

The Alaska Interoperable Communications Committee
(AKICC)

Meeting Minutes: November 20, 2008

Next Meeting: December 17, 2008

Call to Order

Call to order was conducted at 9:00 a.m. Those present for the meeting at the Frontier Building, Anchorage, Alaska were the following:

Major Matthew Leveque, Co-Chair DPS
Bryan Fisher, Co-Chair DHS&EM
Jim Kohler, DOA
Ted Smith, DHSS
Sarah Sanderlin, Urban LEPC
Peter Murphy, ALMR User's Group
Chris Bushoe, Anchorage FD
Kathy Day, DHS&EM

Those attending via teleconference were:

Kathryn Pyne, DNR
Frank Wesser, DEC
Michael Pashcall, Rural LEPC
Jeff Tucker, North Star VFD
Rusty Lassell, Rural LEPC

Guests present at the meeting were:

John Madden, Director DHS&EM
Michael O'Hare, Deputy Director DHS&EM

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting started with introductions by committee members. Co-Chairs Leveque and Fisher addressed the committee. Bryan Fisher extended welcomes from Commissioner Campbell and Deputy Commissioner Cramer. Director Madden stressed the important mission of the committee

due to the communications challenges faced in Alaska. He spoke about the process of getting the AKICC under the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) charter and the responsibility that entails. He stressed that the committee had the freedom to set the priorities for interoperability in Alaska.

Alaska Interoperable Communications Overview

Bryan Fisher gave a synopsis of interoperability efforts up to the present, groups that exist and what lead to the formation of the AKICC. He stressed that although the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) Users Council does a good job with interoperability issues; it serves the ALMR system and does not represent the entire State. During the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP), it became apparent that interoperability efforts in Alaska could be best serviced by a committee housed in the SERC. It was emphasized that one of the major tasks of the AKICC is to implement the SCIP and utilize it as a fluid document to guide interoperability efforts in Alaska. The AKICC will use a statewide approach that will also include supporting ALMR efforts. Other interoperable groups that exist in Alaska are the Alaska 700 MHz Regional Planning Committee (dealing primarily with 700 MHz issues) as well as the Alaska Chapters of the Association of Public-Safety Communication Officials (APCO) and the National Emergency Number Association (NENA). Both APCO and NENA deal with 911 dispatch issues which are technologically behind in Alaska by national standards. There is also the newly created FEMA Alaska Regional Emergency Communication Coordination Working Group which was initiated to support interoperability efforts in Alaska. This group is soliciting for nominees and if anyone is interested, contact Kathy Day.

Mission Statement, Goals and Objectives of ICC

Bryan Fisher read the draft mission statement of the AKICC (located in the attachments distributed for the meeting). He spoke about the multi-jurisdictional, multidiscipline group that came together to help develop the SCIP but added that this plan already needs to be updated. Some of the twenty goals and objectives outlined in the SCIP were highlighted and it was emphasized that these represent the foundation for interoperability efforts in Alaska. Mention was made that on **February 10, 2009**, the Office of Emergency Communications will be offering a SCIP Implementation Workshop for AKICC members and other stakeholders. They will be

sending a facilitator to Alaska for this event and there may be another day added by DHS&EM to cover additional interoperable topics. Kathy Day added that on the federal level there is now an initiative to align all state SCIPS with the newly created National Emergency Communication Plan (that can be located online). Rusty Lasell added he was glad to hear that the committee would include working with emergency dispatch issues which is a problem in his area.

History of Communication Grants in Alaska

Bryan Fisher spoke about the various grants that have been allocated to Alaska since 2004, highlighting the Homeland Security Grant Program. In total Alaska has received approximately \$25,000,000.00 for communications equipment purchases. It was explained that after September 11, 2001 equipment acquisition was a federal priority after the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, but there was little planning in association with the equipment acquisition. A majority of this money went to the larger jurisdictions in Alaska because eligibility was based on population and governance structure, leaving out a good number of rural entities.

PSIC

Bryn Fisher then discussed the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) grant. This 2007 grant was different from the other grants because it came from the Department of Commerce (although the Department of Homeland Security was asked to help administer it). The PSIC Grant provided \$968,385,000.00 nationally to assist public safety agencies with improving their interoperable communications. As a result, Alaska was allocated \$7,250,345.00. This grant was also unusual because it did not require population based funding within states and it also allowed for the funding of non-profit and volunteer agencies. One of the stipulations for PSIC funding required that each state develop a Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan. The grant also dictated that 20% of the money could be kept at the State level while 80% had to be passed through to locals. It was also made very clear that this would be a one time award from Congress and that the end of the grant would be in September of 2010 meaning that all monies had to be spent by that date.

