

CENTRAL MINNESOTA USER COMMITTEE
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, 1:00 p.m.
City of St. Cloud Council Chambers, St. Cloud, MN

MEMBERS PRESENT:

1. Benton County – Marie Herbst
2. Douglas County – Tom Egan, Dave Pedersen, Dave Robley, Rick Wagner
3. Grant County – Chad Biss, Jon Combs, Greg Jacobson, Matt Jensen
4. Meeker County – Rich Christianson, Joel Engler
5. Morrison County – Pat Boone, Jeff Jelinski, Mike Nieman
6. Otter Tail County – Doug Whiting
7. Pope County – David Thompson
8. City of St. Cloud – Gary Fletcher, Tom Justin, Chuck Koetter, Jamie Nixon
9. Stearns County - Paul McIntyre
10. Stevens County – Judy Diehl
11. Todd County - Bob Cuchna, James Kreemer, Steve Peterson, Kelly Saarela
12. Wadena County – Don Snorek
13. Wright County – Steve Berg

MEMBERS ABSENT:

14. Big Stone County
15. Kandiyohi County
16. Mille Lacs County
17. Sherburne County
18. Swift County
19. Traverse County
20. Wilkin County

CALL TO ORDER:

Meeting called to order by Chair Paul McIntyre at 1:00 p.m.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Chair McIntyre welcomed everyone and conducted introductions.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

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

COMMUNICATIONS:

None

REPORTS:

SRB/ARMER Update; MnDPS/MnDOT:

Micah Myers reported the investment justification for the PSIC grant was due April 9th and was submitted prior to the SRB approving.

REPORTS: (CONTINUED)

Interoperable Plan:

Micah Myers reported the State is looking at the Interoperable Plan defining who needs to communicate with who, etc. he would like everyone in this group to list who they have contact with at this time and complete the form that was distributed. When the list is finished it can be submitted to Debbie Backes, Recording Secretary. The lists will be reviewed and results brought back next month. Micah would like them returned within two weeks.

Discussion was raised if an entity has funds available to purchase VHF radios should they do that. Micah Myers stated it is a case by case and entities need to see what works best for them and who they communicate with.

OTC:

Nothing to report at this time.

RAC:

RAC Committee for Interoperable Communications:

RAC Chair Myers reported the RAC recommended the User Committee to create a “who do you talk to survey” and tasked them with completing the survey to define who, how and why they need to communicate with other agencies. The inventory of current communications systems will help facilitate interoperable communications throughout the region.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS:

Radio Demo: (Lt. Tom Justin)

Tom Justin, City of St. Cloud Police Department and Bob Dickhaus, Stearns County Sheriff’s Office provided a slide and handout presentation and demonstration on Radio Programming. Lt. Justin stated individuals need to determine who they need to talk to and refers to this in the presentation as ARMER and not just 800 as it could also include 700. If there is someone you can not communicate with, why i.e. do you not have access to utilize their talk group, does the other agency have radios, etc.

Tom and Bob stated procedural planning is necessary to determine how you would respond to an emergency situation and when you arrive at a site how to communicate with other agencies. It could be political issues such as community to community, from county to county, state to state, etc. Entities need to determine who they need to talk to and who they wish they could talk to; need to determine how often, and the facets of the communication’s plan (county to county, county to FBI, state to state, etc. how do they desire to talk to them). Considering whom do you wish to talk to, i.e. some counties in this region may need to talk to other states or Canada. Entities do not need to redesign the wheel, look at what other agencies are doing, what worked for them, what didn’t, etc. and don’t hesitate to ask for help from other agencies. Tom stated Bob is one of the best resources in this region on interoperability issues, procedures, and understanding talkgroup resource issues, etc. so don’t hesitate to contact him.

Private contractors such as Motorola and Granite Electronics have been excellent resources as is MnDOT. Tom stated with 800, the City changed the way they handle their day to day traffic which previously was on one talk group and now is on multiple talk groups. They stated there will be mistakes and things will need to be changed as entities go through planning and implementing the process. So be patient.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS: (CONTINUED)

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

Bob stated planning and laying out talk groups need to be mission driven, starting with who they talk to today; he stated when he was helping other agencies they currently used the same channel but had different names for them. Agencies then need to consider building talk groups starting with talk groups within your own agency, then build out on how you need to talk to other counties, state, etc. and utilizing shared talk groups. Then consider how to communicate regionally such as with other agencies on site such as fire to law enforcement to EMS, etc. He cautioned to not make the need to be too large and utilize a “bullseye” plan. Start in the center with your agency then go locally, regionally, statewide and finally nationally.

Agency level talk groups are for your exclusive use unless you give other agencies permission to use them. Local levels are the ones within the local level talk group they agree to share within their local level of government.

Regional are for interoperability purposes and are encouraged for use by appropriate users like in an ICS/NIMS incident command situation.

Statewide basis would be talk groups that everyone can communicate on such as E-TACS, F-TACS, L-TACS, and S-TACS. Each discipline has four different talk groups within them, and the S-TACS are for all users.

Finally is nationally, such as St. Cloud needing to communicate with the Secret Service, DEA, ATF, etc., these would be by utilizing resources like the I-CALLS and I-TACS, or other Federal talk groups.

