

Outline for Law Enforcement Interoperability Workshop

Join us during Rally Week for workshop and brainstorming session to explore ways to improve the use of law enforcement interoperability in the NCR. Lunch will available in the Government Center Cafeteria.

Date and Time: Tuesday, June 17, 2014, 1000-1500

Location: Fairfax County AEOC, First Floor, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia

The Problem:

Despite being equipped with the ability to easily communicate with their counterparts in neighboring jurisdictions, many law enforcement officers still insist on passing time sensitive and critical incident-related message traffic to their neighbors indirectly by contacting their own dispatchers and asking them to relay the traffic using landline or PMARS communication links. This results in additional delays that could potentially affect the successful outcome of the incident.

For example, officers respond to a robbery incident near the jurisdictional boundary with a neighboring jurisdiction. The scene is secure, and lookout information is quickly obtained and broadcast to responding units from that jurisdiction. There is a possibility that suspects have traveled into the neighboring jurisdiction. In most cases the next step is for units on scene to request that lookout information be provided to the neighboring jurisdiction. This initiates a process where the dispatcher establishes a telephone or PMARS link to the neighboring jurisdiction and passes the traffic. Depending on the two jurisdictions involved, this process may link the actual controlling dispatchers directly and minimize the delay, or, involve multiple layers consisting of primary dispatchers, PMARS operators, service desk operators and other "middlemen", increasing the amount of time required to transmit critical lookout information to front line patrol resources in the neighboring jurisdiction. In a region where a fleeing suspect can traverse multiple jurisdictional boundaries in a matter of minutes, seconds and minutes matter.

Other examples where interoperability is available but not always used include passing of lookout information for lost children or at-risk adults near jurisdictional boundaries and coordination of other agency resources for those types of incidents, and reporting of accidents or other traffic related matters discovered as a unit passes through another jurisdiction.

The interoperability present in the region's law enforcement radios is a powerful capability that is being underused at present. This workshop will provide an opportunity to brainstorm, identify barriers and challenges to interoperability, and propose practical, targeted solutions that can be implemented to achieve improved law enforcement interoperability. Improving and promoting the use of the interoperability that we have available right now will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement in the region. By encouraging front line law enforcement to use their interoperability capabilities whenever they can now, they will be better prepared to assist when called to respond to active shooter events and other incidents that may quickly evolve into large, multi-agency responses.

Challenges to consider:

- **Cultural**
Is there reluctance among front line law enforcement to communicate with neighboring jurisdictions directly on their talkgroups? If so, what can be done to address this?
- **Policies**
Are there policies in place that prevent officers from switching away from their home dispatchers? If so, can this be resolved or improved?
- **Training**
Do officers receive adequate academy training on our interoperability capabilities? Do they receive additional exposure to interoperability during field training? Are there opportunities to improve interoperability training?
- **Too Busy To Switch**
Is it too much to expect officers at the scene of an incident to provide lookout or other critical information to fellow officers operating on both home and neighboring jurisdiction talkgroups? Is the cost of the delay associated with indirect transmission of traffic worth it?
- **Pursuits**
Pursuits present unique problems with interoperability. While there may not be a more perfect opportunity to use interoperability to coordinate activities with another jurisdiction, many officers state that it is not possible to safely change radio channels while engaged in a pursuit. Are there ways that this can be improved?
- **Codeplug Design/Ease of Use**
Early codeplug design efforts stressed the importance of including talkgroups for neighboring jurisdictions in a user's primary dispatch zone, to ensure that contacting neighboring jurisdictions required little more than "spinning the dial". To what extent has this been maintained?
- **Different Technology**
Nearly all city/county law enforcement agencies in the NCR now operate compatible system/subscriber radio equipment. Federal agencies, WMATA, Virginia State Police and Federal law enforcement agencies use different technologies or radio frequency bands. Is there anything that can be done to improve interoperability with these agencies?

Who Should Attend

Regional law enforcement communications officers, dispatchers, front line law enforcement officers, SWAT team members, K9 officers, and field supervisors - anyone interested in promoting and improving law enforcement interoperability in the National Capital Region.