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 911 and interoperable communications systems. The MARC region covers 11 counties — Atchison, Douglas, 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 October 2018, 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.

**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 MARRS and familiarity with NIMS concepts.

Personnel identified as primary points of contact for their agencies become familiar with the TICP through a train-the-trainer course. 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 Metropolitan Area Regional Radio System’s (MARRS) Management Council.

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.

**Regional Mobile Data and Voice Radio Systems**

The Metropolitan Area Regional Radio System (MARRS) is a consortium of 700 MHz and 800 MHZ trunked radio systems in the MARC region that comply with APCO Project 25 standards and with Inter Sub-system Switch Interoperability (ISSI) standards. This consortium provides authorized radio users with the ability to seamlessly roam and have voice communications through each of the radio systems. 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.

**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 over 60 handheld portable radios including a supply of spare batteries, chargers, microphones, headsets and other accessories — ensuring 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.

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