

AWIN

the
Arkansas Wireless Information Network



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Interoperability is an important issue for law enforcement, fire fighters, EMS, and other public safety departments, because first responders need to be able to communicate during emergencies both large and small.

3rd Annual
Interoperability Conference

October 12-14
Crowne Plaza, Little Rock

Informing public safety organizations about the latest in interoperable communications.

Hosted by: Arkansas Wireless Information Network

Countdown Clock to Mandatory Narrowbanding Continues to Tick

A countdown clock on the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials website (www.apcoafc.org) ticks down the number of days, hours, minutes, and seconds remaining before mandatory narrowbanding, affecting radio frequency ranges 150-174MHz and 421-512 MHz bands, takes effect.

By January 1, 2013, Industrial/Business and Public Safety Radio Pool licensees must:

- 1) Operate on 12.5 kHz (11.25 kHz occupied bandwidth) or narrower channels, or
- 2) Employ a technology that achieves the narrowband equivalent of one channel per 12.5 kHz of channel bandwidth for voice and transmission rates of at least 4800 bits per second per 6.25 kHz for data systems operating with bandwidths greater than 12.5 kHz.

The impact of the mandate means that older radios, certified before February 14, 1997, may not have the capability of narrowbanding while those certified after February 14, 1997 were required to meet this narrowbanding mandate. This affects transmitters and mobile radios alike.

Some things that you need to know if you are affected by this mandate:

- The narrowbanding mandate is not optional. Increasing interference on older equipment may occur as new adjacent narrow band transmissions occur.
- Understanding the situation and planning appropriately may allow for migration to be done in a gradual way.
- Narrowbanding is not the same as the 800 MHz rebanding. Rebanding is focused on eliminating present and future interference in that spectrum band that occurred because of interference between commercial and public safety frequencies. This interference created

- very dangerous and unpredictable communications problems for public safety.
- Be cautious when purchasing older radio equipment to insure that you are not buying more equipment that will have to be replaced as part of the mandate.

More information on narrowbanding can be found at www.apcoafc.org.

Group Advances Five-Year SCIP Strategic Roadmap

Identifying major challenges that need to be addressed in order to advance the Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) and creating a strategic roadmap for the next few years was the focus of a two-day planning workshop by the Arkansas Interoperability Communications Committee (AICC).

Highlighted during the workshop was the completion of 27 of 42 SCIP initiatives relating to governance, SOP, technology, training and exercises, and usage. Major accomplishments included:

- Established the AICC and the Arkansas Interoperability Communications Executive Committee (AICEC)
- Developed policies that support interoperability in Arkansas
- Established a process for developing standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Performed a capacity assessment of the Arkansas Wireless Information Network (AWIN) System
- Developed an approach to ensuring continuity of operations for AWIN
- Established training standards
- Developed and enhanced training on AWIN and ARSKY

Workshop participants achieved consensus on new, prioritized SCIP initiatives. While not a comprehensive list, the initiatives listed below include those with milestone dates in 2011.

GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES	
Initiative	
G3-	Develop Arkansas Field Operations Guide.
G4-	Develop a comprehensive website that is user friendly and communicates updated information on current interoperable communications policies.
TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES	
Initiative	
TE1-	Secure 20 additional Mutual Aid Channels (MAC) and 10 secured MAC channels on AWIN.
TE2-	Complete development of and implement AWIN radio database.
TE3-	Encourage local emergency coordinators to identify alternate communications resources within their jurisdictions (e.g., amateur radio, MARS, satellite phones, and other communications).
TE4-	Develop a statewide public safety wireless broadband strategy that reflects Arkansas' requirements and needs as a rural state.
TRAINING & EXERCISE INITIATIVES	
Initiative	
TR1-	Develop training on processes and the use of interoperability equipment, including bridging equipment.
TR2-	Change certification requirements to recognize previously-trained COML instructors.

Arkansas to Receive Interoperability Field Operations Guide

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Emergency Communications is providing assistance to Arkansas that will allow for the development of an Arkansas Interoperability Field Operations Guide.

The Arkansas version will be modeled after the National Interoperability Field Operations Guide (NIFOG) which is a pocket-sized technical reference guide for radio technicians responsible for radios used in disaster response applications. Like the national guide, the Arkansas guide will include rules and regulations for use of interoperability channels and frequencies in a compact format that technicians can carry with them.

The guide will contain a listing of land mobile radio (LMR) frequencies often used in disasters or other incidents where radio interoperability is required as well as other useful information for emergency communicators. Leading the effort in creating the guide is the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) group in San Diego, California.

Information for the guide will be gathered during two consecutive workshops tentatively scheduled for early fall 2011. SPAWAR will compile the guide. If completed in time, the guide will be available during the Interoperability Conference in October. Plans also call for a .pdf version to be posted on the AWIN website.

AWIN SOWs Ready for Duty in all Situations

Whether good circumstances or bad, the Arkansas Wireless Information Network (AWIN) stands ready to assist first responders and law enforcement with communications needs.

AWIN provided communications support to the Arkansas National Guard and first responders in Chicot County when spring storms resulted in severe flooding along the Mississippi River. Guardsmen were deployed to the area to help shore up levees with sand bags. AWIN provided portable communications towers on wheels to help bridge the communications gap between the Guard and local responders.

In early June, the growing popularity of the Wakarusa Music Festival in Franklin County also prompted the deployment of an AWIN site on wheels. The four-day camping/music festival drew a crowd of thousands. Due to its remote location on private property at Mulberry Mountain in Ozark, the AWIN portable tower bolstered communications capability of law enforcement and National Forest officers at checkpoints on the perimeters of the property with security personnel inside the festival to coordinate with police in making arrests.

Celebration or crisis, the AWIN sites on wheels fulfill a strategic communications need when other alternatives do not exist.

NLE 2011: Lessons Learned From Disaster Response Simulation

A four pronged approach formed the emergency communications strategy for the Arkansas Wireless Information Network (AWIN) during the 2011 National Level Exercise (NLE), a federally mandated exercise led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that simulated the catastrophic nature of a major earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone (NMSZ).

The purpose of the exercise was to test the ability of multiple emergency response agencies such as AWIN, the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department, the Arkansas Department of Human Services and others to prepare, coordinate, and carryout a multiple-jurisdictional response and recovery effort and to test the effectiveness and capabilities of emergency communications. AWIN's primary role in the exercise was the restoration of radio and cellular communication.

“We simulated the deployment of two sites on wheels and satellite telephones in response to a communications signal outage in the earthquake stricken region. We consulted with subject matter experts regarding how they would and could respond. We coordinated with several telecommunications providers regarding their solutions for a widespread outage, and we worked with amateur radio operators to assist with delivering messages into the affected areas,” explained AWIN Program Director Penny Rubow.

Some lessons learned upon completion of NLE were about the significant challenges of fulfilling long term staffing needs of AWIN operations and ESF2 functions during an extensive crisis scenario.

“We learned that we have a lot of good people at DIS that can fill these roles,” Rubow said. “Going forward, we will involve more people in training and exercises.”

Rubow also said use of the amateur radio community was among the best practices to support the effort. Having the presence of vendor partners during the first two days of the exercise also proved invaluable during the ‘communications black out period’.

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