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Advocacy Position Statement

**Public Works and Interoperable Communications**

Statement of Purpose

The American Public Works Association (APWA) seeks to inform APWA members, elected officials, regulators, stakeholders and the public at-large of its stated position on the importance of establishing a reliable interoperable communications system for public safety/first responders.

Statement of Position

Being able to communicate efficiently and effectively between first responders is critical for mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery operations. In order for communities to be resilient to and capable of managing emergency situations, it is imperative that a nationwide interoperable digital radio transmission system—for both voice and data—be dedicated to first responders. Specifically, APWA advocates that the 700 MHz D Block spectrum be allocated—free of charge—to public safety.

Background and Rationale

Currently, the vast majority of state and local first 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.

The public works community is a critical component of any response and recovery efforts, and must be allowed to access any interoperable emergency communications network. 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 first responders, including law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical professionals, and other public works agencies during response and recovery operations. Through the use of emergency communications, public works dispatch personnel, mobile and fixed assets throughout all natural and manmade disasters, and terrorist attacks, remove debris, restore utility services, and assist 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 mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery operations with fellow first responders—thus creating safer communities and a more resilient nation.

Sponsor

Emergency Management Committee