

**Alaska Interoperable Communications Committee**  
**(AKICC) Meeting July 15, 2009**

Next Meeting: August 19, 2009  
Location: AST Headquarters  
9:30-12:00

AST Headquarters

Bryan Fisher Co-Chair DHS&EM  
Major Leveque Co-Chair  
Jim Larsen, AARL/ARES  
Brad Johnson, AACOP  
Tom Smayda, Mat-Su Borough  
John Dickens, ASET  
Jim Kohler, DOA  
Del Smith, ALMR

At Large Telephonic

Mike Paschall, Rural LEPC  
Frank Wesser, DEC

Call to order: 0930

Roll Call and Introductions

Acceptance of Minutes from June 17, 2009

Motion made to approve minutes from June 17, 2009 and seconded. Passed without objection.

**Guest Speaker:** Doug Schoenwald, DMVA Telecommunications Planner  
Doug spoke about the satellite phone program he is in charge of. Currently there are two satellite systems in Alaska and he started by talking about the Iridium satellite phones. With Iridiums, when a call is placed, it either goes from satellite to earth or from satellite to satellite to earth. The good news is that with the Iridiums, the satellite availability is good when you want to make a call. The other system and the phones he has for distribution are made by Globalstar. When Globalstar phones were originally purchased by the State, they originally had 56 satellites in orbit. However, due to a solar incident, they are now down to 18 satellites which

means there is limited availability. As a result for approximately 15-40 minutes out of each hour coverage is not available. The good points with Globalstar are that there is always earth to satellite coverage and the audio quality is much better.

Several years ago the State bought a large cache of Globalstar satellite phones for distribution to various jurisdictions in Alaska. Currently there are 400 (+) ready to be passed out to communities as a last resort when the power is out and radios fail. The phones are housed at DMVA. All any jurisdiction has to do to get a phone is to email their request to Doug. Ideally the plan is to get the phones out to the communities before there is an emergency.

Usage is free until Globalstar's satellite system is repaired and Doug estimates that for the next couple of years there won't be a charge. Once a jurisdiction has one of the Globalstar phones, they are asked to call the State Emergency Coordination Center (SECC) once a month to let them know it is working. The phones go out with a packet of information that is helpful for set-up and operation. Doug also makes sure the communities understand that because of the limited availability of satellites, they can't be used like a cell phone. There is a website where anyone can look up the availability at: [www.globalstarusa.com](http://www.globalstarusa.com). Once there, users can view an optimum availability chart online to see when the satellite will be available. Phones can be programmed to beep when they find the satellite but that would not be the best course of action in the dead of winter.

The phones were originally purchased to go to any community of 25 or more and multiple phones can be sent to larger communities. It is preferred that if possible, someone with a position of responsibility in the community request the phones. When Doug sends the phones to communities, he sends along a detailed slide presentation about the phone that includes operating instructions and information about the antennas. A question came up about coverage. A committee member stated that he uses (Iridium) and heard that in the more northern parts of Alaska Globalstar phones were lacking. Doug stated that is not the case. Apparently when the phones were first sold, an earth station already existed in Canada but coverage in Alaska was not great. As a result, another station was placed in Wasilla, Alaska. Since that time the phones work and were used in Nome during the Iditarod. One million minutes were purchased under Governor Murkowski but the program never

saw operational funding. 500 hand held units and 165 fixed units were originally purchased.

There was a brief discussion about Sky Connect that tells users where they are and allows users to do texting. It was thought it was associated with Inmar Satellite and the service was very expensive. Major Leveque stated that troopers tested on the system on boats but found they really didn't need it. Doug said he will work with AST to see if they have a need for any satellite phones especially by Fish and Wildlife and VPSOs. Doug stated Globalstar also had a kit available for cars that plugs into cigarette lighters with no problems. These aren't free but there may be some funding available for special cases. It was also thought that fixed units need to be installed. The fixed units may also come under National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) provisions.

Doug was notified that Globalstar will put up a new satellite this fall, and based on their last update, they're supposed to be on track with their repairs. A committee member asked about the frequency of the phones and Doug told him that it was 2 GHz up and 5 GHz down. It was also discussed that satellite phones won't accept cell phone calls because of an air interface technical issue. A good thing about Globalstar is that all the phones have 907 area codes and no activation is involved. However, the phone batteries do need to be charged before use.

25 Globalstars are cached in the Fairbanks NSB and were given David Gibbs. More phones are available at the borough level due to higher populations in those areas. Many villages have the phones in the clinics. Homer has several and the police chief calls in to the SECC once a month. The SECC gets the calls but currently does not record the call-in information. The committee discussed ways to get the word out to communities about the phones since there are plenty left and they will be obsolete in another year or two. Doug emphasized that the basic intent of the phones is for them to be used as a last resort and another tool for a jurisdiction's communication toolbox.

