base year (Oct 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010), with two additional years running concurrent with the SOA Fiscal Year (FY).

The base contract submitted for bid covered governance management, Executive Council (EC) support, User Council (UC) support, problem escalation, budget process and audit coordination, third party quality assurance/quality control, system infrastructure maintenance oversight, oversight of asset management services, system network management and technical support, common training services/deliverables, records and document management, security, technical assistance during emergency response conditions, emergency operations support (real world and exercises) during emergency response conditions (COML support duties), and some non-shared services to be paid by the requesting agency.

Many of these areas had baseline services plus optional services attached. The UC voted and passed a motion to fund only the baseline services for the first year of the contract, but will readdress the non-funded services at the beginning of each of the two additional contract years, for possible reintroduction and funding.

Services not funded for State FY 2010 are:

- Meeting reminders beyond initial notification, any special reports, the quarterly ALMR Insider newsletter, Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, technical support to agencies requesting grant funding
- Conflict resolution and impasse resolution
- Other budget and cost reports as required by the User Council/Executive Council

- Monitoring Help Desk trouble tickets for negative trends and report to the User Council; provide oversight of the Help Desk support
- Reviewing and providing reports on emerging technology to the User Council
- Tracking and providing reports and updates on interference and coverage issues
- Providing new equipment procurement assistance and temporary loaner administration
- Providing system familiarization to stakeholder/member agencies
- Performing scheduling services and training classes as required and requested
- Conducting Annual User Council Training Conference
- Developing and providing briefings at local, regional, State or national conferences
- Providing training necessary to solve problems arising with operating on the System to include: operational differences between communication technologies and integration of trunked systems with legacy systems
- Preparing and updating briefings on ALMR for presentation to Congressional delegations, the State Legislature, and the Municipality of Anchorage
- Managing DHS CASM updates for ALMR stakeholders
- Providing outreach education and training for stakeholder/member agencies during exercise or real-world events; document and report training
- Maintaining and updating exercise-based ALMR Tactical Interoperable Communications Plans (TICPs) for the DOD and the SOA
- Preparing and distributing special reports, white papers, or other projects, as required by centric requirements of the stakeholder/member agencies
- Providing ALMR training for new or existing member agencies

If you have questions on services provided, please contact your User Council representative or the OMO, or see the Customer Support Plan on the web site at www.alaskalandmobileradio.org.

2009 Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey

On August 3, the Operations Management Office (OMO) distributed the 2009 Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey to all points of contact for those agencies operating on the ALMR System, as well as the ALMR User Council representatives. The widest dissemination possible was requested with responses due back not later than August 31. At least two reminders were sent out.

Out of a total of 12,780 subscriber units operating on the

System, the OMO only received 86 responses to the survey.

It is important for users to provide feedback continually, not just once a year. The ALMR Help Desk operates 24 hours a day/365 days a year. If you are having problems, please contact the Help Desk or call the OMO. As the frontline users, you are the eyes and ears of ALMR. If we don't know there are problems in your area, we can't look into them.

Transportable Communications System Air Transportability Test Loading Agency (ATTLA) Certification and Air Transport



In June of this year, several of the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) Communications System's transportable communications modules were Air Transportability Test Loading Agency (ATTLA) certified for air transport on US Air Force C-130, C-17, and C-5 aircraft. This process took several months and a multitude of e-mails and telephone calls to accomplish. This certification was a requirement by the Air Force prior to any airlift of the Transportable modules.

To establish an airlift checklist, and test the airlift paperwork process, the Transportable Area South (TAS) Logistics Module, Satellite Skid, and Tug were airlifted via C-130 from Kulis Air National Guard Base, Anchorage, to Eielson Air Force Base just southeast of Fairbanks and North Pole on July 1.

While there, the TAS modules were utilized in conjunction with the Transportable Area North (TAN) during the National Guard "Midnight Sun" communications exercise.

The purpose of the exercise was to establish and test connectivity with the co-located State of Washington Joint Incident Site Communications Capability (JISCC) package, which was deployed to Eielson to test their Alaska deployment capabilities in case of a real-world incident. The interconnect was established via Category 5 cable between the ALMR TAN MotoBridge™ gateway and the JISCC package ACU-1000 gateway. The process and connections were documented for future use.

Later in July, the TAS modules were static loaded on a C-17 at Elmendorf AFB to validate the load requirements and acquaint C-17 personnel with the transportable communications system. The load process was conducted without a hitch.

The ATTLA certification and testing on both C-130 and C-17 aircraft ensures that, when and if necessary, the transportable systems can be sent to the scene of any incident within the State of Alaska.

ALMR is a Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) Communications System

The original design, implementation, and purpose of the ALMR System was, and continues to be, providing day-to-day and emergency voice communications interoperability between Alaska's first responders. Developed and implemented to meet the communications needs of the partnership between Department of Defense (DOD), Federal Non-DOD, State of Alaska, and local first responder agencies, the System currently performs that function on a daily basis.

As time has passed since the System was implemented, various technologies have been developed that can supplement, enhance, and build upon the original voice communications infrastructure and capabilities of ALMR.

However, additional equipment and software enhancements are necessary for many of these features before ALMR users can access the additional capabilities on the System.

When the ALMR Operations Management Office (OMO) conducted its Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey in August this year, some organizations expressed dissatisfaction with the System because it did not support functions such as "real time" GPS location of vehicles and personnel, and text messaging. At least three agencies have purchased GPS microphones for their subscriber units with the idea of being able to track the units in real- or near-real time. Without the addition of equipment and software, ALMR will not provide the desired capabilities to

these, or other agencies.

The OMO and System Management Offices (SMO) are currently re-researching what specifically will be required to add GPS tracking and potentially other capabilities, such as over-the-air programming (OTAP). As soon as that research is complete and the potential costs identified, the information will be made available to the User Council and ALMR member agencies.

In the meantime, if a member agency is considering the purchase of equipment and/or software intended for use on the ALMR System, it is strongly recommended they check with the OMO to ensure the capability is currently supported.

Communications Assets Survey and Mapping Tool

In 2006, the Department of Homeland Security gave Alaska access to a radio communications database tool called Communications Assets Survey and Mapping (CASM). This enables Public Safety entities across the state to catalog communications assets. The database is a centralized, structured collection of information about agency mobile and portable radios, frequencies/channels, base stations, gateways, and towers/repeaters and related assets.

When an agency enrolls in CASM and provides data about its own system, it is allowed access to information other agencies in Alaska are submitting. This can help achieve several objectives:

- CASM becomes a centralized source for radio information/programming for Public Safety first responders and planners.
- Alaska jurisdictions and agencies will have shared access to each other's inventory information, which will assist in local and statewide planning.

- Greater detail and information, with regard to resources and capabilities that may not be available in Federal Communication Commission (FCC) databases, is provided.

This information will be used to assist State agencies with improving their radio operability and interoperability, future planning of infrastructure, and will help create a repository of knowledge to assist first responder planning for communication needs before an incident, and not after. Much of the current information is dated, or not entered for agencies outside of the ALMR coverage area.

Agencies that have not received training and familiarization with CASM, or are in need of a refresher course, are urged to contact Doug Schoenwald, Telecommunications Planner, Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, 907-428-7068 or doug.schoenwald@alaska.gov.

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ALMR FACTOID

Agencies on ALMR:
(as of Sep 30, 2009)

DOD - 6
Federal Non-DOD - 14
SOA - 17
Local - 49

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