FOLLOW – UP REVIEW TO
AUDIT OF
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RADIO
PROGRAM

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Division of Inspector General

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The Honorable Chairman and Members
of the Board of County Commissioners

We have conducted a follow-up review of our audit of the Intergovernmental Radio Program. The objectives of our review were to determine the implementation status of our previous recommendations.

Of the three recommendations contained in the audit report, we determined that all three have been implemented. The status of each recommendation is presented in this follow-up review.

We appreciate the cooperation shown by the staff of the Public Safety Services during the course of this review.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Signature]

Hector Collazo, Jr., Director
Audit Services, Division of Inspector General

Approved:

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Ken Burke, CPA*
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INTRODUCTION

Scope and Methodology

We conducted a follow-up review of our audit of the Intergovernmental Radio Program. The purpose of our follow-up review was to determine the status of previous recommendations for improvement.

The purpose of the original audit was to:

- Determine that department objectives meet Federal, State and local government requirements, and these objectives best serve the County taxpayers for emergency communication and disaster activities.
- Determine that the funding for the Radio Program is adequate, funds are properly used to support the program objectives and the program assets are properly accounted for.
- Ensure that the Radio Program assets are properly secured, available for emergencies/disasters and properly monitored for performance.
- Confirm that the Intergovernmental Radio Program provides an interoperable system serving all public safety agencies and a number of non-public safety agencies operating in the County.

To determine the current status of our previous recommendations, we communicated with management to determine the actual actions taken to implement recommendations for improvement. We performed limited testing to verify the implementation of the recommendations for improvement.

Our follow-up audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing and, accordingly, included such tests of records and other auditing procedures, as we considered necessary in the circumstances. Our follow-up testing was performed during the months of October and November, 2009. The original audit period was October 1, 2005 through October 31, 2006.

Overall Conclusion

Of the three recommendations in the report, we determined that all three were implemented. We commend management for their implementation of all of our recommendations.
Background

The Pinellas County radio system was originally established in the early 1980's with the centralization of the various fire department UHF and VHF radio systems. In 1985, Motorola was the vendor selected to unify the communication network between the County Departments. The contractor offered refined "trunking" technology that supported the County needs.

In 1987, Pinellas County moved to replace the original radio systems with one central system. The latest technology available for radio communications was in the 800 MHz radio frequency band and offered the best solution to resolving radio frequency efficiency for a large number of users. This new system was originally intended to provide communications for the Sunstar EMS Ambulance Service, but was expanded to include the Fire Departments and County Departments. Motorola completed the installation of the radio system in 1988.

When the system was purchased, it was considered a long-term investment that could be upgraded and expanded as needed; Pinellas County Administration made the decision that Pinellas County would maintain and upgrade the system.

In 1994, the County embarked on a project to integrate all Law Enforcement agencies into the radio system, making the system a true Intergovernmental Public Safety Radio System. In 1996, the City of St. Petersburg transferred ownership of the City radio system to Pinellas County. This action enabled the unification of the radio systems serving public safety with the exception of the City of Clearwater who remains on an Ericsson system.

When the 800 MHz Radio System was installed, the County Administration made a decision to contract out the maintenance of the radio system backbone and the user radios due to the high costs of staffing and equipping a radio maintenance facility.

Over the years, the County system has undergone several upgrades. The first was a change from "Smartnet I" to "Smartnet II," enabling greater flexibility in communicating between more subscriber units. The system was migrated to "Smartzone" technology in 1999 and continues to undergo upgrades to accommodate the needs of the users. In 2005, the County began a multiyear plan to upgrade the system to a standards based (P25) system for interoperability with other systems in and throughout the region. The upgrade is funded by a Federal Regional Grant.
STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section reports our follow-up on actions taken by management on the Recommendations for Improvement in our original audit of the Intergovernmental Radio Program. The recommendations contained herein are those of the original audit, followed by the current status of the recommendations.

1. Management Has Not Formally Established Annual Objectives For Their Department Related To The Radio Program.

There are no formal written objectives established for the Emergency Communications Department’s 800 MHz Radio System. Program objectives and deliverables were indirectly present in several documents related to the Radio Program, but they were not quantified and summarized in one location. In addition, the accomplishments related to the objectives were not reported on formally. Our review of the available documents related to the general objectives and deliverables contained in the information presented found that the Radio Program met the need for emergency preparedness requirements for Pinellas County.

In the past, management did not believe there was a need to establish formal objectives and deliverables for the Radio Program. However, written objectives would assist management in providing the defined services for the Radio Program. Objectives would offer a clear standard for performance and promote understanding by other County departments, agencies and the general public.

The ever-changing scope of requirements being established by government agencies changes the individual objectives and deliverables for the Radio Program. Many of the Regional Radio Program objectives are the responsibility of the Regional Task Force with Pinellas County playing a part in delivering the services for the overall region. With formal established objectives, the staff and related support function will not lose their sense of program direction and the services to be delivered. Consequently, a formal method to evaluate objectives and deliverables would improve the overall management process for the Radio Program.

We Recommended management establish a specific plan by defining a set of relevant, measurable objectives for the Radio Program. Management should evaluate the position/successfulness of such objectives at least annually.

Status:

Implemented. Management has formally established annual objectives for their department related to the Radio Program.

