

**VCOMM Board Meeting  
Randolph, VT  
August 2, 2007**

**Present:** Kerry Sleeper, Heather Gibbs, Mark Miller, Peter John, Trevor Lashua, Bruce Beliveau, Doug Lawrence, Bill Burden, Al Barber, Charlie Kremer, Terry LaValley, Jim Leene, Paco Aumand, Mike Manning, Walter Goodell, Tom Cheney, Steve Salengo, Jake Elovirta, Chris Herrick, Gene Perkins, Thomas Murray, Paul Duquette

**Start:** 1014 hrs

**Opening Remarks – Chief Duquette:**

We want to get everyone up to speed and get some input on what to do down the road.

**Opening Remarks - Commissioner Sleeper:**

Commissioner Sleeper thanked everyone for coming and gave a special thank you to Paul and everyone working on the project. He recognized that it is a tremendous amount of work by a number of people over an amount of time. He wanted to thank everyone and remind everyone why we are doing this and why it is so critically important. He continues to hear questions, “is it necessary?” He brought up CNN news 12 hours earlier where the medical center in MN was being asked how things were going [in regards to the MN bridge collapse]. The interviewee said there was a breakdown in communications and that this was a large problem. The Commissioner said incidents like this continue to remind us, particularly in critical events, how important interoperable communications and significant capacity is absolutely essential to all of us being first responders. Examples at the national and local level recently underscore the necessity of the state to have a backbone for interoperability. The Commissioner asked people to push the message out about how important VCOMM is. He asked people not to forget the reason why congress originally appropriated these funds, because of disaster of enormous proportions - because of large numbers of firefighters lost on 9/11 because of failure of communications. This drove Homeland Security grants to be created. Since then interoperable communications has continued to be the number one priority.

Commissioner Sleeper said it is right to ask questions about where and how this money will be spent. He said he is not going to allow this project to move off the tracks of where it is going. It will benefit us and all of our peers. He concluded with asking for any questions.

Peter John said that with his situation in Barre, communications was so critical because it happened so quickly. He mentioned looking back on it and seeing it went off without a hitch due to the communications. He said he was one of the doubters, like other departments, but that it really, really worked in his situation. He said he backs it all the way.

Paul Duquette said this is the kind of stuff VCOMM is looking to have to offset the criticism.

### **VCOMM project RFP update:**

Paul Duquette said there are three proposals. The Steering Committee is reviewing these proposals. VCOMM has picked a vendor, met with the vendor on July 20<sup>th</sup> and started negotiating with them. Paul said he doesn't want to release a lot of information until there is a signed contract. Paul said that if at any point in time anyone has questions to please ask.

Terry LaValley said Paul summarized the RFP process well. He said unfortunately the most expensive proposal is the best for first responders. The VCOMM Steering Committee is trying to get the pricing down without sacrificing quality within the network.

Paul Duquette said one of the things that works out well is the new funding source. VCOMM should be able to complete phase one; the lifeline system and the reprogramming of frequencies.

Bruce Beliveau said in his 30 some-odd years of providing communications, his focus will be on giving first responders they best system that we can.

Douglas Lawrence said that many incidents are not being controlled with ICS. He said that not everyone knows when or how to use ICS. There needs to be a quick way to connect. Paul said that even in small events, you still use Incident Command. Mark's SOPs will cover this. VCOMM will push them out to everyone by e-mail and mail, they will be posted on the web and sent to the Academies for instruction.

Terry LaValley said the information [Doug] provided is critical. If you [Doug] could participate in Mark's committee to help with this that would be beneficial. Terry said people have to make sure that when there are multiple agencies in the same geographical areas people must be aware of what channels are being used and where. Paul Duquette said that fire departments have been using Incident Command forever, but that it's new to police and highway crews. It's a learning process for everyone. He said it was a good issue to be brought up.

### **PowerPoint Presentation – Chief Duquette:**

(Handouts provided)

Paul Duquette requested input on how to motivate the vendors to complete the radio reprogramming. Terry LaValley said there are some exceptions to the reprogramming including many POVs; VCOMM has to draw the line somewhere. There are two issues: narrow-banding and interoperability. VCOMM is working on interoperability; narrow-banding is not the goal of the project and that is replacing radio's that are not narrow-band capable. Money for the radio replacements will have to come from somewhere else; maybe phase two.

Paul Duquette said VCOMM has been in contact with Border Patrol, ICE and other federal agencies to get reprogrammed. VCOMM has started to address working with bordering states and Canada. New Hampshire is using our PL. Terry said gateway products will also allow for these agencies to communicate through out network. Paul said that's one of the reasons VCOMM chose the vendor they did, because they offered gateways. Jim Leene said the more we can work with border states the better our chances are of federal approval.

Barf Farr said VEM is working with 911 on reverse notifications and it would be great to use the radio system to get information out to the first responders as well. Terry LaValley said VCOMM would really have to look at this closely. The channels should not be congested.

Barb Farr brought up including the hospitals in the project. Terry LaValley said there was not enough money to include them in phase one of the project. Mike Manning said there are MMRS funds available to assist hospitals. Heather Gibbs said there was new guidance on the HRSA [there is possibly a new name for these this year] grants that included a significant amount of information about interoperability.

