



Advanced Technology Helps Firefighters Talk to Each Other in Maine

Waterville, ME, December 28, 2007 – The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) and the Maine Fire Chiefs’ Association (MFCA) have embarked on a program to provide advanced technology to allow fire departments in strategic communities to achieve voice interoperability and improve incident commander operations at the scene of an emergency. The project is made possible by Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) from the US Department of Homeland Security for the Regional Interoperable Communications Initiative (RICI) launched jointly by NASFM and MFCA. The AFG program awarded two \$800,000 grants to communities in Maine to implement the RICI program.

The term “interoperable communications” refers to the ability of first responders, including emergency and other public safety officials, to talk to one another via radio and other communication systems, and to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand in real time. Traditionally, this has not been possible with communications devices used by public safety officials from different responding agencies, because their radios tend to operate on different frequencies and protocols.

The RICI program was developed to seek technology alternatives to avoid the problem of replacing all communications equipment so that they are on the same system, which could run into the millions of dollars for a single community.

The technology selected for the RICI program is BAE Systems’ First InterComm system, which is new to the commercial market. Michael Greene, Director of Homeland Security Solutions for BAE Systems explained, “This system was initially developed for the defense industry and has been carefully adapted to serve the specific needs of emergency responders.” The First InterComm technology is installed in first-responder vehicles and allows radios on different frequencies to communicate with each other at the incident scene without requiring major communications equipment replacements or investments.

The pilot project for this initiative placed several First InterComm devices around the Rumford, ME, area. Rumford Fire Department Chief John C. Woulfe III, past President of the Maine Fire Chiefs’ Association, said, “The RICI initiative funded through these grants provided the resources to make significant improvements in our communications capabilities. With the new capabilities, we will also improve firefighter and citizen life safety in communities throughout the State of Maine.”

The NASFM, MFCA, and BAE Systems engineers met in mid-December to discuss how to most effectively use the grant resources and technology. Implementation will be based on specific fire service needs throughout the state. The project will use all existing equipment and infrastructure, and will maintain current standard operating procedures for communications. A task force within MFCA has been established to manage planning and coordination throughout the process.

NASFM President John Dean, who is also the State Fire Marshal of Maine, said, “NASFM is confident that this initiative and the efforts in Maine will create a new standard for how emergency responders can coordinate and leverage advanced communication technology to improve operations and increase life safety.”

For more information on the Regional Interoperable Communications Initiative (RICI), including opportunities to participate, contact Rebecca Harned, Government Relations, National Association of State Fire Marshals, rharned@firemarshals.org, or +1 202 737-1226.

For more information on the First InterComm technology, visit http://www.baesystems.com/ProductsServices/bae_prod_ew_firstintercomm.html