

**Senate Transportation Committee and
Senate Law and Justice Committee Joint Hearing Testimony**

April 19, 2010

Thank you ladies and gentlemen for your review of a critical subject that truly affects the health and well being of all Pennsylvania citizens. My name is Mark Hamilton. I am a Tioga County Commissioner, Vice President of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), and have been a volunteer firefighter and EMS provider for 30 plus years. In addition I have served on the SR60 Commission helping to create the 23 legislative recommendations to better emergency responses across our great state.

One of my favorite books is *All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten*. All you have to do is look at me to know that I understand that warm cookies and milk are good for me. On the other hand I believe two principals we need to think about today are sharing everything and playing fair. When it comes to successful critical incident response it is imperative that we play well together. To play well together we must communicate well and with ease. Therefore, I have compiled some ideas that will help us improve the system we have been building.

I have with me today a state wide operational coverage map. According to this, the north central region of the state is still in the 80th percentile for 800Mhz radio equipment to be used. This seems simply unacceptable for the first responders who put their lives on the line quite frequently in these "dead zones". Interoperability with ease becomes a critical issue when responding to mass casualty incidents. My understanding is that our 911 centers are limited to user groups when on the 800 system. When the need arises to talk to parties outside your user group it is possible but very cumbersome and time consuming to do so. Portable field equipment is also not user friendly and needs to be rebooted when reprogramming channels. With today's economy, equipment cost is also an issue that should be looked at. Portable 800 radios can cost into the \$5,000 range for a single radio, where as most VHF portable or mobile units can be purchased for under \$1,000. In Tioga County alone, the state has close to 30 tower sites built out to get to your 80% coverage in the area. My guess is that each of these sites has cost the state over ~~\$100,000~~ ^{X \$10,000} to build. The county on the other hand has 5 VHF tower sites with vertically 100% coverage.

The North Central Terrorism Task Force has recently taken advantage of a PSIC grant and ordered 9 repeaters and other equipment to be installed in the 7 county region. These repeaters and equipment, once installed on the counties' tower sites, will use the national interoperability capabilities to translate VHF radio signal to the 800 system or visa versa. Once this is in place, any 1st responder with a properly programmed radio will be able to communicate with any agency they may have a need to, no matter what radio system they may be using. I am very excited to see this equipment go on-line as it is the only way I see to achieve true interoperability. In the mean time it can also improve coverage areas and also cut some of the cost factors we have talked about.

Therefore, I humbly submit the following recommendations:

1. Move away from a proprietary system.

2. Use a state wide VHF to 800Mhz repeater / translator system
3. Renew cooperation with counties and municipalities to dual use towers and equipment.
4. Encourage higher level of communication protocols between all agencies.
5. Establish a higher level of education for all users.
6. Promote cooperation in communication between all agencies.

Thank you for your time and attention. I stand ready to answer any question you may have.