



**Statement for the Record
of
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Integrated Public Safety Commission
State of Indiana**

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Subcommittee on Homeland Security
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INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairwoman Landrieu, Ranking Member Coats, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am David Vice, and I am the Executive Director of Indiana's Integrated Public Safety Commission.

It is a great honor to appear before you today to present information about the importance of interoperable communications, and what we have done in Indiana to address the issue.

While I am new to my role as Executive Director of the Integrated Public Safety Commission, I have worked for the agency since 2002. I feel quite fortunate to have been involved "from the ground up" in the project that has made Indiana a national best practice in the interoperable communications arena.

My testimony today will provide you with a brief description of the state of interoperable communications in Indiana, three reasons for our success, and a short summary of what we view to be critical issues that will directly impact first responder safety in the near future.

INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS IN INDIANA – "SAVING MONEY, SAVING LIVES"

Project Hoosier SAFE-T, completed summer 2007, is an 800 MHz trunked voice and data communications system which provides both day-to-day and mission critical interoperability for nearly 60,000 Indiana local, state, and federal first responders and public safety officials. SAFE-T supports both analog and digital radios, and provides greater than 95% mobile and portable radio coverage statewide using 139 communications sites throughout Indiana.

The state fully funded the system build-out and implementation and provides continued operation and maintenance costs. User agencies purchase their mobile and portable radios and dispatch consoles along with mobile radio modems and laptops for access to the mobile data system. Agencies retain significant autonomy with regard to use the system, structure/sharing of talkgroups and interoperable communications planning at the local and regional levels.

Participation in Project Hoosier SAFE-T is voluntary and agencies pay no access or monthly user fees.

The statewide goal - to make interoperable communications affordable and available for every community – has exceeded all expectations. To date, nearly 60,000 radio IDs from all 92 Indiana counties are programmed into the SAFE-T system database. These numbers include first responders and public safety professionals from 320 local and county law enforcement agencies; 439 fire departments; 72 EMS providers; 19 State Agencies; 41 school districts; 88 hospitals; 29 universities/colleges; and four federal agencies.

The story of how Indiana got to this level of interoperability can be summarized into three concepts:

1. A visionary and inclusive planning process;
2. A pragmatic balance between technology and financial reality; and
3. Timing.

A VISIONARY AND INCLUSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

Back in the late 1990's, responding to requests from Indiana State Police officials, state legislators established a commission to address the severe deficiency in public safety communications. Their primary goal was to transition to a statewide, all-agency inclusive, communication system. During the months that followed, the state coordinated several focus groups, held four regional meetings, and conducted three Governor's Summits to engage public safety professionals in the discussion about the benefits of shared resources. Hundreds and hundreds of stakeholders at all levels participated in this process.

Based on these discussions, the state issued an RFP in 1999 and selected a vendor – Motorola - from the eight proposals submitted. Also that year, the Indiana General Assembly created the Integrated Public Safety Commission (IPSC) to coordinate the project and to coordinate other multi-agency public safety issues. The IPSC is made up of 12 members representing fire departments, emergency management agencies, emergency medical service providers, police departments, elected officials, and other public safety disciplines.

In January of 2000, nearly 500 public safety professionals and local first responders attended the third Governor's Summit to discuss what was now known as Project Hoosier SAFE-T and the benefits of shared interagency communications.

The input of practitioners at all levels and disciplines, teamed with a governance board composed of members from these groups, resulted in a plan for an interoperable communications system that truly reflected the needs of those who would be using it.

BALANCING TECHNOLOGY WITH FINANCIAL REALITY

I'll say it up front – we Hoosiers are proud of our frugal reputation. Some people call us cheap, we prefer to define ourselves as pragmatic. This characteristic was definitely present as we were making our decision about which communications technology to adopt more than a decade ago.

Back then, we had the choice to go “bleeding edge” with a fully P25 compliant system. It was tempting - everyone likes to be viewed as progressive. The reality, however, was that communications in Indiana consisted of a variety of technologies and that many local agencies would be unwilling or unable to migrate to a new system. We also could have chosen to implement a fully compliant P25 system on a more limited scale, say for state agencies only. Our goal, however, was to cast as wide of a net as possible.

This goal led us to choose a Phase II P25 compliant 800 Mhz platform. Our strategic direction was to facilitate and encourage as many public safety entities as possible to participate in the statewide 800 MHz SAFE-T system, while allowing for the greatest flexibility for users of other technologies. IPSC established interoperable communication talkgroups, enabled for the least capable radio affiliating with SAFE-T. Support for non SAFE-T users was supported through the use of radio caches, gateways, and “patching” technologies.

As it turns out, we have been a victim of our own success. The flexibility, cost savings, and ultimate performance of the system has attracted new agency users in unforeseen numbers, a success story for sure, but one that has consequences that I’ll briefly address later in my testimony.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Looking back again, as the new millennium began in the year 2000, Indiana had a visionary, user-driven plan for interoperable communications in place. The state legislature had created the Integrated Public Safety Commission, a 12-member, bipartisan group representing the diverse range of public safety stakeholders across the state. This governance group, which met quarterly, using a creative combination of federal grants and partnerships with state and local agencies, construction on a handful of sites for Project Hoosier SAFE-T had begun.

