

Talking Points

Alaska Interoperable Communications

Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR)

From the Commissioner, Dept. of Military & Veterans Affairs

Another Milestone for State-Wide Emergency Communications

Interoperable communications among all levels of government within Alaska continues to be a top priority of Governor Frank H. Murkowski. The ALMR system is the first major step in creating the emergency communications support for first responders throughout the state.

Another milestone was achieved by ALMR during October. The inaugural meeting of the ALMR User Group was held at the Ft. Richardson Education Center on October 3rd. The User Group formation is extremely important because it begins to place the destiny of the ALMR system directly in the hands of first responders.

The lessons learned for interoperable communications from the recent tragedies on the Gulf Coast continue to reinforce the lessons that Alaskans learned in the Alaska Shield 05 Exercise conducted in August. Good communications

technology is not enough. Communication during extreme emergencies *requires advance planning to be effective or even possible.*

During the next several months, teams from the ALMR Program Office will be working with agencies and local governments to develop tactical interoperable communication plans. These plans will start by describing who will need to talk to whom in a given contingency. Simultaneously, at the state-level, a team is working through strategic interoperable communications planning. In the coming months, the tactical and strategic planning will be brought into operational focus by the ALMR Users Group. The ultimate result will be specific interoperable communications plans linking agencies and jurisdictions at all levels within Alaska. The formulation of these plans will be another major milestone for the ALMR collaborative program.



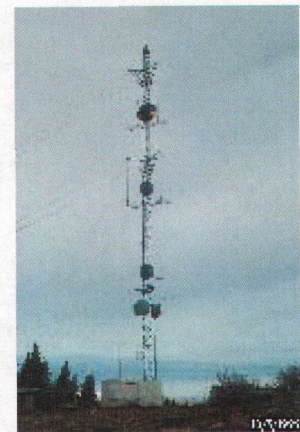
Major General
Craig E. Campbell



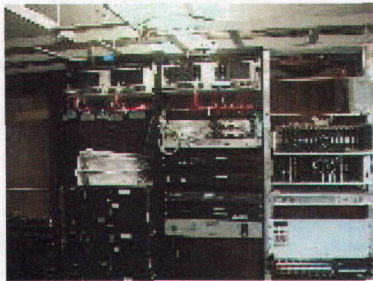
Seward



Moose Pass



Garner



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From The ALMR Program Office-Mike Callahan

As the construction season winds down, the ALMR Program Office is shifting its emphasis to bringing new users onto the system. By the end of this year, approximately 10,000 users will be operational on the ALMR system. The State Department of Transportation has been on the ALMR system since 2003. The next large user groups migrating onto ALMR are the DoD components located within the state. The military will be followed by the Alaska State Troopers. As the lead state law enforcement agency the Troopers will be the core organization to integrate interoperable communications among local and federal law enforcement agencies. Many agencies require the ability to communicate with the Troopers. As a result, special attention is being paid to this issue during the transition planning.

Planning to communicate is the first critical task necessary to achieve interoperable communications during an emergency. There are two dimensions to planning to communicate. The first, is the tactical aspect. Existing mutual aid and mutual support agreements will be used to create the local and regional interop-

erable communications plans. An example of a Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP - pronounced *tic pee*, for the acronym conscious) can be found on the ALMR website under *TICP Sample*.

The second aspect of planning to communicate occurs at the strategic-level. Here, the integration of communications is based on the classification of different types of incidents. The National Response Plan (NRP) currently identifies 15 categories of emergency support functions. These include items such as:

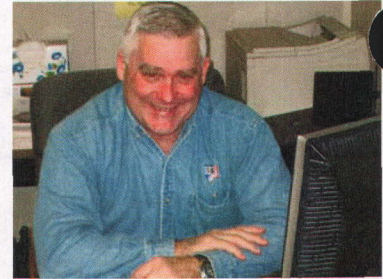
- Restoration of transportation infrastructure
- Restoration and repair to telecommunications infrastructure
- Coordinating and providing housing as a result of a disaster
- Urban search and rescue

As we have seen in the recent incidents along the Gulf Coast, all these response capabilities are fundamentally linked to interoperable communications. Planning for interoperable communications at the strategic-level is being accomplished through the development of *Storm Plans*

(pronounced “storm plans” for the acronym conscious).

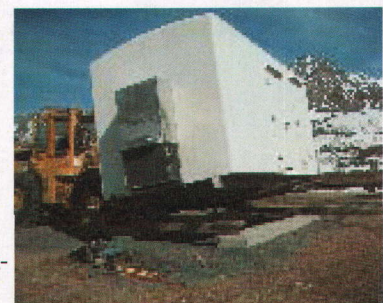
A storm plan is a template, or an “80% solution” to the interoperable communication requirements involving multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional response beyond the local and regional levels. Storm plans are being developed for a number of different scenarios involving both preparedness and law enforcement responses. The Storm Plans are intended to enhance the current mutual support and mutual aid agreements in place among agencies and jurisdictions.

For example, an incident such as a severe earthquake in a metropolitan area would immediately engage all local response capability. This would involve local government, state government, police, fire and rescue responders; hazardous materials response; schools, hospitals, and host of others. Mutual aid and mutual support agreements would go into affect. The Alaska National Guard could be activated by the governor. Both government and non-government agencies outside the state could be called on for support. As we saw during the first



Mike Callahan

hours and days after the Hurricane Katrina emergency, law enforcement and relief efforts will not be effective if responders cannot talk with each other. There are other types of incidents that require both preparedness and law enforcement responses. These incidents could involve a variety of resources from outside the state being used within Alaska. The list of responders will ex-



Black Rapids

From The ALMR Program Office (Continued)

pand or contract based on the type of incident that is being thought through and exercised.

