

How to Navigate the P25 Compliance Website

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The ability to communicate efficiently during an emergency, regardless of the scope of the event, is paramount for emergency responders to function properly and save lives. Interoperable radio communications plays a key role in this effort. After all, responding to the same event and having a possible overlap in efforts or a lack of coordination is dangerous for everyone at the scene, as well as for the community at large.

This lack of interoperability is due in large part to manufacturers producing radios that are incompatible with their competitors' radios. In an effort to reduce the problems this causes, Project 25 (P25) was born. Established through the coordination of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International, the National Association of State Telecommunications Directors (NASTD) and participating federal agencies, P25 sets forth a collection of standards for manufacturers to comply with while developing their technologies. The end result is that they will operate with other technologies on the market with the suite of standards enabling interoperability.

To ensure that manufacturers are developing radios to the standards set forth in P25, the P25 Compliance Assessment Program (CAP) was created. CAP is a system in which Department of Homeland Security (DHS)-recognized laboratories conduct tests on products claiming to be P25 compliant. The labs test the products' conformance to P25 standards and thus their interoperability with other manufacturer's products.

Following a successful test, a participating equipment manufacturer will submit a supplier's declaration of compliance (SDoC) and summary test report (STR) to the Responder Knowledge Base (RKB) website, www.rkb.us.

The RKB is an informational resource for emergency responders, funded through the DHS, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Preparedness Directorate. The RKB provides emergency responders, purchasers and planners with an integrated, online source of information on products, standards, grants and other equipment-related information. To help with purchasing decisions, all users may search this website for products that have demonstrated P25 compliance.

Once reviewed and approved by DHS/Office of Interoperability and Compatibility, the P25 SDoCs and STRs can be viewed on the RKB. They can be found by going to the Certifications and Declarations section of the site and filtering by P25 SDoCs in the left column.

Information on interoperable communications on the RKB is not limited to P25 SDoCs alone. A new feature is the Focus Areas section, which includes an area devoted to public-safety communications.

By clicking on the communications icon within the Focus Area section of the homepage, users will be directed to a collection of conferences, grants, operational assessments, products, publications, standards, training and links to other websites that focus on public-safety communications. For example, with more than 5,000 standards listed on the site, using the area will assist users in narrowing the results to the 55 P25 standards. Using publications as another example, from the almost 2,000 publications on the site,

the RKB staff has filtered the results down to approximately 10 to showcase a snapshot of relevant public-safety communications-related publications that are available on the RKB.

Having the right equipment is critical for emergency responders to do their job, especially when it comes to interoperable communications products. During an emergency situation, accurate and timely information exchange within the response community can save lives. To aid in this effort, the RKB website is an online resource where the public can access P25 SDoCs and STRs that demonstrate a supplier's compliance to P25. This knowledge, along with the vast amount of other equipment-related information the RKB has to offer, assists emergency response officials in making knowledgeable and smart purchasing decisions when it comes to their communications equipment.

Molly Wesley has served as a content analyst on the DHS/FEMA RKB for five years. She serves as the lead for the P25 program and the Ask An Expert feature. Prior to joining the RKB team, she worked for the Terrorism Research Center where she also worked on the RKB website.