Bruce Beliveau said he is working with Terry on reviewing the technical specifications of the project. They will be going out with the vendor at the end of the month to visit sites to see what is feasible and what is not. Bruce said he has been giving technical advice on the grant. Terry said Bruce made the site visits sound easy, but they are very difficult and time consuming. This is one of the ways VCOMM is trying to lower the bid cost.

**Break:** 1110 – 1125 hrs

Paul Duquette said the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) grant is not as restrictive as the homeland security grants. VCOMM can use PSIC to enhance interoperability and is looking to fill the gaps the homeland security grants have created.

Mark Miller said to finish the SOPs he needs to find out who has the tactical channels and who doesn't. He plans to have a draft SOP in 45 – 60 days. The SOP will address procedures for who does have the channels. The SOP will have to comply with NIMS and ICS. He envisions agencies taking this SOP and adopting it to their needs. Mark encouraged anyone who wants to be involved with the SOP writing or anyone who has problems to report or suggestions to make to contact him.

**Lunch:** 1144 – 1205 hrs

Commissioner Sleeper said that MOUs for the state to use local funds is a constant issue at meetings he goes to since interoperability is a statewide goal. However, guidance still requires that 80% must go to the locals.

**DHART:**

Mark Miller proposed using V-Tac 4 for DHART landing zone (LZ) coordination to ensure consistency in communications. Walter Goodell wanted to clarify and stated that as he understood, V-Tac 4 would only use for DHART LZ coordination if DHART was involved and if DHART was not involved that V-Tac 4 would be up for the Incident Commander to use for whatever was deemed necessary. Mark confirmed and Walter confirmed that this was a good idea.

Paul said VCOMM has made communications for NY. Steve Salengo said V-Tac 4 would probably not be used for patient care and other orders, only for LZ coordination. Steve said his understanding is that DHART frequencies can be entered in, but that they requested that V-Tac 4 be permanently placed in their frequencies. If Incident Command or anyone needs to speak to DHART, they can do that request from an alternate frequency. Jake Elovirta said it would be for specific LZ and mark confirmed. A vote was called and all in favor said I, no one opposed. Paul asked mark to take care of contacting DHART.

Bruce Beliveau said NPSTC has gone into channel naming and wanted to know if Vermont will adopt this. Paul said this is a point of discussion for the group. Radios have already been reprogrammed and named with Vermont's channel names and Paul didn't want to go back and reprogram. VCOMM will continue with V-Tac naming as they have been. Mark will state in the SOP what Vermont's nomenclature is but make note that they have different names nationally. Bruce will give Mark the corresponding national names.

### **Other business:**

Paul said there are many projects throughout the state that VCOMM is interested in: Northlink, TerraStar and AOT interstate corridors. Charlie Kremer said the AOT fiber project's first leg is from White River Junction to Burlington. The latest estimate has construction starting as early as late 2008. They ran into a problem with the aerial mapping. Now they are driving the interstate to do the mapping. Charlie said there will be some opportunities to tap into this first leg.

Northlink's first leg is from Norton down to the St. Johnsbury area. They want to run across the top of the state. VCOMM will meet with Northlink in the next few weeks. They are building but very into planning. Charlie said we can all talk about what VCOMM can use as possible fiber and they will plan this into their construction design. They need partners. They have the funding but are looking for anyone to use the network.

The next project is TerraStar. This is a satellite provider that has the technology to link a cellular signal with a satellite signal. It will be chip set up into new cell phones, radios, data cards. If someone is using cellular voice or data and they pass out of coverage the signal will go automatically to satellite mode. Huge improvements in data speeds. There are only two projects currently underway; one in Utah and one here. Charlie said they picked the Newport area because of a Canadian company with spectrum in same range. Joint US/Canadian and border state. TerraStar has to prove to the FCC and DoD that they have a viable product. They have to prove themselves before going on a more commercial basis. Charlie said we have a chance, with Vermont not paying any money; we can test out any kind of antenna stuff we can see. The timeframe will be later this year. By late fall we should see some construction and attachment to antennas. Technologically if this works they will be interested in spreading this throughout Vermont. The satellite will be launched in fall 2008.

Charlie Kremer then discussed the Governor's e-state initiative. There is a Board being put together now. From there they will hire an Executive Director. There is an ad out and they are receiving resumes. There will always be co-location. Not sure how the Verizon-Unicel merger

will work yet. Paul said all of these projects are anticipated to be future phases of VCOMM when we identify areas that need coverage or for redundancy. We hope to keep a finger on the pulse of these projects.

In summation Paul said the Steering Committee is very busy. VCOMM has to address the PSIC justification and state plan. There is also the FY07 request for funding. Bruce Beliveau is doing site visits with Terry and negotiating a price with the vendor. Paul asked if there were any questions. Paul said the Steering Committee is on the web site and that people can reach out for the members any time. Once VCOMM has a price from the vendor, they will use Charlie Kremer's shop for an independent review. Paul said he hoped to get a contract by fall and have the project up and running in the spring.

**End:** 1238 hrs