

Seasons Greetings!

Office of the SWIC Newsletter



Message from John T. Stevens, Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC) & Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for FirstNet in NH



As we close out 2019 and look forward to a very proactive 2020, we need to reflect and acknowledge the accomplishments over this past year that have been extraordinary. The Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) through its involvement and leadership on a myriad of projects, have provided to Public Safety statewide communications advances not only in policy and operational development, but in technological advances not seen in recent memory.

We also wish to acknowledge the US Department of Homeland Security, Cyber Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Emergency Communications Division (ECD), Technical Assistance (TA) Programs for providing to New Hampshire unparalleled support in five (5) separate training and exercise opportunities in 2019. As we create an overall supportive environment regarding communications response capabilities, the SWIC's Office monitors its growth and offers opportunities to jurisdictional capabilities in the advancement of next generation communications technologies. Significant to this growth statewide, were nineteen (19) newly trained Communications Leaders (COML's) and sixteen (16) newly trained Communications Technicians (COMT's) that have created a stable of communications experts that will continue to grow and advance communications capabilities throughout New Hampshire. In coordination with this effort was a Cyber Security Webinar for PSAPs, a Policy TTX where the policy makers were exercised based on the policy they created (a first in the nation TTX that will be replicated throughout the country) and although weather interfered with its completion, causing it to be rescheduled in April of 2020, a Communications Unit Functional Exercise that will provide an opportunity for COML's and COMT's to have their Task Books signed and then certified by the SIEC after the COML/COMT Review Board makes its recommendations to the SWIC.

No less important was the creation of and support provided by US DHS, the development of the New Hampshire Tactical Interoperable Communications Field Operations Guide (TIC-FOG) as an operational tool for all public safety agencies that have now been provided with a pocket guide that lists statewide communications resources and capabilities.

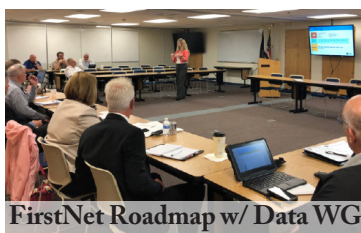


The TIC-FOG is a resource document that will benefit first responders not only in emergent circumstances, but can be relied upon as an everyday tool to better communicate across jurisdictions and across state lines. It is encouraged that if you have any questions regarding the TIC-FOG to reach out to the SWIC's Office for any clarification.

FirstNet expansion in New Hampshire continues to be significant as we approach 2020. AT&T has made substantial in-state investments in infrastructure and is providing a landscape of connectivity unforeseen as the SIEC continues to monitor its growth. Quarterly updates to the SIEC by FirstNet/ AT&T and its engineers illustrates its growth both in coverage and adoption rates by New Hampshire First Responders. This is all in coordination with FirstNet/ AT&T monthly meetings with the SIEC's Data Communications and Radio Frequency Working Groups, as we also continue to coordinate and attend public meetings statewide promoting and advocating for public safety as FirstNet opportunities become more available. Noteworthy to this effort is that we are currently two-and-a-half years into a five- year project plan where FirstNet demands that AT&T will reach 99% of the population and 97% of the geographical landmass in New Hampshire. FirstNet/ AT&T's band-14 (the priority preemption spectrum available specifically to public safety) is currently available in ninety-four (94) communities statewide with an expected nineteen (19) more communities by the end of this calendar year 2019. Thirty-four (34) towers are currently in development in addition to the coverage areas provided by Great North Woods Wireless (15 tower site locations) and the Northeast Wireless Network (11 tower site locations) that has provided tremendous coverage to the northern reaches of the state. Combined with AT&T's Business as Usual (BAU) site locations, AT&T is creating a network in New Hampshire that will support public safety statewide with unprecedented FirstNet capability.

As we begin to close the books on 2019, we are encouraged by the commitment made by the SIEC and to those that actively promote public safety communications capability. It is exciting to see where we have come from, to what currently exists today, along with forecasting a very bright tomorrow. We will engage in 2020 with the same enthusiasm as we have in years past and look forward to the opportunities that a new year will provide. On behalf of the SWIC's Office, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Highlights from 2019



FirstNet MCPTT launch delayed until first quarter of 2020, AT&T says

Written by Donny Jackson for IWCE's Urgent Communications | 4th December 2019

Public-safety users will have to wait until the first quarter of next year to experience push-to-talk service compliant with the mission-critical-push-to-talk (MCPTT) standard on the FirstNet system, according to AT&T, the contractor tasked with building and maintaining the nationwide public-safety broadband network (NPSBN).

