



**A conversation with . . .**  
Bethel Volunteer Fire Department Chief

**David Aldrighetti**

The Bethel Volunteer Fire Department has a team of 25 firefighters. They assist in mutual aid calls to Barnard and South Royalton. They also are part of a three department Swiftwater Rescue Team. David Aldrighetti has been a part of the department since 1993 and became the Chief 10 years ago. His department responded to 85 calls in 2017, a number that is steadily growing. When tropical storm Irene hit the area in 2011, the Bethel area received around 6 inches of rain. We talked with him about how communications held up during the emergency and what difference it would have made to have a reliable FirstNet system to communicate.

**The concentrated rainfall and wind from the storm knocked out power and destroyed infrastructure throughout the state. Bethel had the highest costs for public infrastructure damage in the state--\$5.1 million. Did your communications structure withstand the storm?**

Fortunately, we maintained communication through the storm and never lost power. We have three repeaters and two run-on generators. However, as soon as we were out of range of our towers, we lost communication. We share a communication network with Barnard. We are on the same radio system with the same radio frequencies. That helped us communicate with the surrounding area.

**How did you overcome the gaps in your communication?**

A couple of days into the emergency, the feds took over. The highest ranking feds in our area were based at the U.S. Forest Service Ranger Station in Rochester. They literally would fly over the mountaintops and drop mobile repeaters down. They had radios that worked off those repeaters. Once we hooked up with them, we could communicate in most of the gaps.

**FirstNet and AT&T will be building out a cellular broadband network in Vermont. While not meant to replace the LMR system, how might reliable cell coverage have made a difference?**

During Irene, our cell coverage was not very good. There was a new tower in Bethel. If you went up to the top of that mountain, you had coverage. That became our backup. We are now in the process of converting our pager system to cell phones. Everybody has cell phones. Our cell provider is AT&T and our coverage is pretty good. I am looking forward to FirstNet going forward. Communication is a top concern for us in responding to an emergency.

## Communications in an Emergency



Michael Chamberlain, Windsor County Sheriff

We talked with several other members of the public safety community about tropical storm Irene and the potential future impact of FirstNet in Vermont. Here is what they had to say.

**“Communication can be challenging in Windsor County because of the terrain. We always use our radio first and the cell phones as a back-up. During tropical storm Irene we had very limited communication. Deputies were not able to access radio or cell signals in some areas. We had no portable towers or anything that could be put up in an emergency. If we**

**had good cell communication in 2011, we would have been able to communicate from Plymouth to our main office and have some means to communicate directly with deputies. It would be great if FirstNet would enable us to go to one channel and communicate with all other emergency personnel. We need this.”**

### Todd Menees

River Management Engineer, State of Vermont, southern region

*Regarding technology advances since 2011*

**“Now our team is equipped with smartphones. Now we have fiber optic service to our homes. We have a new AT&T tower in Andover and that has helped coverage, but coverage in our area is still like 50 percent. I know where there is coverage and I stop in those locations to collect cell messages and emails. It is encouraging to see build-outs in the area for cell coverage. I look forward to any improved coverage we may gain through FirstNet.”**



**Debris had to be cleared in many rivers and streams throughout Vermont as a result of flooding from tropical storm Irene. FEMA News Photo.**