



WHITE PAPER

BRAC-RELATED PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS

SUMMARY

In order to ensure security and continued public safety in the Fort Bragg region, it is necessary to fully implement a Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders (VIPER). This will enable public safety officials to communicate directly with one another without having to relay messages through a communications center. Updating the 11-county region's emergency response and public safety measures will cost approximately \$12.974 million.

THE CHALLENGE

The substantial population growth brought about by base realignment and closure will require an even greater need for military, state, county, and local emergency responders to work closely together to ensure public safety in the region. Normal growth in the region is already impacting the capability of emergency response agencies to react to catastrophic accidents and natural disasters effectively; BRAC-related population growth will exacerbate the problems stemming from the lack of communications interoperability.

In addition to the increased population, the military expansion of Fort Bragg will significantly elevate the threat profile of the region as the number of General Officer-level military personnel rises to a global level exceeded only at the Pentagon. Emergency responders must be prepared to respond to any and all threats that might arise as a result of the region becoming a potentially greater magnet for terrorism. However, there are many other situations besides terrorism where communications interoperability is critical. A recent fire on post is a prime example where the civilian fire departments were only able to communicate with the military responders through central communications. This is unacceptable in life threatening circumstances and is just the kind of situation that was evident on 9/11 and which VIPER was designed to correct. Situations like these put the emergency responders, as well as civilian and military personnel, at risk unnecessarily.

It is critical that public safety communications networks cut across jurisdictions to deliver information that is real-time and reliable. All eleven counties in the Fort Bragg region must be part of a region-wide interoperable public safety communication system as soon as possible. In order to establish this interoperability, law enforcement, fire departments, and rescue squads in the region will require significant additional emergency services funding. Without outside assistance, these local and county governments will not be able to absorb this additional cost of purchasing VIPER radios. With funding support, these local agencies could leverage the significant state and federal investment that has already been made in developing the state's VIPER infrastructure.

SCOPE

VIPER protects communities by enabling public safety officials to communicate with one another directly without having to get messages relayed through a third-party public communications system. The strategic solution is to construct a statewide 800 MHz radio

system that will provide interoperable communications for all public safety agencies in North Carolina. This has been done and the State Highway Patrol (SHP) is statutorily responsible for maintaining the VIPER infrastructure, towers, etc. The radios themselves however must be supplied by the local agencies, many of which are volunteer in nature and must raise the funding to support their operations.

COST

A total of \$12.974 million would be necessary to fully fund the equipment needs of the eleven BRAC region counties—Bladen, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson and Scotland counties. (See Attachment I noting the tabulation of equipment and dollars.)

CONCLUSION

To ensure the safety of the region's citizens and the security of the military installment and its personnel, it is necessary to establish an interoperable communications system linking all emergency responders. Due to the nature of the entities involved; spanning three different types of service providers in a multi-jurisdictional framework that includes multiple non-profit and volunteer organizations; there is no simple solution. The region has no precedent to go by as it seeks a holistic solution to this complex issue. The region is actively seeking funding opportunities that will make this interoperability, and the safety and security it provides, possible.

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QUICK FACTS ON VIPER¹

- 238 total sites planned for 100% implementation of VIPER; 95% street-level coverage based on a 5 watt portable radio
- 139 sites constructed and on-the-air
- 62 sites are fully funded and under construction
- 37 sites remaining to be funded and built as of 7/31/09
- Funding to-date has been a combination of Congressional earmarks (received prior to VIPER project 2%), State appropriations (21%), and DHS Funds (77%)
- VIPER is 58% complete (number of sites) with 139 sites on-the-air
- VIPER infrastructure is 57% funded
- 43% of VIPER remains to be funded
- 34,104 users are currently on the VIPER Network
- 150 Emergency Responding agencies (including Federal, State and local agencies) make up the 34,104 users
- SC has the same type Interoperable System; NC/SC can talk to each other using the same type user device

¹ <http://www.nccrimecontrol.org/> on 8/7/2009, Updated 07/31/09