AT&T yesterday provided the push-to-talk update as part of a press release highlighting progress of the FirstNet buildout on Band 14 spectrum and the availability the FirstNet One blimp that is designed to provide extended deployable LTE coverage.

“We also plan to launch FirstNet Push-to-Talk in early 2020,” according to the press release. “This is a standards-compliant, mission-centric solution that’s being purpose-built for public safety. It’s designed to further advance first responders’ communication capabilities with reliable, high-performance calling.”

In response to questions from IWCE’s Urgent Communications, an AT&T spokesperson clarified that FirstNet Push-to-Talk service is now slated to be available during the first quarter of next year.

“We expect to launch it broadly in the first quarter,” according to the AT&T spokesperson.

AT&T’s press release did not specify with which standard that the FirstNet Push-to-Talk service would comply, but the AT&T spokesperson confirmed that it would comply with the MCPTT standard established by 3GPP, the LTE standards body.

“It’s very important to us that the solutions are standards-compliant at launch,” according to the AT&T spokesperson’s statement provided to IWCE’s Urgent Communications. “We will be rolling out a core set of MCPTT-standards compliant features at launch and continuing to enhance and augment them over time.”

At one point, AT&T officials expressed hope that MCPTT service would be available to FirstNet users by the end of 2018, but last year the company decided to delay the MCPTT launch date until the second half of 2019 – a timeline cited repeatedly by company officials throughout this year.

The AT&T spokesperson provided the following explanation for delaying the MCPTT rollout until early 2020:

“We were initially targeting a late 2019 launch, but since we are building this solution from the ground up, we felt it was important to take a little more time to make sure we delivered an excellent end-to-end experience for public safety at launch, pulling in feedback from users in the controlled introduction,” according to a statement provided to IWCE’s Urgent Communications. “We are still tracking ahead of our contractual commitments for the launch of this solution.”

Public-safety sources interviewed by IWCE’s Urgent Communications expressed some disappointment that AT&T is not introducing MCPTT this year as planned, but those sources were more emphatic

in asserting that it would be a mistake for AT&T to unveil an MCPTT offering that is not ready for first-responder scrutiny.

“AT&T is only going to get one chance to make a first impression on this [MCPTT], so they need to get it right,” according to one public-safety representative, who requested anonymity.

AT&T has offered Enhanced PTT service using carrier-integrated PTT technology from Kodiak – now owned by Motorola Solutions – since AT&T was named as the nationwide FirstNet contractor in March 2017. However, the Enhanced PTT offering does not comply with the MCPTT standard that was completed as part of LTE Release 13 in 2016.

Although the MCPTT standard has “mission-critical” in its name, officials for both the FirstNet Authority and AT&T repeatedly have stated that the FirstNet MCPTT offering will be a mission-critical service only when public-safety officials deem it worthy for mission-critical duties. FirstNet representatives have stated publicly that they believe land-mobile-radio (LMR) systems will continue to be used for years.

Despite such statements, many local and state government officials have been anticipating MCPTT, so they can evaluate the service’s capabilities and associated costs. In the near term, many view MCPTT as a complement to LMR. Whether MCPTT eventually could be an alternative to LMR continues to be a subject of considerable debate, particularly as an increasing number of first-responder officials question whether governments will be willing to pay for two communications networks for public safety in the long term.

In creating the MCPTT standard, 3GPP participants attempted to mimic the most stringent performance standards for public-safety LMR systems, according to multiple industry sources. When a user has access to an LTE network, most experts believe MCPTT should perform well and likely will provide noticeably better voice quality, thanks to additional spectral resources and the ability to use better codecs than LMR.

But public-safety officials have significant concerns about using MCPTT when network connectivity is not available. When an LMR network is not available, LMR supports direct-mode communications with devices that use 3 watts to 5 watts to transmit signals over considerable range.

A fully compliant MCPTT offering includes a direct-mode technology – known as proximity services, or ProSe – but it is unproven, with only Samsung claiming to have a working chipset. Even if ProSe works, there are serious questions about its utility for public safety, because the low 0.25-watt power level of most LTE devices mean that the signal range from an LTE device using ProSe would pale in comparison to LMR.

<https://urgentcomm.com/2019/12/04/firstnet-mcptt-launch-delayed-until-first-quarter-of-2020-att-says/>

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