



**ALASKA LAND MOBILE RADIO EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**  
**(A Federal, State and Municipal Partnership)**



**MEMORANDUM FOR ALMR Executive Council**

**April 20, 2023**

**FROM: DOD Co-Chair**

**SUBJECT: January 12 Meeting Minutes**

**TO: See Distribution**

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**Executive Council Members:**

Colonel Timothy "Steiner" Meerstein  
Deputy Commissioner Bryan Barlow

Department of Defense – ALCOM/J6  
State of Alaska – Department of Public  
Safety

Chief Michael Kerle

Municipality of Anchorage – Anchorage  
Police Department (via teleconference)

**ALMR Support Team Members and Guests:**

Mr. Scott Stormo

Alaska Public Safety Communication  
Services

Mr. John Rockwell

User Council Chair

Mr. Paul Fussey

ALMR Operations Manager

Mr. Nikalus Fahnstock

ALMR System Manager

Mr. Timothy Woodall

ALCOM/PM/COR

Mr. Trygve Erickson

Municipality of Anchorage (via  
teleconference)

Mr. David Reed

Information Systems Security Manager  
(via teleconference)

Mr. Jim Kortbein

ALCOM/J64

Mr. Jim Nicholl

Motorola Solutions

Mr. Tim Thometz

Icom America (via teleconference)

Mr. Pete Rogell

BK Technologies (via teleconference)

Mr. Dave Patterson

Motorola Solutions

Mr. Zach Haas

Motorola Solutions

Ms. Sherry Shafer

Operations Management Office (via  
teleconference)

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1. **Call to Order.** Colonel Timothy “Steiner” Meerstein, Department of Defense (DOD) Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:28 p.m. The roll was read, and a quorum of Executive Council members were present.

2. **Opening Statements and Other Announcements.** Colonel Meerstein asked if there were any announcements and there were none.

3. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes.** Colonel Meerstein asked the members if they had a chance to review the draft meeting minutes from the October Executive Council meeting and if there were any requested changes. There were no requested changes.

**Motion: Approve the October 20, Executive Council meeting minutes, as presented.**

The motion was made by Deputy Commissioner Bryan Barlow and seconded by Colonel Meerstein. There were no objections or further discussion. **The motion was carried and approved.**

#### 4. **Old Business.**

a. SOA Quantar Replacement. Colonel Meerstein asked Mr. Scott Stormo if there were any updates.

Mr. Stormo advised that all the Quantars for the State had been replaced with the ESS GTR suites and everything owned by the DoD and by the State had been upgraded to 2021.1, but he noted there were still ongoing phases and parts of the project with the microwave and some routers. Mr. Stormo stated the State also has other ongoing projects for critical connect and APEX Next, so it's very likely that the entirety of all these projects will continue at least through this calendar year.

b. State Interoperability Governing Body (SIGB). Colonel Meerstein asked Mr. Rockwell for updates on the SIGB.

Mr. Rockwell briefed, as presented at the last meeting, AO333 is the governor's order to look at 9-1-1 and public safety communications is ongoing. He stated DPS representation for that is Ms. Lori Criqui, the DPS -91-1 coordinator and he hoped within the next six months or so they would be able to review the draft report.

Colonel Meerstein recommended this item be removed until after the report is submitted to the governor's office and then we can review it at that point. He asked if anyone had any objections to that or any questions and there were none.

c. Long-term Cost Share Solution. Colonel Meerstein asked Mr. Rockwell if he had any updates on this issue.

Mr. Rockwell advised there were no updates, and this is an ongoing discussion that they are continuing to have with all three partners.

d. Fiduciary Responsibilities. Colonel Meerstein requested Mr. Jim Kortbein if he had anything new to offer on this.

Mr. Kortbein stated the DOD would be working through the framework of the fiduciary responsibility documentation through the end of January and at that point they would then work with the State of Alaska to set a time to sit down and go through the agreement.

