

Public Safety/EMS Radio Narrow Re-Banding

Anyone meeting with EMS agencies, public safety radio users, EMS organizations, hospitals, county EMS council meetings, etc.... need to address this radio topic. In the next EMMCO West newsletter, there will be an article to discuss this radio narrow banding topic with our public safety/ EMS constituents.

Effective January 2013, the **FCC** (federal communications commission) has mandated that all public safety radios be migrated from the current broad banded radio system to a narrow banded radio system. EMMCO West regional public safety answering points (PSAP) are preparing to implement the transition within their counties, sometime in 2012. In future EMMCO West & NWPARG regional communication committee meetings, specific transition plans will be discussed.

In preparation of this federally mandated narrow band radio transition, public safety radio users (police, fire, EMS, hospitals, PSAP centers) that use VHF high band or UHF mobile radios, portables, and pagers will need to assure that their radio equipment is compatible with the new narrow banding radio system. Public safety radio users need to have their public safety radio vendor assess their radios and assure they are capable of receiving both broad and narrow banding radio signals. For example, only Minitor 5 or higher pagers are capable of receiving narrow band radio signals. Minitor 2, 3, 4 are not narrow band capable. Only a public safety radio vendor will be able to determine if a radio or pager is narrow band capable.

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that public safety radio users have their radio channels (mobile/portables) programmed to receive both broad and narrow banded signals. Commonly, public safety radios are assigned a specific "zone" of operational channels. **Suggestion:** (Example Only) Have radio Zone A programmed for broad band and radio Zone B for narrow band. When a county PSAP center switches over to narrow band, the public safety radios will already have the narrow band channels in place for the switch over. And the public safety radio will still have operational broad band channels for when the EMS agency would travel outside their normal PSAP dispatch area.

EMS agencies, more than another public safety radio user, travel within multiple counties and EMS areas transporting patients. EMMCO West will keep the region's EMS agencies apprised of when regional PSAP centers are switching over. This suggested dual channels will enable EMS agencies to remain in communication with a PSAP center.

New Radios: For the past several years, at least 5 or more years, public safety radios have been purchased with broad and narrow band capabilities. EFFECTIVE JANUARY 2011, new radios will be manufactured narrow band only. Dual band radios will no longer be manufactured after January 2011. It is unknown how much, if any, surplus of dual banded radios will exist after January 2011. Thus, there is a potential gap of radios between 2011 and the transition switch over to narrow band.

Narrow Band Compatibility: For example, a public safety mobile broad band radio may still be able to partially receive dispatch information from a PSAP center that uses a narrow band base station. However the radio transmissions may muffled, the overall signal may be weak, the volume will be low, and transmissions may be partially interrupted. Narrow band radios receive ½ the signal strength that broad band radios receive. Minitor 2,3,& 4 pagers will not receive the narrow band signal and will not likely activate.

FCC License Update: Organizations that hold their own FCC radio license will need to contact their radio vendor regarding updating their FCC license to the narrow radio bandwidth.

EMMCO West Communication & Transportation Committee Action: Through the EMSOF group purchasing program, administrated by EMMCO West, for recognized EMS agencies are eligible to receive mobile radios, portable radios, and pagers, based on the number of licensed/recognized PA DOH vehicles. The funding is either 50:50 or 60:40, based on urban or rural designation. Eligibility is also based on the history of previous purchases and the life time expectancy of the radio equipment (i.e. portable radio life expectancy is 5 years, etc....). These EW committees will be reviewing the narrow banding issues, as they pertain to the group purchasing of radios. For the upcoming FY 10-11 EMSOF program, radio equipment purchases will be reviewed with the expectation to make any new radio purchases prior to the January 2011 manufacturing deadline.

The EMMCO West and NWPAERG communication committees met today to discuss this narrow radio re-banding issue. The next joint radio committee meeting is planned for March 19, 2011. County PSAP centers are asked to send a representative to discuss their county's narrow band radio transition plans. It is recommended that there be a coordinated effort between regional PSAP centers in the transition to narrow radio banding. Of the PSAP centers present at today's meeting, the summer and fall of 2012 seem to be the target months for the transition of narrow radio re-banding.

Please share this information with our region's public safety radio/EMS constituents. Contact me if you have additional information/questions that you have about narrow radio re-banding.