But frankly, progress was slow. A lack of dedicated funding translated to an ever-changing construction schedule. The financial incentive of a state-funded system with no user or access fees was great, but local agencies still had trouble coming up with the dollars needed to replace legacy VHF and UHF radios. And despite the locally-driven plan, first responders out in the field had doubts that the statewide system would ever be completed, dampening enthusiasm for joining the system.

Even though the strong foundation was set, it appeared that progress would be slower than anyone wanted or anticipated.

And then, during the morning hours of September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States. As we all know, the inability to communicate was cited as a major reason so many firefighters lost their lives that tragic day.

Suddenly, interoperability became the buzzword for successful response. As a result, two massive financial shifts occurred here in Indiana. First, the Indiana General Assembly passed House Enrolled Act 1001, which dedicated a portion of existing BMV fees to help fund the SAFE-T buildout. This guaranteed revenue stream (approximately \$13 million annually) allowed IPSC to proceed with site construction and implementation across the state.

Secondly, the federal government established the Department of Homeland Security and funded new federal grants that address the lack of interoperable communications. Many local agencies benefitted greatly from these grants, allowing them to upgrade user communications equipment. Ensuing disasters such as Hurricane Katrina kept the critical need for interoperable communications at the top of the funding priority list.

While one can never say that these tragedies were “good” for Indiana, they certainly had a profound influence on the state of public safety as we know it today.

WHY IT KEEPS WORKING

IPSC’s locally-driven foundation, pragmatic approach to interoperable technology, and the timing of the 9-11 terrorist attacks are the three largest reasons for Indiana’s interoperable communications success, but several factors continue to influence the success of the system.

I’m proud to stand before you and say that it has been a truly bipartisan effort in Indiana. Both parties recognized the urgency of the issue, and both parties were a part of the solution. To my knowledge, no one at the local, state or national level has ever made claim to “owning” the issue or taken credit for the success of our efforts.

We have a great working relationship with our FEMA and DHS federal partners, especially with the Office of Emergency Communication. At times, I’ll admit that the requirements seem a little onerous, especially since we are such a small agency, but the result of many of the requirements are undeniable. For example, the process of creating our Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) was difficult, but it allowed us to refocus our efforts and identify the gaps that need attention.

As Director Fugate mentioned in his testimony earlier, DHS’s unified approach to emergency planning and response has yielded measurable results. IPSC was a major player in the NLE 11 exercise, both as a communications restoration agency, but also in our role as the lead ESF2 agency. We’re still evaluating our response and assessing internal after action reports, but the exercise was invaluable.

We have continued our emphasis on local involvement. In addition to user groups, we hold an annual Indiana Interoperable Communications Conference, during which several hundred first responders and public safety professionals gather to discuss current and future interoperable communications issues. Additionally, we recently strengthened our governance structure to facilitate the flow of information between local and state agencies. The Statewide Interoperable Executive Committee (SIEC) – formerly the IPSC Policy subcommittee -was reorganized to include a member from each of the ten Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) Districts. This change has greatly improved the bi-directional flow of planning, best practices, and policy recommendations between local, regional, and state communications communities.

Based on the reputation and success of the voice system, Indiana is currently moving into next generation public safety communications: integrated public safety data sharing by deploying a statewide multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction police, fire and EMS computer aided dispatch (CAD) and records management system (RMS).

Implementation of the project is similar to that of the voice system – the state will provide the infrastructure and central server systems; user agencies will own, operate and manage the daily use of CAD/RMS applications. Deployment and testing is currently occurring in the Indiana State Police dispatch centers across the state. The system will be made available to local agencies in 2012.

ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

I mentioned earlier that I would briefly address some of the looming issues that we face as a state – and I believe as a nation.

First, as we all know, technology is developing at a rapid pace. Bleeding edge becomes obsolete at the blink of an eye. It's impossible for "normal" civil servants – even the technologically savvy ones – to predict and thus plan for the future. Further complicating the issue is the fact that vendors have been guilty in the past of extreme proprietary tactics. This has improved somewhat in recent years with the implementation of new standards, but I believe even greater emphasis must be placed on changing the old way of doing business. It is our responsibility as civil servants and as elected officials to bring about these changes.

One result of changing technology and proprietary systems is that many states are now having to address system limitation or end of life issues. Because of the success of the SAFE-T network, we are now at system capacity. We have had to put a hold on adding additional agencies to the system id database until we can add capacity. The process of migrating to a fully P25 compliant system – which will double system capacity - is not inexpensive. Fortunately, many of our public officials and budgetary executives in Indiana understand that this is an infrastructure issue – much as roads and bridges are – but this understanding cannot overcome the fact that these are lean economic times. Where will the money come from?

And then, of course, there's the social media conundrum. Weighing the risks and benefits, getting past legal and security issues, and then figuring out how to talk about the issue in a room filled with techno geeks on one side and old-school responders on the other... Let's just say it is proving to be a stickier issue than plain language.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the staff of the Integrated Public Safety Commission and Indiana's first responders, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to address you today. I'd also like to thank you for your past support and commitment towards improving interoperable communications. I look forward to working with you in the future to ensure that we make the most efficient use of all available resources in our shared goal of "Saving Money and Saving Lives."