Colonel Meerstein asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Rockwell stated he had more of an observation and that he knew the DOD was leaning forward on the responsibility issue and were already working with Motorola on what would be the next upgrade and what would be the cost of the upgrade. He noted he really appreciated the effort of being proactive instead of reactive because as we know that all of a sudden if you're told you need a million dollars or three and you know it takes two years to get it through the budget cycle and I can't give it to you now.

e. DOD FY22 Budget. Colonel Meerstein asked Mr. Paul Fussey to give an update on this item.

Mr. Fussey briefed the budget was sent to the User Council for their approval back on December 19th and the OMO was still waiting for a quorum of representatives for their approval.

## **5. User Council Update.**

Colonel Meerstein asked Mr. Rockwell for an update on the User Council.

Mr. Rockwell stated the annual elections were held in December and he was re-elected as Chair and Ms. Tammy Goggia-Cockrell was elected as Vice Chair. He added there were currently two vacancies on the council for the SOA All Others primary and the US Army primary representative.

## **6. Operations Management Office.**

a. 2021.1 upgrade. Mr. Fussey stated the project closeout meeting was held on December 16<sup>th</sup> and there were some follow-on projects and punch list items remaining, but those items would be completed during regular periodic maintenance inspections (PMIs) throughout the year.

b. Annual Inventory Confirmation Process. Mr. Fussey announced there was a change to the annual inventory confirmation process. He advised the OMO had, in previous years, been sending out letters and confirmation forms in January to every agency to sign verifying they've completed their annual inventory and then would follow

up with their agreements in May. Mr. Fussey stated the two have been combined and specific verbiage regarding the annual inventory has been added to the FY24 membership agreement form, so by signing it, each agency will attest to the fact they have conducted their annual inventory. He noted the new membership agreements will be sent out in May to all user agencies to sign.

c. Annual reports. Mr. Fussey briefed there were three annual reports that would be distributed to the Executive Council via e-mail for their approval after the User Council has approved them and they were the 2022 Business Case, the Annual Information Assurance Report of Findings, and the User Council Annual Assessment on System Operations and Management Performance.

d. Training and Outreach. Mr. Fussey noted he had a good meeting with Mr Dan Nelson, who is continuing on as the training coordinator. He noted they had sat down and went through the annual survey and what the users wanted for training and that interoperability zones came up in several of the responses, so for the quarterly live training Mr. Nelson is going to start out with interoperability zones and is working on that one. Mr. Fussey advised that starting in January, Mr. Nelson would also be putting out a new training video vignette on the website with a different topic for every month.

Mr. Fussey stated he had also been calling the different agencies to discuss how they use ALMR and any concerns they may have. He noted he has been receiving good feedback during the conversations and he has also been able to direct people to the website for some answers. Mr. Fussey briefed there were a lot of the questions regarding TDMA as to what's going to happen and what's going on with the radios and he's explained to them how TDMA works and also directed them to the website as they go through and see that the radios are TDMA capable. He was also able to explain that if they have the old XTS 1500 or the XTS 5000, they will still be able to use them on the system for now, but they will need to upgrade before TDMA implementation.

e. Acceptance Test Procedure. Mr. Fussey stated he has been working to get more radios up and right now ALMR is in the process of testing for approval the Kenwood VM5000 mobile. He added that hopefully they will be able to finish that up soon.

f. December System Metrics. Mr. Fussey briefed system calls were up by 150,000 from November and there were over 28.8 million push to talks for the entire year. He noted the busies were down from last year at 213. Mr. Fussey pointed out there were currently 13 sites below three nines and that some of them are beyond our control such as Pillar Mountain in the areas around Kodiak, which was due to another company's software upgrade which generated lot of questions as to why our system was down when it was nothing to do with SATS or the ALMR system. Lastly, he advised there were currently 25,056 subscribers on ALMR and asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Rockwell stated he wanted to touch a bit more on what Paul covered under training and outreach regarding whether agencies could keep using their old radios. He explained during the upgrade we did work with Motorola for a transitional period that you can continue to use FDMA radios on the system at the same time as TDMA. Mr.

