

To: All State of Illinois Public Safety Agencies

**Special Attention: Users of VHF/UHF Radio Spectrum
(136 to 512 MHz)**

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Committee

Subject: Narrow-band Deadline

Since 1992, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been working to satisfy the public safety demand for additional frequencies in the 136 to 512 MHz frequency range. After many delays and several extensions the FCC set a deadline of January 1, 2011 for license applications requesting channels using 25 kHz bandwidth. After that date, new applications for 25 kHz (wide-band) channels will not be accepted nor processed by the FCC. As of January 1, 2013, operation of only 12.5 kHz or equivalent compliant equipment will be allowed. This means older wide band only equipment will need to be replaced prior to January 1, 2013.

The FCC set a February 14, 1997 as the deadline for type acceptance of 25 kHz radios. After that date, manufacturers applying for type acceptance of new products were required to manufacture radios that provided at least one voice channel per 12.5 kHz of spectrum to be compliant with the narrow band initiative. Most manufactures continued to produce the new types or models of radios in 25 kHz (wide band) but added capacity for unused narrow band features. The FCC ruling did not, however, prevent manufacturers from selling existing inventories for several years of previously type-accepted radios in the 25 kHz only bandwidth. These wide band only radios were typically much less expensive.

So, what does this all mean to you?

In essence, it means that public safety agencies with older wide band only radios that are not programmable for channel spacing, are faced with the expense of replacing existing equipment. Manufacturers were allowed to sell existing inventories of wide-band radios after the February 14, 1997 deadline. The best approach is to inventory all radios and check with manufactures to see if radios used in your agency are capable of being programmed for narrow channel spacing. To be safe, it would be reasonable to assume that in all probability, any radio purchased prior to January 1, 1999, will need to be replaced.

During the next 2.5 years, the Illinois public safety community must make a coordinated effort to migrate from our current 25 kHz channels to the new narrow band 12.5 kHz channels. The need for a coordinated effort is due to the number of legacy systems in Illinois that were implemented and/or evolved into interoperable channels that are used between agencies, and across disciplines, in the public safety environment. IREACH, ISPERN, IFERN, and MERCI are examples of these systems. Without a coordinated effort, public safety agencies responding to an emergency could well find they cannot talk to each other, even though they share common channels, because of the disparity in channel spacing.

The logical first step in addressing this issue is to identify what we have so we can establish whether radios are capable of being reprogrammed, or whether they must be replaced. Again, this involves all radios that operate between 136 and 512 MHz: paging systems, base radios, mobile radios, repeaters, and portable radios. There is going to be some expense involved for reprogramming and frequency coordination, but there is going to be significantly more expense involved if radios must be replaced. By starting this process now, most agencies will have two full budget cycles to deal with the expense of meeting the FCC's narrow-band initiative. Illinois APCO has started a awareness campaign and additional information including a slide presentation can be found on their website: <http://www.ilapco.org/narrowband.htm>

This is a daunting task and financially it could not be coming at a more complicated time. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you need help in determining if your radios will need to be replaced or if they're capable of being reprogrammed, please do not hesitate to contact the Multi-Agency Communications Services Section (MACSS): Jeff Sexton sextonj@isp.state.il.us 217-782-7347
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