No formal written policies, procedures and standards for security measures over the radio sites have been established. In general, the sites had security protection and the function was consistent between sites. Management had not documented industry standards for site security, evaluated the Pinellas site security to the standards and developed a plan, if needed, to improve security. An example of improvements for site security that management had not formally documented relates to security cameras. Only one site currently has security cameras, but management plans to install cameras at the other sites, as funds become available. The site security needs, possible improvements, and changes in security guidelines should be reviewed annually (coordinated with the budget process) to ensure that proper attention is given to security risk for the sites.

Without a formal plan, there may be confusion as to the level of security needed at a site causing some sites to be less secure than others. In addition, changes in standard security requirements for the sites may not be addressed without a formal program process.

**We Recommended** management develop a written set of security standards and procedures for the overall sites with any security measures set by each site. Management should evaluate the security plan at least annually.

**Status:**

Implemented. Formal written policies, procedures and standards have been established for security over Pinellas County radio sites.

3. The Clearwater Police Department Elected Not To Be A Member Of The Pinellas County 800 MHz Radio System, Thus Affecting The Ability Of A Seamless Transition For Regional Communication In An Emergency/Disaster.

The Clearwater Police Department does not have the ability to communicate with other departments and agencies in Pinellas County without altering their communication network equipment setup. The issue is caused by Clearwater electing to use different communication equipment than the rest of Pinellas County. In order for Clearwater to communicate with the rest of Pinellas County through the 800 MHz Radio System, a manual Channel patching (ACUTs or MotoBridge) must be connected to the Clearwater communication equipment. These capabilities depend upon the availability, timing and adequately trained Clearwater staff to perform the patching. This performance function is outside of the County's Emergency Communications Department (ECD) authority.

Pinellas County ECD is separate from each participating Federal, State and County agency. It is each agency’s responsibility to control inventory and the adequacy of their equipment. The ECD is responsible for providing the infrastructure; they manage the system itself, program the radios and make recommendations (i.e., handheld radios) that will best suit each agency’s ability to operate on the system. The ECD cannot be certain
that Clearwater staffing needs (availability and training) will be met in the case of an emergency/disaster. Thus, the ability to communicate with the Clearwater Police Department during an incident remains unclear.

The Pinellas County’s Radio System is designed to serve the public in an emergency; incorporating County Departments, County, State, and Federal agencies and a number of non-public safety agencies. The system allows seamless communication among all parties during an emergency/disaster.

The compatibility issue was caused when the Clearwater Police Department opted out of joining Pinellas County’s Radio System and aligning communication abilities with the rest of Pinellas County and other regional Counties/agencies. The Clearwater Police Department is the only public agency in Pinellas County not operating on the 800 MHz Radio System. Pinellas County has offered the Clearwater Police Department to come to the County’s 800 MHz system twice. The first time was in 1994 when the County was converting all the Police Departments to the current network. The second time was June 20, 2002; ECD was asked by the Pinellas County Administrator to make an offer to bring Clearwater into the system. The ECD Director made presentations to the Clearwater City Council. Both times, Clearwater opted-out of the program and chose to remain on their own system.

The extent of the effect of the Clearwater Police Department communication issue during an emergency/disaster is unclear. Communication abilities are significantly limited (i.e., slight delay, less clear communication, limited channels, etc.) due to dissimilar systems. In our opinion, it is uncertain whether the staffing needs at the Clearwater Police Department communication center will support emergency situations. As an example of the uncertainty concerning the Clearwater Police Department center staffing, the Clearwater Police Department requested the ECD Director to patch channels for the Iron Man Contest in order to communicate with surrounding Police Departments. The Clearwater Police Department center had an employee out of town and no one else to patch the channels.

The Clearwater Police Department communication issue also affects the ability of Pinellas County to meet a key objective of the Tampa Bay Urban Area Tactical Interoperable Communication Plan required by the US Department of Homeland Security. The objective states:

“In an incident, unless it is known that all responding agencies will be operating on the same shared communication system, the Incident Commander should immediately request the Communications Unit Leader to establish interoperable communications between event agencies. The communications center will activate applicable resources.

Interoperable communications will be attempted in the following order:

- Co-location of all Command and General Staff at the incident command post provides the best direct communications and reduces demand on interoperability resources.

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If the Command Staff and General Staff are users of a shared system, that system will be used to establish interoperable communications.

If the Command Staff and General Staff do not have a common shared system, the use of a mutual aid channel should be attempted to establish interoperable communications.

If none of the methods above are available, a request should be made to make use of any gateway devices that can interconnect the disparate radio systems of the Command Staff and General Staff. The communications center and the Regional Interoperability Coordinator will identify any available resources. However, the Unified Command Staff should be given first priority for available interoperable communications resources.”

**We Recommended** ECD obtain written confirmation from the Clearwater Police Department confirming staffing needs have been met. The confirmation should state that staff is both available and has the knowledge to properly use one of the communication capabilities in order to effectively communicate on the 800 MHz Radio System in the case of an emergency/disaster.

**Status:**

Implemented. Management states that they have verified that the Clearwater Police Department has sufficient personnel who are adequately trained to operate the interoperability network and mutual aid channels. Management further states that both systems (County and Clearwater) are being migrated to P25 technology and will be tied together for interoperability at the P25 level.