ALMR INSIDER

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USARAK Site Divestiture - What's happening?

Various rumors have circulated over the past several months regarding United States Army - Alaska (USARAK) participation in the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) Communications System cooperative partnership. It has been rumored that USARAK was "bailing out" of ALMR or was "shutting down" sites. The fact is, over the next two years, USARAK must restructure its material involvement in owning and maintaining ALMR infrastructure. However, USARAK has reconfirmed its intention to remain in the ALMR cooperative partnership to meet the day-to-day communication needs of its Alaska installations, as well as maintain interoperability with other ALMR partner agencies, which is essential in meeting their Defense Support of Civil Authority (DSCA) mission.

During the initial planning and build out of ALMR, USARAK had a mission requirement for land mobile radio (LMR) coverage for convoys traveling along the Alaska highways between the seaports (Seward, Anchorage, Valdez and Whittier) and their Alaska installations in South Central and Interior Alaska.

To support these requirements, and as a vital component of the DOD portion of the cost-shared ALMR cooperative partnership, USARAK funded the purchase and installation of the ALMR radio frequency (RF) equipment housed in 41 State of Alaska (SOA) communications sites replacing older State wideband equipment. Additionally, to meet their day-to-day requirements, they also funded ALMR RF equipment at four sites on USARAK installations.

Over the years the mission for USARAK, and concurrently the methods for delivery of ordnance, has evolved. There is no longer a requirement for USARAK to maintain continuous LMR coverage along the roadways to support convoys. Without a legitimate operational mission requirement, USARAK cannot legally continue to fund maintenance costs for the RF equipment at the 41 road-way sites.

In a February 2010 letter, the USARAK Commanding General (Major General Troy at that time) advised the Commanding General Alaska Command (Lieutenant General Adkins) that he would no longer be able fund maintenance for ALMR sites outside of USARAK installations. According to General Troy, USARAK intended to divest itself of the ALMR RF equipment at the 41 SOA road sites over a two-year period by transferring it, at no cost, to the State. The initial divestiture date involved 13 sites along the Seward and Richardson Highways and was effective July 1, 2011. The second phase involves the remaining 28 sites along the Seward, Richardson, Glenn and Parks Highways, effective July 1, 2012.

In a March 2010 letter to previous SOA Commissioner of Administration Annette Kreitzer, General Adkins provided the State a one-year written notice on behalf of USARAK, and pursuant to the ALMR Cooperative Agreement, of the intended divestiture of the equipment at the 13 SOA sites. He also indicated further divestiture could occur subsequent to additional considerations by USARAK.

Additional correspondence and meetings have occurred between USARAK and SOA staff with regard to whether or not the State will accept the equipment, the total number of sites involved, and the actual effective dates. USARAK further advised the State that if it did not wish to accept the RF equipment at the initial identified 13 sites, it would be removed beginning in January 2012.

During a March 2011 meeting between USARAK staff and SOA Commissioner of Administration Becky Hultberg, USARAK was advised that the

Can Interoperability Keep Pace with Technology?

The "face" of public safety is the men and women wearing the uniform, and the public rarely thinks of the practical ways these providers do their job. They are more clearly recognized by the tools of their trade -police car, ambulance, fire truck, gurney, guns, and hoses. While these have always been the classic tools and fundamental components associated with the delivery of public safety services, these days communications has become a major pillar of support to the modern-day, ever-mobile public safety provider, even though it may be largely hidden in the background.

The public safety community faces challenges in adapting new communications technologies, like ALMR, to their everyday operations. Public safety is comfortable with routine, and new communications technologies must be implemented carefully within this community to ensure the technology meets their intent while balancing advanced features with practicality, including user acceptance. Thus the need for planning, training, and exercise if the full value of any newer technology is to be realized.

Communications and interoperability, although not as visible as the other tools of the public safety trade, are now a key element to the successful and effective delivery of public safety services. The complexity of our world has resulted in an increased dependence upon advanced communications methods - a dependence that is clearly relevant to the world of public safety.

The general public communicates via an ever-expanding inventory of communications methods, applications, and devices, which has given rise to the term "social media." This engenders expectations from both the public and political leaders that our first response community must also be benefitting from these advanced capabilities. Indeed, these advanced capabilities can provide significant new applications in support of public safety.

Interoperability is based on the integration of multiple operable systems in a planned and organized manner. This requires that the underlying operational systems be highly functional - whether they are day-to-day systems normally running routine traffic, or standby systems dedicated and reserved solely for a large, multiagency emergency response event.

Technology is but one element of a good communications system. With the proper planning, operational procedures, training, and exercises can be configured in such a manner as to take advantage of any communications

technology which is available and suitable to the specific task at hand.

Mobile communications systems used by public safety have evolved relatively slowly and purposefully over the years; significant technical advances occurred incrementally and over time.

Newer digital technologies can pose certain disruptive tendencies when adopted. The concepts and capabilities inclusive to modern communications systems pose changes that affect the very manner in which public safety core interoperability is delivered and perceived; thus these new developments rightfully deserve a very close look. It is not merely enough to make these new technologies available to public safety. Public safety must ensure their planning and training efforts keep pace, as well.

The ultimate goal is to put tools in the hands of first responders that allow them to effectively and efficiently execute their mission. To do that, the public safety community needs to be made aware of new technical directions; to plan and prepare for these changes; and, above all, manage these changes. System planners need to fully analyze the impact any new technology will have on their overall operation - or the impact it may have if not implemented.

- Hard decisions will need to be made that require sound planning, analysis, and decision-making.
- The skills and knowledge required by most agency system managers and supervisors may be heavily taxed. They will have to prepare by exercising a thorough analysis of their existing status, including physical, technical, operational, and fiscal.
- Managers will have to determine the enablers to the process, including sponsorship from as high a level of management as possible.
- A well-thought-out strategic plan will identify and mitigate risks before they become deadly.