### **Tribal/Other Committee Representation**

Bryan Fisher stated they have tried to work with the governor's rural advisor on the issue of tribal representation on the AKICC with little luck. Bryan also stated that there needs to be more federal representation on the

committee and getting someone from BLM was discussed. Someone also brought up that having someone from the National Guard, technically a state agency would be appropriate. Bryan thought that wouldn't be a problem but it is unclear who would be appointed. Ideally it should be someone directly involved with the JISCC but it would be up to the Guard to appoint someone.

Brad Johnson brought up the fact that he was appointed by the Alaska Association of Chiefs of Police and was originally on the AKICC representing urban law enforcement. Someone else needs to fill that role and committee members thought someone from Juneau might be appropriate. John Dickens thought it might be beneficial to have someone from the Coast Guard represented. Major Leveque added that we usually don't have a say on who's appointed to the committee from various agencies. It is a waste if there is someone appointed who never comes to meetings and never reads the minutes. He thought that just because an agency nominates someone doesn't mean we have to accept them. Bryan thought it would be better to have someone from the technical or operational end of things. Bryan summarized that we will request someone from JTF Alaska, the Coast Guard and Tribal Entities. Brad Johnson wanted to know if the AKICC should have regional tribal representatives. This issue was discussed but ultimately it was determined that the committee didn't want 6-12 people representing one group on the committee. Getting someone from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) was also discussed but Bryan was told members of that organization were not allowed to sit on committees to represent tribes. Brad Johnson thought maybe someone from Tanana Chiefs Conference or an Alaska State Trooper Village Public Safety Officer Coordinator would be appropriate.

Bryan stated that invitation letters would be drafted. He wasn't sure how many letters would be sent out but that he would send some feelers out. At the next meeting in August it was anticipated that there would be recommended changes to the committee membership.

### **Grants Allocation Working Group**

Prior to the July AKICC meeting Bryan selected several local committee members representing local jurisdictions and agencies to serve as an external review committee to make local awards for the 2009 IECGP Grant. Tom Smayda, Brad Johnson and Jim Larsen were the only members from the

original pool available to participate and they will also review Homeland Security Communications Grant Applications for communications equipment. Once the 09 IECGP equipment funding is allocated, the list will be sent to AKICC members for a vote. This is the committee's first time making recommendations for grant awards so the process is still evolving and can be modified if needed.

### **Excess Equipment Acquisition Protocols**

Bryan brought up the ongoing issue of whether the AKICC wanted to allow jurisdictions to purchase more equipment with remaining grant funds if they have grant money left over and purchased everything they asked for. There was a lot of debate over this issue including the subject of caches. There was also a lot of discussion about where unmet needs are and if additional equipment is needed for unfunded jurisdictions. It was recommended that if a jurisdiction needs a few extra/spare radios these should have been included in the original grant application. Questions came up such as: should jurisdictions be penalized if they negotiate a good price and have money left over? Is there a reasonable measure that could be put into policy over this issue such as allowing 10% of excess funding for spares? Some committee members felt uncomfortable setting up a number that would be applied automatically. Ultimately it was decided that every jurisdiction would be limited to purchasing the equipment they initially requested. If there were any excess funds and equipment requests these would come back to the committee for discussion and a decision. A motion was made that in the case of Homer (that was discussed in previous meetings) the request for extra equipment was denied. This was seconded. Bryan made the motion that in the future the process cited above would become policy and that all money not spent by jurisdictions after their equipment was purchased would be returned and for reallocation. John Dickens and Brad Johnson seconded the motion.

### **SWIC Meeting**

Major Leveque gave a summary of the Statewide Interoperable Coordinators (SWIC) Meeting that was held in San Diego in June of 2009. The Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) had funding for three delegates from each state to attend. Ideally they wanted a legislator from each state to participate and Alaska thought they could get one there, but after several

hopefuls were slated, none were able to attend. As a result the attendees representing Alaska were Kathy Day, Dean Brown of Forestry and Major Leveque. He called it a “working meeting” since the agenda was very full and 48 states and territories were represented. He said after attending the meeting he really got the idea about a “system of systems” approach for interoperability and there was a lot of talk about that concept. He observed that many states and regions were getting away from the approach that just saw one system as the “fix” for all their communications problems and instead the real approach was to get buy in and interconnectivity of systems. He feels we’re going down that road with motobridges and ALMR. If we can get past the financial aspect of who pays for what, Alaska would be in better shape. He feels that it’s not efficient to bring every jurisdiction into ALMR, and, as stated in the SCIP we need to look at operability for some places before they can get interoperable.

Major Leveque also commented that there was a lot of discussion on how to make interoperability more meaningful. That brought up the subject of how we can make the AKICC more useful. It was also mentioned that Alaska really didn’t have an interoperability champion in the executive and legislative branches. He also started thinking about how we can evolve and bring ALMR and other systems together in the state. There was also discussion about the governance and how the AKICC really needed to take control of statewide governance of interoperability. Ultimately he thought that the committee needed to really focus more on outreach and its true mission which entails interacting with legislators and mayors and we to focus on the bigger picture of what we need should be trying to achieve. There was also some mention as to if eventually the AKICC should stand on its own rather than be part of the SERC.

