

CENTRAL MINNESOTA USER COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 11, 2008, 6:30 p.m.
Stearns County Administrative Center, St. Cloud, MN

MEMBERS PRESENT:

1. City of St. Cloud – Gary Fletcher, Tom Justin, Chuck Koetter
2. Douglas County - Dave Pedersen, Dave Robley, Rick Wagner
3. Grant County - Jon Combs, Matt Jensen
4. Kandiyohi County - Stacey (Ace) Bonnema
5. Meeker County – Rich Christianson, Joel Engler, Greg Gilbertson
6. Otter Tail County - Mark Hovland, Mathew McGuire, Jim Rieber
7. Pope County – David Thompson
8. Stearns County - Paul McIntyre, Jay Sikkink
9. Stevens County – Judy Diehl, Jason Dingman
10. Todd County - Bob Cuchna, Kelly Saarela
11. Wadena County – Don Snorek, Donald Weniger
12. Wilkin County – Russ Fenlason

MEMBERS ABSENT:

13. Benton County
14. Big Stone County
15. Mille Lacs County
16. Morrison County
17. Sherburne County
18. Swift County
19. Traverse County
20. Wright County

Meeting called to order at 6:38 p.m.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Chair Paul McIntyre called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone, and conducted introductions.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Gary Fletcher moved, Jay Sikkink second to approve minutes of February 11, 2008, upon a vote, motion carried.

COMMUNICATIONS:

None

REPORTS:

SRB/ARMER Update; MnDPS/MnDOT:

OTC:

Jay Sikkink stated he was at the OTC meeting today; the State spent a lot of time the past few months revising the State plan, number of sites and zone controllers state-wide, hoping to have plan approved at the State Radio Board in April. It currently includes 235 sites and 6 zone controllers up from 185 sites in the original plan which included 85% coverage statewide and now is changed to 95% county-wide. He stated all of the tower sites are very preliminary as land is not purchased for all towers.

REPORTS: (CONTINUED)

SRB/ARMER Update; MnDPS/MnDOT: (Continued)

OTC: (Continued)

Two most significant items of discussion is where the towers are located and a two-year implementation plan. Minnesota is in phase 3 buildout, phase 2 is to improve current MnDOT sites. OTC had lengthy discussion that if towers were not built out county wide, entities would not come onto the system.

They are working hard on the aviation concerns with Life Links, helicopters, State Patrol, etc. so when aircraft crosses regions or land how do they communication effectively.

Numbering standards – Jay stated at the last OTC meeting he discussed concerns on standard numbering; therefore there is a Standard Committee developed. In standard 3.2, Jay indicated there are two different standards one with 3.2h and one with 3.2i, he stated numbering should be unique, consistent within the region, and be different than the State Standards. He indicated Central Minnesota will have their own 3.2c standard on P-TACS and A-TACS, although a different region could be different. Had discussions if numbering should be unique to State, Regions, etc. no decision made yet. Originally will go back and renumber standards for consistently and then move forward with new numbering system to be determined.

Jay stated there is a talk group for the “technical staff” to go encrypted for security purposes including the location of tower sites. There could be an issue when announcing a system will be coming down for service and if the information gets into the wrong hands. There was considerable discussion as to what information is public and what is not.

SRB/Interop: (Jay Sikkink)

There is a subcommittee of the SRB, Micah Myers is on the Funding Committee and Jay Sikkink is on the Interop Committee. Money available for interop and migration and will need to determine how to spend the money. Talked about naming standards, discussed utilizing “plain English” as a standard versus “codes.” Jay stated MnDOT actually built the 800 system but the SRB is governing the system.

RAC:

Jay stated the next RAC meeting is Friday, Tim Lee from MnDOT and Tim Heroff from Rochester will be present to discuss interoperability for the region and what makes sense. \$3.4 million in funding is available to help with interoperability and it is up to the RAC on how to spend the money.

