Maryland
DEPARTMENT OF
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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MARYLAND
FiRST
First responders Interoperable Radio System Team

MD FIRST NEWSLETTER

OCT 8, 2020

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SOP website: https://doit.maryland.gov/support/Pages/Radio-Control-Board.aspx

Coverage Issue Reporting Tool: https://forms.gle/EkpDvQBK8qMXsDHr9

Table Rock Tower (Garrett County) – Site Construction complete, site expected to be online before the end of 2020.

Staying up-to-date

This Newsletter is for you, the people that use the MD FiRST statewide system day-in and day-out. Our mission is to bring you important information that will help you and your users keep up to date with System activity. We also want to provide convenient avenues for users to submit feedback to help us improve this system and support our users the best way we can. Please provide us with your ideas, comments, questions, stories and more – after all this is for you and your team.

• **New Addition to MD FiRST Team:** Pat King, Assistant System Manager moved from the Maryland State Police and joined the MD FiRST team in March 2020. Pat assists Brandon (Director, MD FiRST Operations) with the daily operation and maintenance of the system, which includes processing requests from users for changes or additions to the system and troubleshooting system and user issues.

Pats' experience includes 28 years as a sworn trooper and flight paramedic with the Maryland State Police Aviation Command, who retired as a Captain. Pat continued to work for an additional 3 years with the Maryland State Police Electronic Services Division as a Radio Technician Supervisor. Pat maintains his license as a Paramedic while he fills the role as the Assistant System Manager for MD FiRST.

• **MD FiRST Coverage Issue Reporting Tool:** MD FiRST now has a Coverage Issue Reporting Tool. The purpose of the tool is to allow Primary users of the MD FiRST system to submit reports of coverage issues for logging and analysis by the MD FiRST team. Capturing this data will allow the MD FiRST team to troubleshoot potential equipment problems and will also be used when determining priorities for the MD FiRST **Coverage Improvement Program.** Where possible, we ask that agencies assign a single POC to file these reports to reduce duplicate reports and to ensure accurate data.

Please use the following link to access the **Coverage Issue Reporting Tool**:

https://forms.gle/EkpDvQBK8qMXsDHr9
Please contact Justin Ellingwood for login information.

• **Tropical Storm Isaias Performance:** MD FiRST withstood Tropical Storm Isaias with relatively minor impacts. There were no major connectivity issues and only one site outage (Marion in Somerset County) due to a power outage and transfer switch issue. Site was offline approx. 1 hr. There was a large increase of airtime and PTTs during the height of storm, particularly on the Eastern Shore but the system performed well and handled the spike in volume. Though there was an increased number of busies (56), the average busy time was 0.7 seconds, and the Grade of Service (GOS) level was 0.04%, well below the GOS target of 1%.

System Maintenance

• **7.18 Upgrade:** The System Release 7.16 to 7.18 upgrade is nearly complete. The upgrade, underway since March, was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic causing access restrictions to most dispatch locations but work is now wrapping up. The next major system upgrade is expected in first half of 2022.

• **Site Preventative Maintenance:** Now that the system upgrade activities are winding down, techs are starting back on Preventative Maintenance (PM) activities. Moving forward, because of the growing size of the system, PMs will likely be more of a year-round activity rather than a concentrated effort. More information will be shared as specific activities are coordinated.

Project Development

This section is to provide you with information on the buildout and completion of the MD FiRST project until we reach the completion of Phase 5.

• **Phase 5 Coverage Testing:** Testing of Charles County set to begin on Oct 15th. Plan is to complete

Coverage testing of Charles, St Mary's, and Calvert Counties before the end of 2020. Prince George's County will be completed shortly after the new year, with Montgomery County occurring later in the spring. Phase 5 currently expected to "go-live" by the end of May 2021.

• **Table Rock ASR (Garrett County):** Site expected to be live by the end of 2020. Once online, additional coverage testing of Southern Garrett County will be conducted.

• **Georgia Ave Tower (Olney, Montgomery County):** Construction has been completed and turned over to SHA. Equipment installations ongoing. Site is expected to go live by the end of May 2021 with the rest of Montgomery County cell.

Coverage Improvement Program

We are continuously evaluating, testing, and gathering input from user reports, the **Coverage Issue Reporting Tool**, coverage modeling, and various other evaluation procedures to prioritize locations at which to improve MD FiRST coverage. Some of the recent/planned efforts will be outlined in this section.