## **911 Issues**

There was discussion about the AKICC’s role with 911 and how the state can take existing systems from 911 to phase 2 (enhanced 911) which is the next generation of 911. Currently there is only one system in Alaska that has that capability. Mention was made of a grant that would provide additional funding for 911. A 911 plan was required which really doesn’t exist in most jurisdictions. Brad Johnson thought that FNSB could act as a model. It was then commented that 911 is like a large elephant and while there is an existing structure, it wasn’t totally effective. Discussion then moved to determine if there was a group that charged with overseeing 911

issues. If the AKICC deals with interoperability should 911 be included because there currently is no statewide focus on 911? APCO and NENA tried to get legislation passed but that has not happened yet. Major Leveque believes 911 is something the committee can and should tackle. This is especially true since cell phone coverage is expanding throughout the state. Jim Kohler added that this issue has to be addressed throughout the state. Its one thing to transfer a call but the other is to have expectations about how the call should be handled. The comment was made that in one remote village 911 was going to a woman's home at fish camp. John Dickens made a motion for the AKICC to tackle systems like 911. A motion to continue to review this issue was made.

Bryan sated that from where the committee is at present, the AKICC can tackle some issues but what's really needed is a 911 Commission. It was then determined that the discussion would be continued at the next meeting. It was also added that the AKICC needs to have a goal to bring enhanced 911 eventually to every community. This brought up the fact that it is a national expectation that 911 personnel be trained in dispatch for various emergencies. It was determined that the 911 should be kept on the agenda for further discussion.

### **Other Business:**

#### **Communications During Recent Floods**

Brad Johnson brought up that TICP updates were occurring. May and June 2009 had many communication challenges with the flooding operable communications was a problem and needs to be discussed at the next meeting

#### **Statewide Standards**

Major Leveque stated that after the SWIC meeting in San Diego he feels that we should look at statewide standards for different communities and eventually find a way to determine how many is the right number of radios for each jurisdiction. Currently we have a "hodge podge" approach as to how we allocate equipment. We should have some way of knowing, on a statewide basis, what is needed in each jurisdiction. It appeared that in other states this issue is more controlled than in Alaska. If we're spending money passing through various equipment acquisitions, these need to support a community's needs.

Bryan agreed and he thought there were many issues we needed to tackle and that we may need to reach out to other agencies. The AKICC needs real working groups. For the 09 IECGP grants to the locals for equipment we did that somewhat in the grant process by providing technical assistance. Doug Schoenwald added that he fielded calls from many jurisdictions pertaining to equipment.

### **Standard/Common Language Protocols**

Brad Johnson brought up the fact that the ALMR Executive Council put together a working group for standardized plain language throughout the state for agencies to follow. They were requesting a white paper from the SWIC that could go out to all the jurisdictions recommending everyone adopt common language and follow the practice. There was some discussion as to who this message should come from. Ultimately it was decided that it would go back before the Executive Council for further discussion. There were meetings with a lot of agencies that came to the consensus on common language as a body. Dell Smith also wrote up a document on behalf of User Council and thought it would be best distributed under the auspices of the SWIC. It was questioned if this concept needed to be sold more to local emergency responders. Tom Smayda thought it got back to getting the interoperability word out. Mike Paschall thought the AKICC should do two things; come out with an official statement and then continue meeting with groups until there is more buy in. Ultimately it was determined to take the effort back before the User Council and table the issue. It will also be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

### **Amateur Radio Information**

Jim Larsen informed members that the Anchorage Amateur Radio Club has given the Kenai Radio Club \$17,654.90 to build an emergency communication trailer. Progress is underway and a 24 foot trailer has been obtained. This will be coupled with a power and tower trailer to provide Kenai responders with VHF and HF communications in a deployable format. Jim Larsen provided a handout for Amateur Radio Planning. Quick Guide #1 concerns finding amateur radio operators in Alaska's cities and villages.

Amateur radio operators also conducted a point to point ARES exercise on July 11 between Fairbanks and Anchorage. The exercise simulated flooding on the Chena River and utilized scripted messages. Message traffic was passed from five remote sites in Fairbanks and was passed over VHF to HF to VHF digital links to two sites in Anchorage. The test was a success.

Anchorage Amateur Radio club has added two new HF transceivers to their emergency response assets. The club has also upgraded the Mount Susitna VHF/UHF emergency services repeater to include battery backup. This upgrade was implemented due to the frequent failure of site power on the mountain.

### **National Guard Communications Exercise**

Bryan Fisher Spoke briefly about the National Guard exercise that took place in Valdez, Fairbanks and SECC from July 7-10, 2009. During the exercise the Guard flew up Washington Joint Incident Site Communications Capability (JISCC) System to Fairbanks. Bryan is waiting for the after action comments to be released. This exercise was considered a warm-up for Alaska Shield exercise in 2010. It's a fairly big effort, first time ALMR transportable moved. Doug Schoenwald, who participated in Fairbanks, stated he was impressed with ALMR's transportable unit.

The meeting was adjourned at 1215.