Rockwell provided the example if a site has six voice channels on it, when we complete the upgrade to TDMA, that will split those voice channels in and increase them to 12 and the control channel. He explained if FDMA radio on that site it would negate the TDMA capability, so that although we can have both technologies on the system during the transition and beyond the transition at some point, we are going to cut off all that. Mr. Rockwell stated that we understand that it takes years to get funding to find these radios, and so we felt that we would be very liberal, and we put it out to December 2026. He expressed hopefully, as people think about the infrastructure that they have, the number of radios they have, the fact that we have upgraded the system to be able to utilize the new technology for the TDMA that they are going to have to either a flash upgrade if they have a newer radio or they are replacing those older 1250, 1500, and 5000 radios. Mr. Rockwell emphasized that we've been talking about this for a couple years now, so he wanted to bring it up in this forum to remind everybody here and on the phone that Paul is right, that both of them could be on the system today, but we are looking at a date when we're going to turn off the FDMA functionality.

Mr. Fussey added when he talked to some of the agencies, they stated they did not know TDMA was coming, so he has been educating them on the radios, directing them to the website, and advising them when the cutoff date is. He also briefed he has spoken to others who have emailed claiming their radios won't work anymore because they're not TDMA and he has explained to them both can be on the same site at once again, but also again direct them to the list of TDMA capable radios, the cut-off date and how they can slowly transition over. Mr. Fussey stated that has been the bulk of his outreach work.

Mr. Fussey also noted that on the ALMR website it states no more FDMA radios will be added to ALMR system effective December 2021, so the FDMA radios that are on there now are on there.

Mr. Tim Woodall pointed out that they currently do not have the licensing required from the FCC and the NTA with regard to TDMA, and he requested that ALMR not turn on the TDMA systems until the licensing is complete. He stated that he would coordinate with the state on how the licensing process has to occur and then provide a timeline for that licensing process, but until that time the system is not authorized to use TDMA from a licensing perspective.

## **7. New Business.**

Colonel Meerstein asked if there was any New Business and Deputy Commissioner Barlow noted it had been brought to his attention by his department there were dead zones, for lack of a better term, in areas like Big Lake and an area around Tok, but primarily I keep getting asked about the area around Nikiski, which, by state trooper standards is an urban area that they're operating in and they're having difficulty talking on the ALMR system there, and I was asked to request an update on where we're at with the technology for a potential fix into the future.

Mr. Fussey explained Nikiski has been a problem area due to topography. He stated a couple of years ago, Director Hughes (previously Captain Hughes) and ALMR had looked at different towers in the area including the Nikiski Fire Department but found it would still not cover the Kenai Spur Road; it had fixed some of the areas for topography, but not quite all. Mr. Fussey also noted that Captain Roberts and DPS have worked on that also, and the annual User Council survey has also pointed out it is a problem area. He stated ALMR is looking at a couple different towers out there and have done some coverage overlays.

Mr. Fussey stated he has heard from some individuals that when they upgraded from the XTS5000 to the APX6000 and APX8000 it did improve coverage for some areas but not all. He also explained the system was built and designed for 95% coverage for mobiles, but the majority of the issues in the past seem to be with portables and not mobiles.

Deputy Commissioner Barlow stated he believed Mr. Fussey was right and it was portable radios but didn't have confirmation on that right now. He also advised he had heard DPS had considered using radio signal boosters in their vehicles to help them, but the other concern was that still leaves the fire department, State Parks, BLM, and other individuals with coverage issues and of course, money is always the crux of everything that has been looked at.