Due to the unique nature of the PSIC grant, managers at DHS&EM determined early on that a priority of PSIC would be to give funding to un-served, underserved communities who had not received grant money in the past. Kathy Day then went through the PSIC grant awards (in attachments for meeting) that included a number of the targeted small communities. Note was made that although Anchorage received a large sum of money, funds were allocated for the Chugiak and Girdwood Volunteer Fire Departments as well as the Anchorage Police Department's Auxiliary Search Team. Bryan Fisher commented that there could have been a better job at outreach to more of the un-served, underserved communities, but that all those who did apply were given priority with funding.

With PSIC, awards were also available for planning, training and exercise but most of the local jurisdictions requested equipment. Additionally, there is now \$268, 561.00 in PSIC funds available for training and exercises. Money was all set aside at the State level for a Strategic Interoperable Communications Training and Exercise Plan (SICTEP). Another stipulation of the PSIC grant was the requirement that there was a 20% match required for all equipment purchased. Alaska decided not to make local communities and jurisdictions pay the match and instead had money appropriated with the help of the Department of Administration (DOA) to absorb the match requirements. The PSIC grant also called for each state to develop a Strategic Technology Reserve (STR). In Alaska, money has been allocated for this project, which will be primarily "low tech" to include cache radios and deployable gateways.

Several State agencies also were awarded funding for projects which came out of the State's 20%. The Department of Public Safety received money for Alaska Search and Rescue, while the Division of Forestry was awarded money for radios in several of their planes. The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Section of Injury Prevention and Emergency Medical Services (IPEMS) also received funding for an assessment of what local emergency responders have and need in the realm of equipment. DHS&EM personnel anticipate that there will be money left over from PSIC awards so there will be another round for grant applications once the initial awards are finalized.

There was a break at 10:00 a.m. until 10:20.

Deputy Director Michael O'Hare then welcomed the committee stressing the important mission of the AKICC and reminding everyone that their primary mission was to help local communities respond to disasters.

The Grant Process

Bryan Fisher explained to the committee that one of their primary missions was to manage interoperable communications grant spending. He explained the grant award process and how all grant awards go through an internal and external grant review process. The external grant review is done by a committee made up of local emergency responders with the final decision resting with Director Madden of DHS&EM. The AKICC will be responsible for reviewing all awards having to do with interoperable communications. Kathy Day will report on the grant funding process and progress at the committee meetings.

IECGP

Bryan Fisher then spoke about the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP). Originally it was reported that Congress had appropriated \$400 million for this grant that would be legislated on a yearly basis. It ended up being only \$50 million nationally and for 2008 Alaska was awarded \$278,294.00. Due to the large volume of equipment awarded in PSIC, a stipulation of this grant was that it could only be used for governance, planning, training and exercise projects. A priority nationwide was for each state to hire an interoperable coordinator, and Kathy Day was hired as the interoperability coordinator for Alaska. The rest of the money for this grant has been allocated for a variety of training, exercise and planning activities, which can be found in the IECGP grant allocation document (attached to meeting agenda). Due to the three week turnaround time for this grant application, the grant was written so that all money would be retained at the State level. The 80% that was supposed to be passed through will also be retained by the state, as stipulated in the grant guidance, through an MOU with a local jurisdiction.

Bryan Fisher then spoke about the allocated money for updating the Tactical Interoperable Communication (TIC) plans which are currently very "ALMRcentric" and focused on AST detachment areas. It is anticipated that the TIC plan updates will be leveraged with funding already allocated by

ALMR for this project. Additionally, a contractor will be hired to write TIC plans for the three regions of Alaska that don't have plans, the North Slope Borough, Western Alaska and Southwestern Alaska. Currently the plans are a "snapshot" in time and need to be updated and simplified. The contractor hired by ALMR has developed a "playbook" format to make them more operational.

Bryan added that another federal initiative for IECGP recognizes the need for equipment Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). It was also stated that money has been set aside to fund an interoperable communications component to the 2010 Northern Shield exercise as well as for a myriad of other exercises, from tabletops to full-scale during the course of the grant.

