Operation Texas Talks

"Why Can't We Talk When Lives Are At Stake?"

"The inability of our public safety officials to readily communicate with one another threatens the public's safety and often results in unnecessary loss of lives and property"[1]

Objective: Provide consistent funding for ongoing development, maintenance, and capital replacement of interoperable communications systems for emergency first responders statewide, allowing them to talk within and across agencies and jurisdictions on demand, in real time, and when authorized.

More than 5,300 fire, police and emergency medical service agencies respond daily to emergency and life-threatening incidents throughout Texas. They often rely on aging and/or proprietary communication systems that limit their ability to share vital information with other agencies on-scene. In many cases, public safety responders can't even talk to their own people on the radio.

Public Safety Agencies need $60,000,000 per year for interoperable communications.

- "Operability" means sufficient wireless communications to meet an agency's everyday internal and emergency communication needs.
- "Interoperability" is the ability of first responders to communicate across disciplines, to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, as authorized.

Texas Public Safety Radio Communications Problems

- ☑ No radio communications for some agencies, i.e. no operability.
- ☑ No radio coverage in some areas, i.e. no operability.
- ☑ Aged and crumbling radio towers and antenna systems, i.e. limited operability.
- ☑ Aged and outmoded radio systems, i.e. limited operability.
- ☑ Dissimilar radio systems, i.e. limited interoperability.
- ☑ Changing regulatory environment may cause some agencies to lose communications capabilities.

Strategy: Create partnerships among public safety agencies throughout Texas to build and maintain a cost-effective interoperable communications network using shared resources. A statewide assessment and analysis of current needs resulted in a projected cost of $812,320,000 (see table below). *Operation Texas Talks* proposes to use federal, state, and local funding to provide interoperable communications to state and local public safety agencies and emergency responders. (For more information go to **http://txrc.region49.org**.)

Basic Requirements for Voice Interoperability Statewide	Unit Cost	Totals
Radio sites (average 3 sites per county) estimate for 254 counties	$300,000	$228,000,000
Towers (average 2 towers per county) estimate for 254 counties	$240,000	$121,920,000
Connectivity (average 2 hops per site) estimate for 254 counties	$50,000	$76,200,000
Mobile & Portable Radios (average 367 units per county, additional units to be provided by local agencies)	$4,000	$373,000,000
Mobile Communications Vehicles (average one MCV/COG) for 24 regions	$500,000	$12,000,000
Local Training, Exercises & Standard Operating Procedures (average one award per COG) for 24 regions	$50,000	$1,200,000

$813,020,000	**Needed Funding** to Achieve Basic Interoperable Radio Communications
$393,000,000	Anticipated Federal Funding
$420,000,000	Requested state funding @ $60,000,000 per year FY 2009 through FY 2015
$ 60,000,000	FY 2016 on-going state funding for operations and maintenance

Consequences of Doing Nothing:

- Citizens and property are at risk because emergency responders cannot communicate to coordinate the most efficient and effective delivery of emergency services.
- Emergency responders are at risk.
- Loss of some federal funding due to inability to meet the cash match requirements.

[1] "When They Can't Talk Lives Are Lost", National Institute of Justice, National Law Enforcement & corrections Technology Center, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij.

OPERATION TEXAS TALKS TALKING POINTS

When disaster strikes, effective response requires rapid coordination among all emergency first responders. Without operable and interoperable communications, coordination and effective emergency response simply are not possible.

Operable communications are vital for first responders to meet their everyday communication requirements while performing the most basic elements of their jobs.
Interoperable communications allow public safety and service agencies (police, fire, EMS, not-for-profit non-governmental entities, public works, transportation, hospitals, etc.) to communicate across agencies and jurisdictions on demand, in real time, and when authorized. It means, in any multi-agency, multi-discipline emergency response, everyone is able to talk to each other over their radios.

Citizens look to their elected and appointed officials to ensure that public safety agencies can respond effectively in a crisis. To provide effective operable and interoperable communications for emergency first responders across Texas, ***$60,000,000 a year is needed from State funding to build and maintain a statewide "system of systems", which is a network of local and regional communication systems connected together to provide seamless interoperability.***

Why $60 million a year?

- Many current radio systems and towers are 25-30 years old and can no longer be maintained. They must be replaced.

- Lack of basic operability means, in some parts of Texas, first responders use runners to carry messages from one unit to another when responding to emergencies.

- Traffic accidents, missing children, fires, high speed chases, rescues, and chemical spills occur with frightening regularity and do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. When they occur in your community, will your agencies be able to talk to one another?

- The ability, or the inability, to communicate in a timely manner can mean the difference between life and death.

- Citizens expect a call to 9-1-1 for help to bring emergency responders who can effectively work together to secure the situation. Unfortunately, fire, police, and EMS often cannot talk to each other over the radio because their systems are not interoperable. The ability to respond quickly and effectively to a 9-1-1 call, when multiple agencies respond, depends on the ability of all first responders to communicate with each other.

- First responders often juggle multiple radios to talk across disciplines, because the police department's system is different from the sheriff's system, which is different from the fire department's system. This slows response times and increases operational and maintenance costs.

- Economics support shared systems. Systems that share infrastructure (towers, dispatch centers, etc.) and cover large areas are an effective use of taxpayer dollars.

- There is limited funding to replace or update communications equipment.

- The amount of money needed to build and maintain a statewide "system of systems" requires a coordinated effort and assistance from the State and Federal Government.

- Public safety agencies save lives and protect property. To be effective, they require radios that allow them to communicate with each other. This issue is too important for any of us to ignore and too big for any of us to solve on our own. We need to work together to make sure our public safety responders are equipped to do their jobs. We all will reap the benefits.