

Purchasing Power

Buying a new two-way radio system is a complex, long process. The purchased technology will likely be in place for more than a decade, and taxpayer and business funds must be maximized. Many factors — technological, political, financial and historical — must be taken into account when purchasing a new system. In the end, mission-critical communications managers' careers and reputations are on the line for the final system purchase.



While Project 25 (P25) has established a standard to which many systems are migrating, some users have voiced challenges with one vendor's equipment working with another vendor's technology. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is working to provide buyers with more data about the compliance of P25 equipment.

By this summer, you will most likely be able to access a Web site with reports detailing whether a specific Motorola P25 portable interoperates with a specific M/A-COM P25 portable, for example. The data is part of NIST's P25 Compliance Assessment Program (CAP), which will first assess vendor laboratories to determine whether they can perform required P25 tests. Vendors will then test the P25 Common Air Interface (CAI) of different vendor equipment, rating various features and components of each product. Inter RF Subsystem Interface (ISSI) equipment will follow.

Suppliers declaration of compliance (SDoc) forms will detail standardized test reports, including the product and version tested, other vendor products it was tested against and pass/fail results for each feature. More detailed results should be available from vendors by buyers who request the data. The data won't be certified; no one will verify the results from vendors. However, the program will undoubtedly offer more information than is currently available, and vendors will be held to high

standards of reporting.

"There is still a lot of responsibility on you as buyers that the equipment delivered does what it's

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supposed to do," said Derek Orr, program manager for public-safety communications standards with NIST Office of Law Enforcement Standards (OLES), which is overseeing the project.

Beyond P25, our publication is also working to offer all buyers of mission-critical communications equipment — P25 and other systems — as much product and buying information as possible. In addition to our annual SpecsGuide and online SuperGuide, which offer detailed product and supplier information, we will continue to bring you articles on system procurement best practices and guidelines, both in the magazine and on our Web site.

Here's to informed purchasing power.

Sandra Wendelken

Sandra Wendelken, Editor