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## IT'S TIME TO LEARN ABOUT P25 TRUNKING

Mar 1, 2008 12:00 PM, By Chris Lougee

So, how does \$1 billion to upgrade state and local first responder communications equipment sound to you? If you're with a public safety agency, could you use it to improve the communications in your town? If you're a land mobile radio dealer, could you upgrade your government customers? You bet you could!

That is the amount approved by the Department of Commerce — with its Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) grants — and the Department of Homeland Security, with its Commercial Equipment Direct Assistance Program (CEDAP). Almost 3000 local agencies will receive CEDAP grants, and agencies in all 50 states will receive PSIC funds. They may be used for the acquisition, training and deployment of interoperable communications equipment. The primary target was for equipment to be used on the refarmed spectrum at 700 MHz, but other bands also may be used to achieve interoperability. Check out the DHS, FEMA and National Telecommunications and Information Administration Web sites for full details.

These are just two of the grant programs available from our federal government as it continues its inexorable march toward nationwide interoperability of radio communications. They are an important component of a coordinated effort to strengthen the nation's overall level of preparedness for any disaster, natural or human engineered.

There are some "strings attached," for radios to qualify, however. Interoperable radios must meet standards set by DHS in its SAFECOM communications program. The first benchmark is "P25 capable" but requirements also are specified regarding battery life, rugged construction, intuitive displays, and high level security of voice and data communications with over the air re-keying capability. (In addition to DHS, the departments of Defense, Treasury and Justice also have adopted the P25 standards.)

The main point is that even if an agency does not plan to use all the features of P25 radio systems now, it needs to meet those standards to receive the grant money. The obvious purpose is the long-term goal of multijurisdictional and multidisciplinary interoperability at all levels of government.

Also included in these standards is the ability to operate analog or digital, conventional or trunked. That's right — P25 trunking now is upon us. The standards are set, and manufacturers are showing many new P25 trunking offerings at IWCE this year.

Public safety agencies never have had more P25 trunked options from which to choose. The elaborate systems introduced by the "original big players" are still available, but new choices from other companies offering big performance for a reasonable investment of hard-earned taxpayer dollars now are available, too. One company has even developed a PC-based controller that converts an existing analog repeater into a P25 trunked repeater.

Other companies are showing fully submersible P25 radios with new battery technology, FIPS 140-level security, intrinsically safe ratings and new data capabilities. Many offer several portable models from a basic radio with no display to a full-featured, 10-key model with field programming capability for fast deployment in tactical conditions.

Mobile radios with P25 trunking capability for vehicles also will be available from several manufacturers. And don't forget to look for radios with backward-compatibility to MDC1200 signaling for easy migration into current fleets. It will be well worth the time of any customer or land mobile radio dealer to check out all the P25 products and accessories on the IWCE exhibit floor this year.

Ah, the beauty of competition — and wasn't that an original objective of the APCO 25 project?

We all need to learn about this new P25 trunking technology to deliver these solutions to our customers. It's what many of them will be spending their grant money on.

*Chris Lougee is vice president at Icom America and leads its land mobile radio division.*

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