

Vermont Responders Evaluate FirstNet

by Terry LaValley



I want to thank all of those who attended one of the seven regional information meetings on FirstNet. Starting in February, the Department of Public Safety began holding regional meetings to encourage dialogue between first responders and FirstNet and AT&T representatives. The final meeting was held April 30 in Milton. In all, more than 100 people attended the meetings, representing 103 different departments. A common request from first responders was for improved coverage in Vermont and affordable pricing.

No one is required to subscribe to the AT&T FirstNet cellular plans. It's anticipated that as the broadband network is built nationwide and in Vermont, coverage and applications will grow. AT&T began to market FirstNet subscriber plans in Vermont early this year. Not surprisingly, other carriers are responding by stepping up their marketing. There has been some confusion regarding what AT&T will provide via FirstNet subscriber plans versus other carriers. I'd like to clarify a few points.

Coverage: At this point in time, the cellular coverage area in Vermont remains unchanged. Regardless of what cellular carrier you are using, coverage is a first consideration. AT&T is starting an ambitious buildout with the support of designated federal funding from FirstNet. As reported to the Public Safety Broadband Network Commission (PSBC) in April, AT&T is working on 30 Vermont FirstNet sites, plus more business-as-usual sites, at the same time. The 25-year contract FirstNet has with AT&T requires the company to complete the initial buildout by 2022. You should remain alert to new developments in your area.

Band 14: Band 14 is a part of the 700 Mhz spectrum. Within that spectrum are bands that are licensed by the FCC to various vendors. Congress specifically licensed the Band 14 spectrum to FirstNet. As FirstNet's private partner, only AT&T has the right to use this spectrum and will be incorporating it into their overall network as they enhance their existing infrastructure and build new towers. In the future, AT&T may offer features and applications specific to Band 14. FirstNet approved devices that operate on the 700 Mhz Band 14 spectrum are starting to be released. Regardless of the carrier you use, the development of new technology will open the door to more communication options for first responders.



Terry LaValley
FirstNet Single Officer
& PSBC Chair

Subscriber Plans: Anyone who currently serves in a first responder role is eligible to sign up for a FirstNet subscriber plan. A primary user is any public safety organization/individual whose primary mission and job function is to provide services to the public in the area of law enforcement, fire protection or emergency medical services. When a public safety organization subscribes to a FirstNet plan, that organization will provide AT&T with a list of the names of people who serve in a primary role. Once a person's name has been submitted to AT&T, that first responder is eligible to subscribe, regardless of whether the individual is paying his/her own cell phone bill or the organization is paying the bill.

Pricing: DPS is currently working with AT&T on a FirstNet services pricing addendum. State of Vermont entities, municipalities, the University of Vermont and the Vermont State College system may use the addendum to purchase FirstNet plan services for qualified public safety subscribers. Departments also may elect to purchase services directly from AT&T.

There are several web sites you can go to for more information on FirstNet in Vermont. DPS provides administrative support for the PSBC.

PSBC.Vermont.gov: Commission web site, has links to the FirstNet sites.

FirstNet.gov: First Responder Network Authority web site, learn more about developments regarding the nationwide public safety broadband network.

FirstNet.com: AT&T web site for subscribers.

My office is available to help answer questions and direct members of Vermont's public safety community to any needed resources. Working with FirstNet, my office will be facilitating more outreach events this year. You may contact us via email at DPS.PSBC@Vermont.gov or by calling (802) 241-5535.