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Advocacy Position Statement

Public Works and Interoperable Communications

Statement of Purpose

The American Public Works Association (APWA) seeks to inform elected officials, regulators, stakeholders at the state, federal and local level and the public at-large of its stated position on the importance of establishing a reliable interoperable communications system for public emergency responders, which includes public works.

Statement of Position

Being able to communicate efficiently and effectively between emergency responders, including public works, is critical for preparedness, response and recovery operations. In order for communities to be resilient to and capable of managing emergency situations, we support the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN) that is being developed by FirstNet.

Background and Rationale

In 2012, the “Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012” reserved the “D” block spectrum for emergency responders. The Act also created FirstNet within the Department of Homeland Security – Office of Emergency Communication. FirstNet is charged with developing and implementing the NPSBN. The NPSBN will provide communications interoperability when emergency responders have to provide mutual aid to other communities.

Currently, the vast majority of state and local emergency responders do not communicate with each other on the same radio frequency. Moreover, incompatible, aging communications equipment coupled with limited funding makes the goal of establishing an interoperable communication system for public safety that much more difficult to achieve, yet all the more necessary to protect communities.

When disaster strikes, local public works agencies are called upon to serve at the forefront during emergencies. Accordingly, public works agencies depend on a reliable interoperable emergency communications system that connects them to other responders, including law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical professionals, and other public works agencies during response and

recovery operations. Public works has a vital role in all natural, technical and manmade disasters, including clearing and repairing roadways, controlling flooding, removing debris, restoring utility services, and assisting with the operation of incident command centers and evacuation centers.

Importantly, the lack of an interoperable communications system places communities—and ultimately individuals—at risk for injury, loss of life and/or property in the wake of a disaster. Public works agencies recognize that through the use of interoperable emergency communications, they are able to better coordinate preparedness, response and recovery operations with other responders—thus creating safer communities and a more resilient nation.

APWA supports the efforts of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet – an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration [NTIA]) to provide public works and their other first responder counterparts with the first nationwide, high-speed, interoperable broadband network dedicated to public safety.

Sponsor

Emergency Management Committee

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