

October 2014

Allcomm Communicator

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Model# H96RCF9AA2BA
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Just fill in your name, email, and you heard about the giveaway from our newsletter.

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Winner will be announced via facebook Oct. 31st



INTENT -TO- CANCEL NOTICE

Motorla Solutions has informed all customers that the following radios will be cancelled shortly if not already.

CP200 • CP200 XLS • PR400

Please call your sales rep to talk about replacement models.

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Alabama's P25 System of Systems

-originally published in *Mission Critical* magazine by Ernie Blair and Chuck Murph

With minimal federal grant money, several Alabama counties began collaborating and developed a system-of-systems approach to a statewide Project 25 (P25) network.

The April 27, 2011, tornado outbreak across the Southeast was one of the deadliest in recorded history. The devastation was widespread, totaling \$4.2 billion with more than 2,400 injured and 316 fatalities, of which 234 deaths were in Alabama. Nearly simultaneous tornados struck densely populated areas hundreds of miles apart. Electrical power, telephone and Internet outages were commonplace. Responders in Alabama did a phenomenal job providing emergency services to thousands of victims throughout the state, but the lack of interoperable communications hampered efforts in some locations.

In early 2011, radio interoperability among first responders across Alabama was just a mirage. Jurisdictions had become dependent on a commercial push-to-talk (PTT) service that didn't interoperate with local public safety radio systems. They found that even though the commercial PTT service was robust, dependable and provided a great everyday administrative communications platform, it would not serve the complete need of first responders as a whole.

Adding to the mirage was the widespread deployment of radio gateways years earlier, but through attrition and lack of training to new operators, most jurisdictions chose not to use the capabilities. A radio gateway can be an effective tool to foster interoperability if the operator is adequately trained, the gateway is managed and used onscene at an incident, and the radios used by the gateway are properly configured and programmed. Ultimately, state and local officials saw the need for a unified Project 25 (P25) statewide communications system. The question was, how do they get there?

Alabama's Response

In response to the devastating tornadoes of April 2011, Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley appointed 19 community, corporate and non-profit leaders from the state to the Tornado Recovery Action Council of Alabama. The group conducted a comprehensive study of the storms and hosted seven community forums in devastated areas of the state. Research and citizen input was used to develop a report and 20 action-oriented recommendations to reduce damage and loss of life in future disasters.

One of those recommendations was the need for counties to maintain an up-to-date tactical interoperable communication plan (TICP) to foster local interoperability. Next, the governor created through executive order the Alabama First Responder Wireless Commission (AFRWC) to begin addressing interoperability from a strategic level statewide. The executive order was later codified by the Alabama legislature, creating a statewide governance structure to transcend administrations. The commission's 28 members represent first responder agencies, support agencies and elected officials from state, county, local and tribal governments. Spencer Collier, secretary of the newly created Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, was elected as the commission's first chairperson.

In its first year, the AFRWC formed two subcommittees to foster cooperation among interoperable radio system owners and potential users. The first committee represents state agencies while the second represents local agencies. The committees schedule their meetings so they can first meet separately to address their respective concerns, and then later the same day, meet as a combined group to address common issues. The committees then make recommendations for consideration to the AFRWC. The commission encourages local governments contemplating new systems to cooperate with those operating existing systems to enjoy mutually beneficial cost savings.

Alabama's Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC) Chuck Murph began coordinated discussions among the various state and local first responder agencies needing statewide interoperable radio communications. In late 2011, Baldwin County on Alabama's Gulf Coast and Madison County, hundreds of miles north bordering the Tennessee line, contracted individually to construct countywide P25 interoperable radio systems in their respective counties. Envisioning the possibilities of a statewide radio system, Collier, then director of the Alabama Department of Homeland Security (DHS), authorized funding for a link between the two countywide systems on opposite ends of the state. Using a recently upgraded statewide microwave network operated by Alabama Public Television, Alabama DHS established a reliable link between the countywide systems. The microwave link initially established between Baldwin and Madison, once viewed as a mere "scientific curiosity" by many, is now widely recognized as a useful building block for an effective statewide communications network.

County Systems Grow

The two countywide systems became fully operational in late 2012, just in time to meet the 2013 FCC narrowbanding mandate. In 2013, Alabama DHS funded the construction of two new P25 sites in central Alabama. One is in Montgomery, the state capital, and the second is in Clanton, the home of the Alabama Emergency Management Agency. Morgan County has nearly completed a four-site system adjacent to Madison County.

In a P25 system, the master site or "switch" is the single most expensive component for a system owner. Morgan County chose to lease the use of Madison's P25 switch. Using the same cost-savings approach, the city of Opelika, located in east-central Alabama, is constructing a singlesite system that will operate through the Madison switch.

In 2014, the city of Birmingham, serving Jefferson County, and Calhoun/Talladega counties completed factory acceptance on P25 upgrades replacing their existing 800 MHz trunked systems. The University of Alabama, serving Tuscaloosa County, also completed factory acceptance of a new P25 system. All three multisite countywide systems are to be constructed by the end of 2014, each with a standalone master site. These switches, along with those of Madison and Baldwin counties, are geographically distributed around the state. By partnering with an existing switch owner, a potential future system owner can experience significant cost savings in capital outlay and maintenance expenses.