Question was asked the difference between A-TACS, P-TACS, etc. Lt. Tom Justin stated I-TACS are channels that are Nation wide, State tacticals are S-TACS, L-TACS are Law Enforcement only, E-TACS are for EMS personnel, F-TACS are dedicated for Fire State-wide. In Central MN region there are A-TACS (currently 1-7 are dedicated for “all activity” i.e. any entity such as Law Enforcement, Fire, Emergency), P-TACS (currently 1-4 and are for law enforcement only), there are also E-TACS. Jay stated the METPH is a public health talk group for a pandemic.

Lt. Tom Justin explained the reason for local and state-wide tacticals, when someone is utilizing a tactical it ties up their channel on the tower and could be an issue. Jay stated there is discussion as to how we control the usage of the tacticals and resources available. Chuck Koetter added not only would the individual tie up the other tower, it would tie up all of the resources (towers) between the two resources.

Ace Bonnema asked if there was discussion of improving the 95% coverage, Jay stated he was not aware of it as it was left up to the region to determine if they want coverage above that.

REPORTS: (CONTINUED)

RAC Committee for Talk Group Management:

Chair McIntyre stated at the last meeting there was a subcommittee talk group set up to come up with naming talk groups, they met last week and worked on regional naming conventions, i.e. if Central MN could have CM in front of it, Stearns County perhaps could be SC although City of St. Cloud could also be SC, this area is doing some rebanding so radios will need to be retouched anyway. As other entities come onto the system within the region, there will probably be a Regional Coordinator to keep the standards and everything consistent. Jay stated with the seven regions, Central MN borders all regions with the exception of one; therefore the naming will be critical.

Gary Fletcher stated it was clear that there are naming issues and we need to be creative i.e. SC could mean City of St. Cloud, Sauk Centre, etc. Chair McIntyre stated if anyone was not at the last meeting and would like to be a part of the subcommittee, contact Jay Sikkink. Chuck Koetter stated it was discussed to provide a study for in building coverage and if communication is an issue, an amplifier may need to be added. Chair McIntyre stated he is aware the St. Cloud Hospital added it, some county buildings and schools may need to add one to provide in-house coverage. Jay stated if anyone is aware of them, to please let him know as it is important for us to know.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS:

Radio Demo: (Lt. Tom Justin)

Lt. Tom Justin passed around radios so members present can feel and see what an 800 MHz radio is like; he only had Motorola available since that is what his department utilizes. Motorola makes three different series of radios, a model 1500, 2500 and 5000; he explained the difference between the radios, i.e. 1500 will operate the same for transmission as the 2500 and 5000. Some radios have screens and some do not, the ones with screens allow you to see what talk group you are on, the ones without a screen will require you to look at the radio knobs. Lt. Justin explained with the various radios going around some are from Police, Fire, Public Works, etc. and if they were all turned to ATAC 1, they could all talk to each other at the same time. He stated the ones with the screen has advantages, although do cost more. He stated between the 2500 and 5000, there are several models and includes a keypad and can do additional functions. A rough price range is approximately \$1500 - \$1800 for a 1500, \$2,500 for a model 2500, \$4,500 for a model 5000; Jay stated encryption is now available in the 2500 and originally was only available in the 5000. Lt. Justin demonstrated a commander mic and its functions and the ear piece which can be plugged into the commander mic. The most recent item he is demonstrating is a blue tooth, Dan McCoy explained the usage of the blue tooth.

Lt. Justin stated the radios without a screen, there are 48 different talk groups able to be programmed into them, the 5000 can have 512 talk groups; the old VHF system would need to have 512 different clicks to have the same. He demonstrated a radio test and the delay in the radio and indicated that even if it is delayed, there still is not any information missed or cutoff. He stated the 800 does not have cutting in and out when going out of range, it is clear until it totally drops off. Lt. Justin demonstrated the alias (name within radios) so individuals with a screen can see who is talking.