Mr. Rockwell briefed, he wanted to have Mr. Fussey describe the assessment of process, where annually the User Council goes through and does an assessment of all the areas that have either a lack of coverage or spotty coverage. He pointed out three years ago, Big Lake was one of the areas that were brought up to the council and they said the easy fix for that and what we do with those, we prioritize them. Then the issue becomes if we can get funding and then we can do the work. Mr. Rockwell reiterated that the process is we identify it, we prioritize it, we fund it, we fix it and so far, we've only been able to identify it and prioritize it. He noted DPS has been asking for funding in the previous years and this year they asked for five million for new towers in several areas and it got all the way up to the governor's office before it got pulled back.

Mr. Rockwell stated there were other projects that are going on that he was going to ask Mr. Scott Stormo to describe that allow us to supplement the Alaska Land Mobile Radio network that are not the traditional P25 systems you think of when you think of radios that can solve some of these problems, but pushing these types of projects forward will open up areas that we haven't even thought of before. He then requested Mr. Stormo talk a little bit about the upgrade with the Smart Connect and the APEX Next radios.

Mr. Stormo explained the APEX Next radio can have a SIM card in it and, for the moment, only with Verizon or AT&T and with the infrastructure that we're getting put on the system, assuming it makes it through Fed ramp approval, and it sounds like it's going to, then you can have your APEX Next SIM in your radio, and if you're outside of a ALMR coverage such as a portable in Nikiski which is not getting a good signal from an ALMR tower, then you can talk to an AT&T tower and it will communicate just like it's connected to the system. He pointed out it's an expensive radio, but it's probably the radio of the future, in probably ten years. Mr. Stormo stated that is one option and not

only will that work in a place like that, although it doesn't do GCI at the moment, and maybe it will or won't in the future because GCI doesn't exist anywhere else and it is not a big market that manufacturers are working towards, but if there's a FirstNet-capable site in western Alaska or Verizon was out there, then people could use a radio out there and communicate on ALMR.

Mr. Stormo briefed the other piece is called Smart Connect and that works with APX 6000, 6500, 8000, or 8500 radios and it is a feature set that has to be on the radio. He added the big purchase that DPS just did was to put it on their radios in anticipation of what we are trying to do and Motorola put it on the radios without charging us for it because they knew what we're trying to do, and they were gracious enough to add that capability to those radios. Mr. Stormo explained, it can allow you to communicate to Wi-Fi and to the Internet, and there are a couple of different ways that can work. He noted it has to be configured to do it, but if you are in a building that doesn't have good in-building coverage, but it has a data network on it, there are programs to communicate through those data networks. Mr. Stormo gave examples of the LTE Sierra Wireless routers like the troopers are putting in their vehicles. That Wi-Fi could be turned on and then the portable within the range of that Wi-Fi bubble, could be talking through that and on the system. He also gave the example if the Delta police chief in his house didn't have the portable coverage and if his home had Wi-Fi, that could be programmed into his radio and his portal would then work at that house and all it takes is the configuration on the system and the configuration on the radio. It has potential to solve some of these problems that maybe aren't going to get solved by spending a million and a half dollars to build a new site, but maybe it could be solved if it's only affecting a small number of people. Mr. Stormo stated, maybe there are cheaper options for some issues, even it means you have to buy an expensive radio that may be a better solution than that could work.

Deputy Commissioner Barlow asked how about out West and if there was a push where we're starting to explore something like Starlink, and if it can produce the Wi-Fi coverage in a village.

Mr. Stormo stated they have been working the last two years with the connected car concept. He provided the example of the troopers, or EMS, or some type of public safety vehicle that is now the hub for the Wi-Fi environment wireless router and that becomes the connected vehicle with the combination of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth and the concept could work in parts of Western Alaska where there is decent connectivity.

Mr. Stormo also mentioned they are working on to bring up another project that we're working on which is the satellite connectivity and they are looking at putting some additional technology within the DPS structures, which should create that Wi-Fi environment and the vehicles could still use their radio even though they're way far away from any ALMR tower.