A holistic approach to applying current and future digital technology to the day-to-day operations and interoperability of public safety emergency communications is core to the mission of the NIEC. SEARCH, via the NIEC, is embarking upon an effort to create a series of instructional platforms that are designed to help public safety keep pace with the ever-advancing technology. Change is not our enemy…failure to plan is. (Portions adapted from the National Institute for Emergency Communications Newsletter, March 2011)

Reductions in Contracted Services for Site Maintenance

Although initially facing an ALMR site maintenance funding shortfall for the State of Alaska (SOA) FY 12, USARAK has received the funding necessary to maintain their ALMR equipment at the 28 SOA sites they are not divesting in FY12 at the same level as FY11. However, as described in the USARAK divestiture article in this Insider edition, 13 of the USARAK sites will be in "break/fix" status through December, 2011.

The SOA, Enterprise Technology Service (ETS) is also making adjustments to address an ALMR funding shortfall in their budget. To reduce costs, beginning July 1, 2011, Bering Straits Information Technology (BSIT), the contractors operating the ALMR System Management Office (SMO), have up to 72 hours to respond to reported ALMR issues at SOA sites.

The sites will still be monitored 24/7/365 but depending on severity of the reported issue, SMO technologists may not have to respond immediately. In the case of a Severity 1 site issue (site down); initial response may be by SOA Enterprise Technology Services (ETS) SATS Microwave personnel. They will determine if the issue involves the site equipment infrastructure that supports the ALMR and SATS Microwave equipment or the ALMR RF equipment at the site.

If the ETS personnel determine it is an ALMR RF issue but something they are capable of correcting they will do so. If for some reason the ETS personnel cannot restore the ALMR RF to functional status, SMO technologists will be dispatched to take the necessary corrective actions.

Overall, response to SOA ALMR sites issues, whether by SOA ETS personnel or SMO technologist contractor staff, is planned to remain at FY11 levels.
(Article content coordinated with Mr. Jim Kohler, SOA ALMR Program Manager)

Southeast Alaska Drills for Real-world Scenario

On May 26 and 27, the Juneau Police Department, Capitol City Fire and Rescue, SEADOGS, Juneau Mountain Rescue, Civil Air Patrol-Alaska Wing, Juneau Snowmobile Association, Alaska State Troopers, and Temsco Helicopters participated in a simulated avalanche search, rescue, and body recovery drill. This event was part of on-going training among the agencies to ensure coordinated, successful responses to real-world events.

As is the case in any multi-agency response, communications and situational awareness for the participants was a key ingredient in ensuring the successful completion of the mission. Lt. Kris Sell, Juneau Police Department, one of the key planners involved in putting together the exercise, said that utilization of the capabilities of the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) Communications System and familiarizing responders with operating on the system in a multi-agency effort was a key goal. Although the agencies involved have worked together in the past during real-world events and previous drills, the May exercise was the first to involve extensive use of ALMR for coordination of effort and command and control.

Communications during the exercise involved some agencies that are not on ALMR on a daily basis. These agencies utilized their own radio systems for internal communications, but were issued ALMR radios to communicate with other participating agencies who use ALMR day-to-day. According to Lt. Sell, radio transmissions worked extremely well between responders at the simulated avalanche site on Douglas Island, the staging area, and the Search and Rescue (SAR) headquarters in Ketchikan. She also stated use of ALMR in the exercise allowed clear, understandable voice communication over longer distances than had been previously possible in exercises of a similar nature. Due to the communications capabilities it provides, Lt. Sell anticipates increased use of ALMR during exercises and real-world events involving the Juneau area responders to help ensure that communications interoperability will not be a major issue in any of the after action reports (AARs).

As should be the case in any multi-agency event, a communications plan was put together, which addressed what talk groups were programmed in the ALMR radios and what specific talk group(s) were available to be utilized during the exercise. The kind of planning engaged in by Lt. Sell, Trooper Landvatter, and others involved in the execution of this exercise were key to its ultimate success.
(Exercise/drill details provided by Lt. Kris Sell, Juneau Police Department.)

LMCC Suggests Revisions to Trunked Systems at VHF and UHF

The Land Mobile Communications Council (LMCC) suggested specific revisions to the rules governing the availability and licensing of centralized trunked systems in the industrial/business and public safety 150 – 512 MHz bands.

The LMCC said it has "worked to fine-tune its recommendations in response to evolving technical approaches with the objective of proposing rules that will serve both industrial/business and public-safety applicants for new systems as well as incumbent licensees."

Further, the LMCC requested that the "FCC consider these proposed revisions as a means to promote spectrum efficiency through centralized trunking systems while simultaneously protecting incumbent wireless system investments."

The suggestions were submitted as supplemental comments in WP Docket No. 07-100 in a June 3 letter filed with the FCC. (Extracted from Mission Critical Communications Magazine, June 2011)

USARAK Site Divestiture (continued)

State was not in a position to accept the equipment in July. To allow the State additional time to seek approval from the Legislature, USARAK agreed to continue funding maintenance of the 13 sites, but at a reduced level (break/fix) through December 31, 2011. USARAK has implemented the contract to provide continued 24/7 monitoring and a 72-hour response and repair time for that equipment.

USARAK will divest the remaining 28 sites on July 1,2012, at which time if the State does not wish to accept a transfer of the equipment, it will be removed and decommissioned.

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First 13 Divested Sites	
Cooper Mtn	Seward
Divide	Silvertip
Ernestine Mtn	Summit Lake
Girdwood	Valdez
Hope	Whittier
Moose Pass	Wolcott Mtn
Portage	

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