• **Ocean City:** Tower remediation has been completed and the transmit antenna has been relocated to the top of the tower in order to increase the coverage footprint of the Ocean City ASR site. This was done to address multiple reports of poor coverage in the West Ocean City area. Before/After testing has shown significant improvements in signal strength from this site, and initial reports of coverage differences have all been positive. We encourage agencies to pass along any feedback (good or bad) they may receive from users in this area.

• **Tower Road ASR:** This site in North Central Frederick County became operational in May 2020. Addition of this site was intended to enhance coverage to secured areas such as Camp David and the surrounding State/National Parks.

• **Cherrytown ASR:** MD FiRST has performed final acceptance testing on the Cherrytown ASR Site in North Central Carroll County. This site enhances coverage in Pleasant Valley along the MD Rt. 97 "corridor" from Westminster toward the PA State Line.

Both Tower Rd and Cherrytown ASR have been "opened up" for operational traffic, please contact Brandon Renehan or Pat King directly if you want to verify your talkgroups are set up to use these sites appropriately.

• **Crisfield ASR:** MD FiRST is adding this site to enhance coverage in Crisfield and for marine units out in the Chesapeake Bay. Equipment already purchased, shelter expected to be placed by the end of October.

Additional coverage enhancements in Carroll County are planned for FY 2021 and will be announced in this newsletter as they progress.

SOPs, SOGs

All approved and signed SOPs and SOGs can be found on the following DoIT website: https://doit.maryland.gov/support/Pages/Radio-Control-Board.aspx

New and amended SOPS approved at the June 17, 2020 Radio Control Board meeting:

• **MD Call/MD TAC (amended)**
https://doit.maryland.gov/support/Radio%20Control%20Board%20Minutes/0.02B%20MD%20Call%20MD%20TAC%20SOP.pdf

• **MD Call/MD Event:** Intended for pre-planned events. This zone is a combination of clear and encrypted channels that mirrors the MD Call/MD TAC regional channel selection and is intended to reduce the dependency on MD TACs.

https://doit.maryland.gov/support/Radio%20Control%20Board%20Minutes/0.10%20MD%20Call%20MD%20Event%20SOP.pdf

• **MD Call/MD Law:** Restricted to Law Enforcement personnel only. This zone is intended for planned and emergent law enforcement operations. These channels are regionalized similar to the MD CALL / MD EVENTs, but all communications are encrypted for operational security.
https://doit.maryland.gov/support/Radio%20Control%20Board%20Minutes/0.09%20MDCall%20MD%20Law%20SOP.pdf

To activate or request use of the above interoperability talkgroups, please contact the Maryland Joint Operations Center (MJOC) as described in the "Activation" section of each SOP.

MD FiRST User Input

This is where Primary and Interop users share important information with other users. *If your agency has anything you want us to share with other MD FiRST users, please let us know and we can include it in future newsletters.*

Maryland's interoperable public safety radio system, Maryland FiRST, has been a great success in providing mission critical, interoperable, voice communications to Maryland's first responders. With over 85% of the system built out, there are over 25,000 first responders on the system as primary users with another 43,000 as interoperability users representing 66 State agencies, local governments, and Federal agencies.

In 2020 the Radio Control Board has approved the following new users:

Interoperability: Montgomery County, Wicomico County, Baltimore City (including Baltimore City Health Department)

Primary: Chesapeake College and Anne Arundel County (as a back-up in the event of a catastrophic breakdown of the AAC system).

Operational "SOP" Update - Patapsco Valley State Park: Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services has created a new SOP that utilizes the MD FiRST System for incidents occurring in Patapsco Valley State Park. Patapsco Valley State Park is a popular recreational area which sits low along the Patapsco River between Howard and Baltimore Counties. A recent review of increased requests for service led to several communications issues being identified. Even though Baltimore and Howard Counties both have robust P25 Public Safety Radio Systems, each have areas of the park where radio communications can be inconsistent.

In a joint effort between Howard and Baltimore Counties along with DNR's Natural Resources police, extensive testing of radio communications was performed throughout the park. In general, the MD FiRST system was found to have the most consistent level of coverage in all areas tested. As a result, Howard County has modified procedures in concert with DNR and the Baltimore County Fire Department. Upon notification of a fire, EMS, or rescue emergency in the park, the responding units will utilize a MD TAC channel on the Maryland FiRST system for interoperability and coverage, thereby ensuring that all first responders work seamlessly together in relaying information in real time to all parties.

Since adoption of this SOP, an MD TAC TG has already been used in a successful search for a missing hiker. Units on the ground during this operation called the use of MD FiRST "a game changer."

Please stay tuned for upcoming issues of your newsletter. Remember to use the tools listed in this issue. Please provide us with your ideas concerning topics/issues you would like included along with news from your region and/or agency.