The key to storm plans is that the interoperable communications requirements for a variety of different kinds of emergency responses can be pre-programmed into ALMR

radios. With the push of a button or a mouse click on a dispatchers console, all responders will have the interoperable communications they require.

Once the storm plans are developed, coordination sessions with the ALMR User Group will be scheduled. During these sessions, the

ALMR Users and planners will integrate the tactical and strategic interoperable communications plans. With these plans in place, the next step will be to develop realistic training exercises to see what works and, equally important, what does not work for each of the planned scenarios.

Transition Planning

Across Alaska, agencies are beginning the migration of their emergency communications systems onto ALMR. As with any cut over, the process has bumps and glitches. The Alaska State Troopers are in the process of transition now.

One of the most important parts of an agency's transition onto ALMR is keeping users in the field informed. Major M.C. Leveque, Admin Commander for the Troopers, recently sent an email to the field that is an excellent example of keeping people apprised of the transition to ALMR.

Major Leveque's message is reprinted here, with permission, in its entirety.

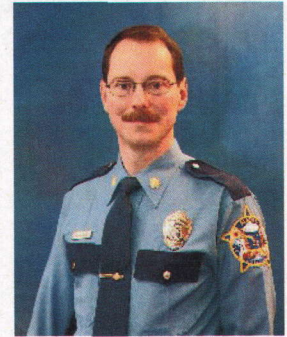
As you may know, the State of Alaska, along with most federal agencies and many municipal governments in Alaska, has been involved in a project to update our radio communications. The short version is that a number of years ago, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandated a change in radio frequency usage that meant that our Saber radios were going to become obsolete. This same FCC decision affected the Department of Defense and virtually all radio spectrum users in the US.

The timing of the FCC an-

nouncement a few years ago wasn't bad for Alaska. Many troopers can tell horror stories of how repeaters would go belly up for days or weeks at a time. The hardware on our current system is very old and replacement parts haven't been available for some time. Many repairs were just a function of "cannibalizing" old repeaters to keep things running. In spite of the best efforts of all the technicians involved, this has sometimes created officer safety concerns among troopers and CSO's. Without going into the technical details, it is intended that this new system, called Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR), will increase the

ability of agencies to talk with one another; and for command and control to be exercised in time of emergency. The importance of interoperability in Alaska isn't lost on our partners (DOT, local PD's, Fire / EMS, etc.). When ALMR was first spooling up, one of the most important features, identified by other agencies, was that our partners felt it was critical that they be able to reach you during an emergency.

When the system becomes operational, and when all the road-system repeater sites have been converted to ALMR, it is expected that road system coverage and clarity will be improved. An-



Major Leveque



Ernestine

Major Leveque's message (Continued)

other feature of ALMR is that it will eventually give AST the ability to implement mobile data transmission; meaning that we could eventually place mobile data computers (MDC's) in our cars. The first phases of this system will only serve the areas of the state nearby the road system. Areas in southeast and western Alaska will not immediately change to ALMR. Inclusion of those areas will probably take a while and will be dependent on what amounts of funding are available in the future.

In the meanwhile, you may be experiencing some confusion and difficulty. The first point to be made is that while you may have been issued a new mobile radio for your car, or a new portable radio; you are still talking on the old system. If you think about it, it makes sense to get new radios into the field before we change over the dispatch center consoles. Imagine if we had you try to talk with dispatchers who had new equipment, while you had old radios; all you would get is dead air! The reason we can give you the new radios is that the new radios are "backward compatible" - fancy talk for radios that will work with both the new and old systems.

The fact that the radios are backward compatible isn't perfect, however. The new radios have lower transmission power, so in some outlying areas, troopers are finding that the new radios don't work as well! There is no cure for this situation, but if you are a road-post trooper, or an ABWE trooper who spends lots of time in outlying areas, let your supervi-

sor know. In some cases, changing the roof antenna on your car is a simple, but not perfect, fix. We've tried to identify all of the affected troopers, but perhaps we've overlooked you.

So, I ask your patience with this process. Get to know the limitations of the system while we are in this transition period. I have been assured that once the new radios are working on the 'real' ALMR system, you will be amazed. We have already done field testing of the ALMR concept with SERT units in Valdez a year and a half ago, and in Whittier this summer. The field tests showed that the system performed as advertised. Once we have ALMR fully transitioned on the road system, we expect that you will find it is safer, more reliable, and easy to use. In fact, ABADE has recently had a couple of big successes with these radios, which they feel would not have been possible with the Sabers.

At this point, the next big step in implementing ALMR is to get dispatch consoles replaced in Fairbanks AST dispatch, MatCom in Wasilla, and at Soldotna AST dispatch. The time frames for those installs is somewhat loose, but I would guess that the soonest we might see a "cut-over" to ALMR in Fairbanks (they are first) is probably February or March, 2006. MatCom and Soldotna are scheduled to follow Fairbanks within a few months, with MatCom going next.

If you would like to know more about ALMR, follow this link:

<http://www.ak-prepared.com/almr/>

In particular, you might want to read the frequently asked questions (FAQ's).

MC Leveque, Major, Admin Commander



Cooper Mountain



Hope Shelter Lift

Notes From The Field

When radio batteries cannot be recharged...

Recent events on the Gulf Coast have provided a number of lessons learned. Among the most basic is that when grid power fails and generator power is difficult to access, first responder radios become useless very quickly. The tactical solution to this problem is the use of "clam shell" battery packs for ALMR portable radios. These battery packs operate on twelve AA batteries that are easily replaceable in the field.

To find out more about clam shell battery packs for Motorola and EF Johnson radios go to *Clam Shells* on the ALMR web site at www.ak-prepared/almr.

Points of Contact

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