Gary Fletcher stated the Fire Department assigns two radios per truck - one with a large headset and a secondary radio which are assigned to a position on the truck and they know what firefighter is assigned to that position. Chuck Koetter stated in Public Works they have the radios assigned to a truck number, the Park Department utilizes a numbering system of radios and know in the morning who has which radio for the day.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS: (CONTINUED)

Radio Demo: (Lt. Tom Justin) (Continued)

Gary stated individuals are not required to have the same radios throughout the whole department, i.e. Police have radios ranging from 1500 – 5000 as the 5000 has encryption and the 2500's do not. Lt. Justin added whether individuals are looking at Motorola or another vendor, look at the radios as you will want to know what every little button on the radio is capable of doing, although you need to decide if you need all of the buttons. He suggested prior to deciding to make a radio purchase to make a wish list of what you would like the radio to do, i.e. allowing all lights to be turned off if going into a search situation, screens provide ability to see the life of a battery, is encryption required, etc.. Lt. Justin stated so far they have not had a battery go dead within a 10 hour shift, batteries are a rapid charge, Dan McCoy added they are a SMART charge. Bob Cuchna asked what is the battery life; Lt. Justin stated out of 220 batteries, within the first year they had 12 batteries go bad and they were replaced under warranty, recently they replaced one battery in the model 5000 and have had them for three years. He stated he has had batteries go for three days without having them go dead.

Jay stated for the entities with the old VHF system, this system is different and with the 48 talk groups it won't take long to utilize all of the different talk groups. Lt. Justin stated with what the State is requiring in radios are 16 for State, 5 for National, and if you put 7 regional into the radios, you already have 28 talk groups. He explained the purpose of the MTUG meetings (where he attended meetings and provided input and requests as to how he as a user would like to see the radio perform and the add-ons available).

He encouraged everyone to take a close look at radios, the various vendors, the features, etc. of all radios available. Gary Fletcher stated St. Cloud and Stearns County had EF Johnson, Kenwood, and Motorola utilizing multiple suburbans with mobile units going into swamps, different areas in and outside of the city, and in buildings to see how well they worked. Motorola by far worked the best for our testing in all scenarios and they had more than 95% coverage. Lt. Justin also asked the vendors to send their own technicians if they wanted to in case the radios didn't work and to do the "drop the radio" test to see how durable they are (i.e. if a radio was dropped, would the battery stay in).

Lt. Justin stated incident command zone (NIMS) have S-TACS, P-TACS, L-TACS, and your main on position 1 and 16, the state will be utilizing one zone on each radio. Dave Nohner stated Stearns County is rebanding currently and will be setting up radios for all agencies similar so they can all talk on the same channel whether they are from fire, police, public safety, etc.

Lt. Justin recommended this group have one topic per meeting for training and discussion. A future topic is to discuss programming issues as an educational topic. Discussion followed regarding an IT person for programming of radios, Jay stated the County has their own IT staff do this. He stated currently Stearns County provides this for all of their agencies within the county with the exception of the City of St. Cloud. Jay stated the RAC started discussing programming recently and stated Stearns is more than willing to help although they can't provide programming it for all counties. Programming is something that needs to be addressed at the RAC and RRB. Currently there is not a vendor authorized by the state for programming. Lt. Justin suggested demonstrating fleet mapping at a future meeting.

Ace asked about the various dispatch consoles and options, Dan McCoy stated there really is only two at this time.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS: (CONTINUED)

I-35W Incident Command Video:

Jay stated after the 35W bridge collapse a video was put together, he stated this was the first time in history of the US that a major catastrophe took place in which the radios worked. He heard a lot of testimony on the collapse and part of the issue is individuals utilizing the radios listened to the incident, yet it is not their incident and they utilized resources. A copy of this video will be provided to each entity of the RAC.

800 MHz Radio Acronyms List:

Chair McIntyre explained the list of acronyms and stated it will continually be updated.

Other Items of Interest:

We will be going over standards as appropriate, Stearns County and St. Cloud will provide a programming 101 demonstration and a fleet map demonstration at next meeting.

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

April 8, 2008, 1:00 p.m.:

The next meeting will be April 8, 2008 at 1:00 p.m., City of St. Cloud Council Chambers.

May 13, 6:30 p.m.:

The May meeting will be May 13, 2008 at 6:30 p.m. at the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris, MN in Stevens County.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chuck Koetter moved, second Gary Fletcher to adjourn meeting at 8:45 p.m., motion carried.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Debbie Backes, Recording Secretary.