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News Brief

New Specification Connects Public-Safety Gateways (4/15)

By Sandra Wendelken A group of six vendors demonstrated interoperability among their various mobile-communications gateways in the culmination of an 18-month-long effort to come together on an interface for VoIP-based gateways. The demonstration took place April 9 at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) facility in Boulder, Colo.

Representatives from Cisco, Clarity Communications, Motorola, Sytech, Twisted Pair and Valcom demonstrated how one vendor's bridge could pass a voice call to another vendor's bridge. For example, the new specification will allow a local public-safety agency's network to interoperate with a statewide public-safety network.

"We hope this is how things are moving instead of the more contentious standards process," said Luke Klein-Berndt, chief technology officer (CTO) for the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) science and technology directorate (S&T). "This is something you can implement quickly." The work is being done with help from DHS S&T in conjunction with NIST's Office of Law Enforcement Standards (OLES) and the Institute for Telecommunication Sciences (ITS). The bridging systems interface (BSI) is the first interface that the Public Safety VoIP Working Group has developed and tested; the next step is publication of the specification.

Industry suppliers first presented a technical draft of the specification last August, which was put out for comment. A draft was published in September, and Cisco and Twisted Pair performed the first vendor tests in early November. Several additional vendors helped draft the specification, but were not part of the most recent demonstration. Executives noted that each company is at a different product development stage for the specification, which is based on Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) technology. Some companies have commercially available products compliant with the specification, while others will release products throughout the year.

In addition to suppliers, at least 20 public-safety practitioners were involved in the working group as well. Alan Komenski, Washington statewide interoperability executive council (SIEC) section project manager, said Washington is interested in the specification as an interim

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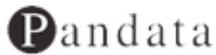

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step to connect networks throughout the state. In addition, Mark Hall, communications officer for the Fairmount Fire Service in Golden, Colo., and Tom Manka, deputy chief of the city of Thornton (Colo.) Police Department, noted how important the specification will be from both technical and operational perspectives.

In fact, one vendor representative said the technology included in the specification isn't ground breaking, but the fact that suppliers are working together to quickly bring the specification to users is noteworthy. The group held meetings for two days after the demonstration to discuss enhancements to the specification. Rob Mitchell, Twisted Pair Solutions market and technology specialist, said floor control likely will be the first added function to the specification. Floor control addresses which user has the ability to speak and allows one gateway to signal another vendor's gateway that it wants to communicate.

DHS Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) officials plan to implement the BSI as part of a radio over wireless broadband (ROW-B) project in Washington. ROW-B is a partnership with DHS OIC, the D.C. Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) and Clarity Communications. The project will integrate new broadband technologies with existing public-safety two-way radio systems, including the integration of location information. ROW-B, announced last year, originally planned to use the Project 25 (P25) Inter-RF Subsystem Interface (ISSI), however, it's not yet commercially available, DHS OIC officials said.

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