

# Technology Update



## *The Public Safety Wireless Network (PSWN) Program*

### *A Brief Introduction*

By Derek Siegle and Rick Murphy

**P**ublic safety wireless interoperability refers to the ability of public safety officials to communicate with each other seamlessly in real time over their wireless communications network. Whether by voice or through data transmissions, interoperable communications can mean the difference between life and death for citizens and public safety personnel and often hold the key to minimizing loss of property when disasters occur. However, the history and evolution of public safety wireless communications seems to contradict the need for, and benefits of, interoperability. Stand-alone systems, operating independently, consequently have created obstacles to interoperability. Nonetheless, these obstacles can be overcome, and the Public Safety Wireless Network (PSWN) Program is leading efforts to do so.

### **History and Organization**

The PSWN Program is a joint effort sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Justice and the Treasury. The program addresses issues facing public safety wireless communications, primarily in the area of interoperability among land mobile radio (LMR) networks used to support public safety missions. The program is working to plan and foster interoperability at all levels of government (e.g., local, state, and federal) and among all public safety disciplines (e.g., law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services). In 1996, the PSWN Program was founded in response to a National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPRG) initiative that called for the establishment of an intergovernmental wireless public safety network as a means of achieving interoperability. Since then, the vision has evolved to a system of networks, regionally focused, brought together through coordination and partnerships among public safety agencies from all levels of government.

Although its task is very challenging, the PSWN Program has made great strides in achieving interoperability among public safety agencies across the United States. The program realizes that there may never be one nationwide wireless communications system, but that statewide or regional interoperability is an achievable goal with the federal government participating where appropriate.

The PSWN Program has been active in several key areas of the interoperability challenge. The program is promoting coordination and partnerships among public safety agencies, exploring difficulties in funding and the development of funding alternatives, addressing public safety spectrum issues, supporting and participating in standards and technology development, promoting systems security improvements, and implementing pilots, proof-of-concept projects, and demonstrations in several cities and regions of the United States.

### **Coordination and Partnerships**

Agencies must be willing to communicate with each other. Coordination and partnerships are essential to achieving interoperability. The PSWN Program realizes officers and departments first must be willing

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to work together and share a mutual commitment to the goal that no man, woman, and child ever should lose their life or be injured because public safety officials cannot communicate with each other. The PSWN Program is very active in bringing representatives from different departments together to find a solution to their interoperability challenges. Public safety agencies must recognize the importance of interoperability and strive for interoperability as they plan system replacements and upgrades. This requires public safety agencies to identify their interoperability requirements and form the necessary partnerships to meet these requirements.

The PSWN Program is fostering partnerships, providing networking opportunities, raising awareness, and sharing solutions through its regional symposiums. Working with associations, such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and through the efforts of the PSWN Executive Committee, the program remains proactive in developing these relationships. The Executive Committee comprises leading representatives of local, state, and federal public safety agencies. It serves as an advisor to, and an advocate of, the program and its mission. In addition to its symposiums and Executive Committee, the program sponsors Integrated Program Teams with direct representation from radio communications specialists from all levels of government. These persons serve as members of these working groups to solve specific interoperability challenges and foster solutions and pilot concepts.

The program also is beginning a new outreach initiative to facilitate the formation of public safety communications councils in each of the 50 states. This campaign hopefully will be a catalyst for the coordination and partnerships necessary for tackling the interoperability challenge. Several states, such as

California, Colorado, and Montana, already have working groups addressing interoperability issues. The PSWN Program will offer whatever assistance it can to states and their communications councils as they work to resolve the issue of interoperability. The program realizes it cannot accomplish its mission successfully without the direct involvement and actions of individual state and local public safety agencies across the country.

### **Funding**

The ability of departments to obtain funding for public safety wireless projects is a major obstacle to achieving interoperability. Historically, public safety communications, particularly those that enable

departments to communicate outside their normal realm of responsibility, have garnered little attention. Quite often, this issue is very low among the funding priorities of most legislatures, administrators, and even the public, until major incidents or disasters call attention to shortfalls. To help alleviate the funding difficulty, the PSWN Program is reaching out and educating individual members of Congress and making presentations to the National Association of Governors, National League

of Cities, and other similar associations to inform state and local decisionmakers. The goal is to make public safety wireless communications systems and interoperability a priority investment for America's future safety.

### **Conclusion**

The ultimate goal of the Public Safety Wireless Network Program is to develop and enact a road map to assist public safety agencies with ongoing and future interoperability efforts, known as the Public Safety WINS. Public Safety WINS will serve as a basis to help public safety agencies formulate

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strategies for interoperable systems by addressing coordination and partnership, funding, spectrum, standards and technology, and security issues associated with such an endeavor. Public Safety WINS is scheduled to be finalized by the end of fiscal year 2001. Public Safety WINS will include an introductory video supported by an interactive Web site that will provide both technical and policy solutions to interoperability issues.

The PSWN Program is committed to assisting public safety agencies with implementation strategies and their plans to address interoperability. Information regarding the program, its studies, pilots, and

publications, as well as other issues regarding interoperability can be accessed at <http://www.pswn.gov> or can be obtained by contacting the program at 1-800-565-PSWN. ♦

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*Mr. Siegle and Mr. Murphy are, respectively, the U.S. Justice and the Treasury Departments' program managers for the Public Safety Wireless Network (PSWN) Program. The PSWN Program is a federally sponsored initiative dedicated to improving public safety wireless interoperability, so that no one loses their life because public safety officials cannot communicate with one another.*

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## ***Unusual Weapon***

### ***Barrel Gun***

**A**fter an armed bank robbery in New York, police officers arrested two individuals exiting the bank and recovered two weapons. One of the weapons was a machine-lathed zip gun containing one .22-caliber bullet. The weapon is loaded by unscrewing the 1 1/2-inch barrel, where the round is inserted. The barrel is screwed back on, and the cocking lever is pulled back engaging the trigger lever. The firing pin has an adjustment spring for the amount of pressure needed to drive the firing pin. The weapon is 5 inches long and can be concealed easily in the palm of the hand.

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*Submitted by the Joint Bank Robbery Task Force of the New York, New York, Police Department*

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