

INTEROPERABILITY FACT SHEET



The ability to communicate among disciplines and across jurisdictional boundaries during large-scale emergencies is one of the most compelling challenges facing public safety agencies today. Kansas City area law enforcement, fire, emergency medical service, state and federal agencies are working together to enhance interoperable public safety communications by implementing a multiphase Regional Interoperability Plan.

This plan guides homeland security investments to expand and enhance interagency coordination and communications. It outlines the resources and processes for the region to achieve optimum levels of interoperability as defined in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM communications program.

WORKING TOGETHER)))

The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) serves as the association of city and county governments and the metropolitan planning organization for the bistate Kansas City region. MARC provides administrative and management services for the region's 9-1-1 and interoperable communications systems. The MARC region covers an area that includes 120 cities and nine counties —Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami and Wyandotte counties in Kansas, and Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray counties in Missouri.

Public safety agency personnel come together in several MARC committees to discuss interoperability plans and projects such as the Regional Interoperability Plan, regional radio and mobile data systems, the Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP), regional communications assets, interoperability training, exercises, and communications trailers.

In March 2010, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) observed an exercise to test regional interoperability. The region met the regional interoperability objective which is the first goal of the National Emergency Communications Plan.

TACTICAL INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN)))

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requires each major urban area to complete a Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP). MARC's

Public Safety Communications Board approved the region's TICP in 2005. The plan was approved by DHS in 2006 and was updated and approved by the Public Safety Communications Board in April 2010.

The TICP provides operational direction and technical data for using regional interoperable communications systems and resources. It is continually updated as new resources become available to support regional response.

The plan was exercised in 2006 and the region is committed to adding interoperability components to future drills and exercises.

PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING)))

An important component of the Regional Interoperability Plan is training the personnel who use communications systems and resources. The region has developed a plan to train public safety personnel on how to access and use new regional interoperability assets.

Personnel identified as primary points of contact for their agencies become familiar with the TICP through a train-the-trainer course. They learn to use Communications Assets System Mapping (CASM) — a Web-based tool that can track public safety/first responder radio equipment and infrastructure information and provide a virtual map of the agencies, radio systems, towers, gateways and radio caches in use in the urban area. The curriculum also identifies operational responsibilities for key positions such as regional communications coordinators and communications unit leaders.

REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATORS)))

Regional communications coordinators (COMCs) are a major component of the TICP and interoperability efforts under the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Public safety personnel serving in this role must demonstrate core competencies adopted by MARC's Public Safety Communications Board.

The COMC serves as a resource to the communications unit leader and incident commander during an emergency event to fulfill specific duties and responsibilities outlined in the TICP. These responsibilities include the authority to coordinate and assign multijurisdictional interoperability assets.

RAMBIS)))

The Regional Area Multi-Band Integrated System (RAMBIS) enhances and expands current interoperability methods by allowing interconnection of various shared channels throughout the region. RAMBIS includes the three major radio frequency bands used by public safety (UHF, VHF and 800 MHz) and provides first responders with an immediate resource for communicating with other agencies.

MARC worked with Motorola and Alcatel-Lucent to implement the RAMBIS system, which includes a 10-site simulcast system that became operational in 2010. MARC staff developed and provides a train-the-trainer program — complete with a lesson plan, training video and standard operating procedures for RAMBIS use.

PLANNING FOR REGIONAL MOBILE DATA AND VOICE RADIO SYSTEMS)))

Phase III includes the Metropolitan Area Regional Radio System (MARRS) — a regional voice radio system. Using federal grant dollars, in addition to local investments, this “system of systems” includes the city of Independence, Mo., Johnson County, Kan., and the city of Kansas City, Mo.

MARC's Public Safety Communications Board approved the creation of a MARRS governance board and a memorandum of understanding has been executed between the three host agencies.

This “system of systems” will allow other jurisdictions to join the system to improve day-to-day interoperability and utilize the communications infrastructure in a more efficient and cost effective manner.

MOBILE COMMAND VEHICLES AND COMMUNICATIONS TRAILERS)))

The region has acquired two regional mobile command vehicles with radio interoperability capabilities. Each mobile command vehicle provides regional public safety agencies with the physical capabilities needed to effectively operate under the Incident Command System at a large-scale incident.

Three communications trailers can also be deployed to manage interoperable communications during major incidents. The trailers provide reliable radio links to emergency operations centers and are equipped with a radio gateway that provides direct connectivity between overlapping public safety agency radio systems that operate on different frequency bands (VHF, UHF and 800 MHz.)

EXERCISE CONTROL TRAILER)))

Another new regional asset is an exercise control trailer that carries a robust cache of portable radios and accessories. The trailer — with a portable repeater, a high-gain antenna, and 63 hand-held portable radios including a supply of spare batteries, chargers, microphones, headsets and other accessories — ensures seamless radio operations when deployed to training exercises. The assets on the trailer can also be used to help a local agency during a real emergency.

Staff Contacts:

Keith Faddis, Public Safety Program Director
Nikki Thomas, Public Safety Maintenance Supervisor



600 Broadway, Suite 200
Kansas City, MO 64105
Phone: 816-474-4240
Fax: 816-421-7758
www.marc.org/publicsafety