Bob provided Stearns County’s layout, Zone A (which would be your agency zone and would be where your radio is 99.9% of the time.) It has 16 talk groups, and he explained the various talk groups in their zone and the reasoning for each. Then when there is a lost person, a large fire, or incident in town that requires interoperability with other jurisdictions, disciplines, or resources and their local channel will not work, they can reassign the entities to Zone B (regional resources) and/or state resources like L-TACS. This also allows for freeing up their local talk groups.

Bob stated there are four talk groups assigned by the state such as A-TACS (stands for all users). Regionally A-TACS could be for an incident and P-TACS are for public safety. Roam talk groups are when you are traveling around the state. MNSEF is state-wide (VHF) and can be patched to other talk groups such as a local one which allows an 800 MHz to communicate with a VHF system. Status board is how channels are kept track of and Bob stated there is a software that keeps track of them and what is being utilized. Andy Faith asked how the status board works, Bob Dickhaus stated with it he could see what other regions were doing if he wanted to.

S-TACS are state-wide and again there are four talk groups. SOA’s which are scene of action channels were discussed.

Tom stated one thing everyone needs to consider is the equipment they purchase. Different radios allow for different features. If you purchase (Motorola) a 1500 series 1 radio it may allow up to 16 talk groups, 1500 series 2 allows 48 talk groups, and 2500 allows 512 talk groups. He stated with the number of talk groups that are required, you already have approximately 33 talk groups and you did not even consider your local talk groups. He stated in St. Cloud, Police have a zone set up identical to the Fire Department’s radio which will allow for operability.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS: (CONTINUED)

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

Tom stated there are now national talk groups or resources coming this way and there will be approximately 38 total resources or talk groups required or recommended to be in the radio. He warned about having too many talk groups for individual use such as chief to chief, cop to cop, etc. as the talk groups will be filled up fast.

Tom stated if someone is utilizing a talk group, you will be able to determine who is utilizing the system as it can be pinned down to an individual user. He explained the authorization and procedure necessary to utilize other agency's talk group and there is a protocol on the state radio board's website and it also indicates an individual must have training to utilize a radio. Monitor only indicates an agency can add the talk group to their radio but is on a monitor only process. He explained a dispatch console can only contain up to (believed) 99 different talk groups, or problems arise; and if it is not in the console, it isn't displayed and they can't hear it. Therefore if you have too many talk groups that are not necessary, you will run out of space.

Gary Fletcher stated the Fire Department does not have all of the same radios in their department and it could save departments money. Tom cautioned that some radios have limitations as some can not have encryption in it, just the same not all radios may need 500 talk groups. Chuck Koetter stated a limited talk group radio could be patched to a different talk group if needed. Tom stated if a talk group is not listed on the dispatch screen, it would not be patchable, and also that several talk groups could be patched together. He stated there are timing issues when patching VHF with 800.

800 MHz Radio Acronyms List:

Micah Myers stated the handout of the acronyms is a combination of the State's and Central MN's list, if you want extra acronyms on the list, forward them to Debbie and the list will also be posted on the website.

Other Items of Interest:

Question asked how dispatch monitors all of the talk groups, it was stated they have two main channels and occasionally they will be utilizing four-five talk groups, if more than that, it would usually be a disaster. If St. Cloud Fire and Police go to a disaster, dispatch would move them over to a different channel, an example recently was at Rocori School they had three fire agencies on site, and it was explained how dispatch patches to allow communication.

Chair McIntyre asked the group for items of interest for the next meeting. He stated he has received emails asking about teleconferencing and if it will be provided. Micah Myers stated they have demonstrated both the teleconferencing and video conferencing and question came up if a motion and voting can take place according to bylaws and he is looking into that further. He realizes this is a large region, Andy Faith asked if the video conferencing can be two way. Micah stated they recently had teleconferencing and wherever these meetings are taking place, they need to have the resources available for it.

Tom Justin stated there are Homeland Security, PSIC, and ARMER funding available and are three separate sources. Most of them are to be utilized towards the planning process. Micah stated the state allocated \$4.5 million for subscriber units, \$1.5 million for corselets for PSAPS, and there is close to \$6 million available. He stated the funding will be provided to the RRB for distribution and it will be prioritized by the RAC, by the next User meeting Tom hopes to have a contract in place between the City and the State to have him officially the Central MN Interoperable Coordinator.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS: (CONTINUED)

Other Items of Interest: (Continued)

Chair McIntyre stated some of the fire agencies have been successful in obtaining FEMA grants, Micah stated as agencies get grants, he will make the information available on the cmnradio's website.

Chair McIntyre asked for anyone who is willing to work with Monticello ambulance to let him know as they have an interest to be involved.

Bob stated there is a talk group template from the SRB website as a starting point for entities to use.

Tom Justin asked for items for the next meeting, none suggested at this time, any ideas are to be emailed to Debbie.

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

May 13, 6:30 p.m.:

The next 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:

Judy Diehl moved, second Gary Fletcher to adjourn meeting at 2:30 p.m., motion carried.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Debbie Backes, Recording Secretary.