Mr. Stormo added there are also GPS push-to-talk radios and DNR uses these, but they have problems with the satellite phones, and they probably wouldn't work very good in a house or in the trees, but this option can provide a form of communication. He noted

they will never be as good as being on the actual system and there could be delays, pauses, missed voice traffic, but this is versus having to make a phone call.

Mr. Stormo advised there are also push-to-talk over cellular things that can be hooked into ALMR and some of that exists right now where you can be on the system. He stated it is something the Anchorage Muni has, and you can try to get licenses for it but it can be run on phones and that's improved a lot over the last five years.

Mr. Stormo also briefed smart phones are coming out with a push-to-talk button on the side of it, so it's not always a process where you must open the app, find the page, and then scroll to who you want to talk to you. He advised they have made it a lot more user friendly and a lot more radio like, but again, it is not the same as being on the radio system and you may or may not be heard when you are pushing its limitations.

Mr. Fussey asked Deputy Commissioner Barlow if his troops could e-mail or call him so he could create a map of the problem areas and then as ALMR looks at different towers or different coverage areas to see if there's already an existing tower. He noted he would also be working with Mr. Stormo and his folks as well as Mr Rockwell to see if there is money or if one of those towers will cover the majority of the problem areas that the troops in fields are having.

Mr. Rockwell stated that ALMR is working on some of the problem areas through Smart Connect ideas and that will be the first test for that product. He advised they have looked at the towers and whether to add a new tower won't be known until they get past testing some of this other technology, but he felt that a lot of it is coming together finally.

Mr. Rockwell briefed the push to talk over cellular was something he has been pushing for three years to be integrated into the ALMR network and there are now some solutions where they can take a donor radio and put in a talk group and see if it works, but as far as the resource itself, it's very limited. He added they have been working with Motorola and working with First Network with AT&T on how to integrate that push to talk over cellular and other solutions, and as Mr. Stormo mentioned, it's getting so much better now that the technology is finally catching up to the ideas.

Mr. Stormo mentioned there was one solution that has actually been implemented although he doesn't know how much it has been used and that is a high-quality backhaul through the health clinics and it is tied into the ALMR system through a CCGW, which allows you to hook conventional radios into the system. He offered that this could be another option for some of Western Alaska, where you could have a repeater that covers not only the village, but other areas. Mr. Rockwell stated this was why it was also a perfect solution for them because they needed someone to dispatch, and Valdez was happy to dispatch as long as they could get a call. He noted they were able to work with Motorola and work with one of the local vendors to implement a solution for that specific problem. Mr. Stormo concluded the potential solutions out in Western Alaska could be a radio repeater that could be used to tie back into ALMR, but there is a lot of technology out there that exists that opens up opportunities.



**8. Next Meeting.** Colonel Meerstein advised the next meeting is scheduled for April 20 at 1:30p.m. in the Alaska Public Safety Communication Services conference room. He requested everyone to please check their calendars and let Ms. Shafer know if they had any conflicts.

**9. Adjourn Meeting.** Colonel Meerstein asked if there was any other business and hearing no response, he requested a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**Motion: Adjourn the January Executive Council meeting.**

The motion was made by Deputy Commissioner Barlow and seconded by Colonel Meerstein. There were no objections. **The motion was carried and approved.**

The meeting adjourned at 2:08 p.m.

Timothy J. Meerstein, Colonel, USAF  
ALCOM J6  
ALMR Executive Council

**Distribution:**

SOA/DPS, Deputy Commissioner Bryan Barlow  
USNORTHCOM/ALCOM J6, Colonel Timothy "Steiner" Meerstein  
FBI, Ms. Sarah Mueller  
MOA, Chief Michael Kerle  
AML, Assistant Chief Alex Boyd  
OMO, Mr. Paul Fussey  
SOA DPS, Mr. Scott Stormo  
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