Recently the grant guidance has been released for the 2009 IECGP funds. The application is due January 13, 2009. The AKICC has been tasked with providing guidance and participation in this grant process. Currently DHS&EM staff are awaiting clarification from FEMA on several grant guidance issues before proceeding. Jim Kohler suggested it would be better to determine what Alaska needs first and prioritize these needs prior to having the locals apply for funding. It is not clear if local projects need to be included in the application or if the state can apply for the money listing various initiatives and then have locals apply. It was clarified that the grant performance for 2009 IECGP is 24 months. Bryan Fisher was not sure how long it would take to award the grant money and felt that OEC would allow for some flexibility if the scope changed. Bryan then added that it might be a requirement that locals apply initially. Sarah Sanderlin wondered if there was some way of doing a quick survey of potential applicants for current funding needs and additional priorities. Bryan thought a survey could be done fairly easily.

Miscellaneous Information

Rusty Lasell heard that local jurisdictions would have to pay \$18 a month per radio to stay on ALMR. Jim Kohler addressed this stating that this was a cost share strategy and represented a unit of cost that probably would never be passed on to locals. Jim Tucker also added that he had additional information on this issue.

Bryan Fisher stated that AKICC would also need to tackle sustainability of equipment and this issue would not be an easy one. Additionally, Bryan said the committee would be invaluable in bridging informational sharing issues with ALMR. Kathy Day also brought up that other states had a website devoted to interoperability issues and that eventually AKICC would have such as website. Rusty Lasell added that there needed to be a means of equipment maintenance as well as outreach for training and exercises because sometimes locals don't know what to ask for.

Bryan addressed some training issues and stated that there is now a push nationwide and with FEMA for the newly created All-Hazards Type III Communications Unit Leader (COML) Certification Program. There will be more information coming out about this as time goes on and there is training money available for locals to attend such training. Alaska has made NIMS compliance a priority and Bryan still wants to stress ICS training in all jurisdictions.

Bryan spoke about the urban/rural divide with Homeland Security Grants and stated that interoperable communications is no longer a priority for 2009. The attitude seems to be that large funding amounts have already been awarded in previous years for interoperable equipment. Bryan's idea is to have the larger jurisdictions in Alaska apply for the Homeland Security Grant Program funds, which would make IECGP funding available for the unserved, under-served communities. Bryan also commented that federal money may soon be running out for buying equipment.

Committee Formalization/Organization

Bryan Fisher stated that there were more representatives from various agencies and jurisdictions while developing the SCIP but he wanted to keep the AKICC small enough to get things done but wide enough to provide good representation. Currently there was still no word on a nominee from the Alaska Association of Chiefs of Police (ACOP). Mike Paschall thought that Brad Johnson was a good representative for local law enforcement.

Bryan added that tribal representation is required by the PSIC grant, and spoke about Alaska's unique situation whereby rural representation also sometimes covers tribal concerns. He will be working on getting a tribal person and thought of contacting the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). Jeff Tucker suggested that the Tribal Chief's Association might be a good

organization to tap. Ted Smith thought someone from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) would be beneficial. Bryan mentioned someone from that group was brought in during the planning process.

Major Leveque thought it would also be good to get someone from a remote area of Alaska to serve on the committee. He thought a representative from a place like from Bethel, Dutch Harbor or Dillingham, would be able to better represent remote Alaska. Bryan thought it would be good to solicit from LEPC groups. Everyone agreed. Mike Paschall thought it would also be good to poll the rural and tribal groups to find out their needs, how they're doing things now and what equipment they're currently using.

Meeting Schedule

There was some discussion about when to meet. Everyone agreed on the 3rd Wednesday of every month and morning worked best for everyone. The time of 9:30 was agreed upon. It was then determined the next meeting would be **December 17, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.** Jim Kohler stated that for January the meeting time coincided with the SERC quarterly meeting in Juneau. He thought it would be a good idea to have the AKICC meeting in at the SERC for members who could travel. Bryan said there is funding available so this could be discussed at the December meeting. Bryan thought it was an excellent idea to meet during the SERC.

Bryan stressed that he wanted the AKICC meetings to be as informal as possible. Kathy Day and Bryan will also work on by-laws for the operation of the committee. For regular business and voting initiatives Bryan would like a 50% plus 1 vote. He feels that for anything involving money, everyone will need to vote and electronic voting should be fine. The goal for funding is to make sure the money is being spent appropriately.

Meeting minutes will be drafted, sent out for approval and then voted on at the December meeting. Frank Wesser asked about the interoperable website and Bryan felt that down the line there would be a robust site dealing with interoperability in Alaska. The meeting adjourned at 1150.