

A General Overview of FCC changes, the real story on P25, and grant funding guidance

FCC Required Changes

All FCC licensees of VHF and UHF 2-way radio systems are required to switch from 25 kHz (the current bandwidth standard) to 12.5 kHz (narrow band) before the end of 2012. **Operation at 25 kHz after December 31, 2012 is not permitted.** These changes apply to virtually all 2-way radio users with a few minor exclusions. See <http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/search/label/FCC%20Information>.

SAFECOM Approved Standards

SAFECOM provides the technical guidance to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in determining approved operating standards for interoperable 2-way radio communications. There is only one digital operating system meeting SAFECOM standards and that is P25!

Most of the language spoken in government documents is written in *double speak*, but you can make some sense of it. The selection of appropriate guidance is addressed on Page 11 of the 2010 SAFECOM Guidance for Federal Grant Programs. This includes ALL federal grant programs including not only fire, but law enforcement as well. You are invited to review this information for yourself in the applicable section at the link below:

www.safecomprogram.gov/NR/rdonlyres/31A870C0-0C9D-4C29-86F8-147D61AF25CF/0/FY_2010_SAFECOM_Recommended_Guidance_111809_Final.pdf

All new digital voice systems must be compliant with the Project 25 (P25) suite of standards. This requirement is intended for government-owned or -leased digital land mobile public safety radio equipment. This requirement does not apply to commercial voice services that offer other types of voice interoperability solutions. To ensure encrypted interoperability, the P25 suite of standards references the use of Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) in the Project 25 Block Encryption Protocol, ANSI/TIA-102.AAD. Entities pursuing encrypted communications capabilities must be compliant with the P25 Block Encryption Protocol.

This guidance does not preclude funding for non-P25 equipment when there are compelling reasons for using other solutions. Funding requests by agencies to replace or add radio equipment to an existing non-P25 system (such as procuring new portables for an existing analog system) will be considered if there is an explanation for how such equipment will improve interoperability or support eventual migration to interoperable systems. Absent these compelling reasons, P25 equipment will be required for LMR systems to which the standards apply.

DHS Grant Guidelines

All applicants requesting **funding for communications equipment must meet the guidance standards provided by SAFECOM.** This includes Assistance to Firefighter Grants. See reverse side for additional information.

Grant Guidelines at the State Level

It is the opinion of the Alabama DHS that **first responders must adhere to the Federal Guidance and Guidelines that accompanies any federal grant for which they have been awarded.** This office cannot draft policy and/or guidance for federally administered grant programs including the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters grant. – Chuck Murph, ADHS.

Region IV Guidance

The following correspondence was received from Vicki Murphy of the Region IV FEMA office on April 12, 2010. *When grantees make purchases with grant funds, they are required to assure that any equipment purchased meets current DHS and State Communications requirements (there are no 2-way radio State requirements in Alabama – See comment above). They are required to obtain price quotes from multiple vendor/manufacturers and purchase compliant equipment. If, after receiving price quotes, they cannot afford to purchase equipment which meets the current standard (P25); they can submit an amendment to reduce the number of items purchased. They may not, however, reduce the standard and they cannot buy less without an amendment.* This should clear up any questions, not only for the 2010 program BUT FOR PREVIOUS PROGRAMS AS WELL!

Additional Reference Material

The need for Interoperability – From a recent interview

Chris Essid, director of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications, is the driving force behind the effort to establish interoperable communications between first responders. Mr. Essid's comments are summarized as follows: *Simply put, police and fire chiefs — and the communications officers who answer to them — have a decades-old tendency to act out of self-preservation. Any kind of cultural change is very difficult to achieve, but especially in public safety.*

*But change is coming! Agencies are finding that self-preservation and self-sufficiency don't mesh in the current economic climate. There's not the funding for everyone to go out and buy their own thing anymore. We have to realize efficiencies and economies of scale, and the only way to do that is to work together and work the problem as a whole. Mr. Essid concluded by stating that **agencies that work together stand a greater chance of getting their projects funded.** The days of going it alone, and not caring about what your neighbors are doing, hopefully are over.*

For more information on Narrow Banding

An introduction to narrow banding – <http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2010/03/looking-for-facts-on-narrow-banding.html>

Latest update on narrow banding - <http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2010/04/new-fcc-narrow-band-changes-released>

For additional information on P25

Project 25 – Finalization of Common Air Interface – 1995

Project 25 – Overview, www.info4u.us/APCO25/

Project 25 – Technical, www.apcointl.org/frequency/project25/information.html

Project 25 – General, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_25#Adoption

Do you have to purchase P25? - <http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2009/09/message-to-public-safety-radio-users.html>

For some of the antics of the those opposed to P25

Now we've heard it all - <http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2010/03/now-weve-heard-it-all.html>

Doofus awards - <http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2010/03/doofus-of-day-awards.html>

Why MotoTRBO is not acceptable for public safety use

MotoTRBO technology explained - http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2010_02_01_archive.html

VHF or UHF – Which is better?

<http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2009/11/vhf-versus-800-mhz-real-facts.html>

Information on current FEMA grant program for fire departments

<http://falconinfo.blogspot.com/2010/03/2010-fema-fire-grant-program-overview.html>

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