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P25 Task Group to Investigate Fireground Noise Issues (8/18/08)

By Sandra Wendelken The APCO Project 25 (P25) Interface Committee (APIC), chaired by James Downes, with the Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC), created a special task group to investigate fireground noise issues. The task group will be chaired by D.J. Atkinson, Institute for Telecommunication Services (ITS) standards expert and the lead researcher in the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) digital noise tests conducted earlier this year for the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC).

"[The group] was given the specific objective to further investigate all the technology-related issues and specifically identify all the potential problems and solutions to those problems as quickly as possible so that we may make any appropriate changes in the standards or specific technical recommendations to industry, which may help in improving the performance of the products they sell," said Craig Jorgensen, co-chair of the P25 Steering Committee. "As a result of that work and the efforts being made by IAFC, we fully expect to substantially mitigate the adverse characteristics we saw in the first round of testing."

The first test results released in June will be a baseline for working toward improved audio quality for public-safety practitioners, Atkinson said. Based on that, the group will identify specific testing scenarios that will serve as a basis for developing quantitative requirements for audio quality for public-safety communications systems and potentially help narrow the quality issues to specific aspects of the system that can then be improved to enhance overall audio quality. "The overall goal of the group is well-defined, audio-related performance requirements for public-safety communications systems," Atkinson said.

Atkinson said the next next phase of testing likely will occur this fall or early winter. "It will take a couple of months to get a well-defined and agreed-upon test plan and then some additional time to prepare the material for the tests and arrange for practitioners to be able to participate," he said.

Jorgensen also noted that the fireground noise issues aren't vocoder specific, but a series of not-yet-defined ancillary issues that impact the vocoder's performance. "While I think we all agree vocoder performance is critical in ensuring proper audio quality and intelligibility, other non-vocoder problems, such as audio input technologies and methodologies and best practices, may in fact be of greater concern," Jorgensen said.

At the IAFC conference in Denver last week, the digital audio issue was briefly addressed in a panel titled, "What You Need to Know about Communications." Panelists said in addition to the next phase of testing, numerous training issues also must be addressed.

"The first round of testing that we did was a very collaborative effort between practitioners, manufacturers and the test lab," Atkinson said. "I'm looking forward to

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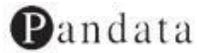


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continuing that collaborative environment in working toward resolution of the audio quality issues and defining performance requirements.”

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