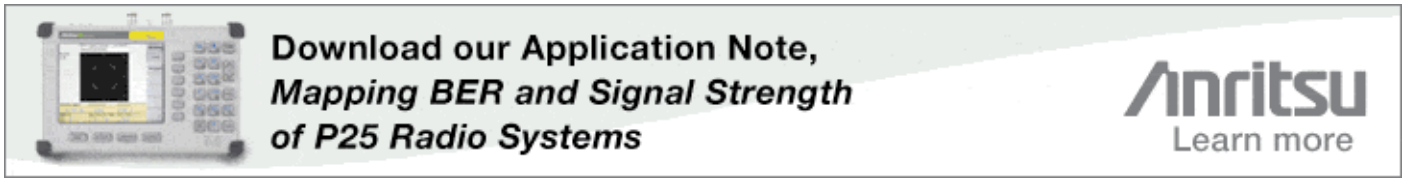

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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

Vendors Demo P25 CAI Interoperability

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By Sandra Wendelken

Five vendors conducted Project 25 (P25) Common Air Interface (CAI) trunked interoperability tests at a Motorola lab in Schaumburg, Ill., last week. The tests are similar to interoperability testing that will be conducted under the federal government's P25 Compliance Assessment Program (CAP), which is still ramping up.

Motorola, EF Johnson Technologies, Tait Radio Communications, Technisonic Industries and Tyco Electronics Wireless Systems completed all of the P25 CAI trunked interoperability tests outlined in the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) TSB-102.CBBJ required to claim P25 Phase 1 CAI trunking interoperability. The tests occurred throughout the week of Jan. 12, with a public event Friday in Shaumburg. Technisonic is a privately held Canadian manufacturer of P25 radios for the avionics industry.

The testing was conducted on a Motorola ASTRO 25 release 7.6 system with subscriber radios from all five of the P25 manufacturers. Test reports outlining the subscriber models tested can be found at www.motorola.com/project25.

Bob Schassler, corporate vice president of the Motorola government and public-safety products organization, called the testing a milestone event. "As an industry, we've come a long way. We've made tremendous progress. Everybody has set aside our competitive tendencies for the week," Schassler said.

The tests were the first of their kind to verify P25

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interoperability and document results and specific features. Motorola said it would hold similar tests with each revision of its P25 infrastructure. Supplier representatives said this test and future tests will include the latest revisions of software in radios, which are generally backward compatible. The full set of P25 features was tested, company executives said at the event. However, the P25 standards don't address ergonomics, so each radio performed some functions differently. "Agencies must get used to each radio and its quirks," said Dean Hart, a consultant with Tusa Consulting, who attended the demonstration.

The public demonstration showed how each vendor's A talk group could communicate with the other four vendors' A talk groups. The suppliers also demonstrated unit-to-unit communications, allowing a Motorola portable to communicate in individual call mode with an individual Tyco portable, for example. The suppliers also demonstrated encrypted communications, where one radio communicated to the A talk group, but only radios with encryption received the audio.

The event was conducted by the manufacturers in advance of formal Department of Homeland Security (DHS) lab recognition as part of the P25 CAP, which will document interoperability between P25 products from various manufacturers. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Office of Law Enforcement Standards (OLES) teams of assessors and subject matter experts are currently assessing labs, said Dereck Orr, program manager for public-safety communications standards with NIST/OLES.

The first batch of recognized labs will be announced at the end of April, said Kurt Fischer, P25 CAP program manager, at the event. Motorola executives said its lab has already been assessed, and Paul May, business development manager for Tyco, said the company is expecting its lab's assessment soon.

The CAP program has been delayed from its original schedule, which had set a summer 2008 timeline for the first product information from CAP testing to be posted online. However, the program testing should be fully under way this year. "We're moving ahead full steam, with good input from vendors and participants," Orr said. "We've had good response from the labs we've visited. Our expectation is to have CAP documentation on the DHS web site come end of summer."

The testing is an additional cost to vendors, which are responsible for setting up the labs, maintaining the labs and equipment, and performing the tests. However, instead of verifying for each potential customer that a manufacturer's products are P25 compatible, the CAP program will provide interoperability data to all agencies and spread the cost across a wider installed base, company officials said. "It's a cost of doing business in the P25 world," May said. "We hope it expands the market for P25."