

# MISSION CRITICAL

## WESTMORELAND COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

### REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

“Public safety may be the most critical responsibility we have in county government, and spending millions of dollars to improve it requires both good judgment and conviction. Sometimes you have to balance public investment with the responsibility to protect and save lives.”

— TOM BALYA, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, WESTMORELAND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS





## True Interoperability

The fire chiefs were sending runners...

"We did an exercise using the legacy equipment – hopefully for the very last time," remembers Matason, "and it became necessary for the fire chiefs and the incident commander to communicate by sending runners. The way to eliminate that is to have some means of interoperability. The 800 MHz system is a viable solution to eliminate chaos on the emergency field, so that fire, police, and EMS can talk to each other at the same time on the same field."

Chief Hobaugh knows what interoperability means on the front lines. "No matter what goes on at the scene, whether it be hazmat, a tank car overturned, a house fire, a possible wreck with entrapment, we have the interoperability to work with every agency on the scene. All I have to do is get them on the radio."

### **"You have to start doing your homework"**

How do you get more than a hundred agencies to agree? "You have to start doing your homework three to four years in advance," says Matason. "Without a consensus, the project is not going to go anywhere."

Board member Ceraso says, "Try to get as much input as you can from the people that are going to be on the system. By setting politics aside, we had a lot of people who maybe never had a seat at the table. Their opinion is important because down the road, when they go to use the system, they're going to know that they had a part in it and they're going to accept it that much sooner."

As a volunteer firefighter, Chief Hobaugh was one of those people at the table. "I thought Westmoreland County and the Department of Public Safety did an excellent job, because they got everybody involved. Law enforcement, fire, public safety, the ambulance, the EMA directors, everybody had their own input and their own needs and worked together as a group."



## Critical Networks

“Any call that comes into 911 is a critical call”

“I don’t think anybody would disagree that any call that comes into 911 is a critical call,” says Matason. “The advantage of owning a Mission Critical solution is that we own it, we run it and we’ll determine how it’s going to be used. When you go on a system from a commercial provider, you’re bound by their rules. Those might not be rules you want to abide by.”

One of the new network’s strengths is real-time monitoring of system performance. On the old system, “We had no way of telling if there was a problem. With the new radio system, with all the monitoring and alarms, the shift supervisor immediately knows if we’ve lost power to a specific tower site,” says Brammell.

### Funding the best technology

**Step 1: \$14-15 million initial bond issue.** “The funding was a critical piece of our timetable,” says Matason. “I can’t say enough of the commissioners having the foresight to do a bond issue to get us started.” County Board Chairman Tom Balya puts the expense into perspective, “Lots of things have changed in recent years, things we never dreamed of happening in our country. There was a recognition that we’re operating in an ever-changing world and we need to have the best technology available to meet those needs.”

**Step 2: \$2 million State and Local Emergency Preparedness Grant arranged by Congressman John Murtha.** “There was a need to help finance equipment for entities that aren’t directly attached to the county,” says board member Ceraso. “About \$1.3m of this grant was used to buy radios for first responders, including the volunteer fire departments.”

**Step 3: \$6 million Federal Homeland Security Grant.** “That enabled us to buy a mobile radio for every piece of fire apparatus, every police car, every ambulance, plus all public safety and public works vehicles,” says Matason. Ceraso says, “Our radio system was the only one at the time in Pennsylvania that was even qualified to get the money from the federal government, partly because of the interoperability of the system.”

Brammell suggests that communities applying for grants should be prepared. “As far as grant funding, have a vision of where you want to be in the future and how you’re going to get there. I believe that’s one of the reasons why we received the grant. Even more was because our county commissioners made the commitment to put the infrastructure in. We had a plan in place.”



## Mission Critical Data

“Rip-and-run will help us respond a little quicker”

“On every survey that we got back from the field, data came up as one of the critical elements,” says Matason. “The first data solution that we’re going to use is what’s called ‘rip and run’ – which will allow us to send valuable information from our CAD (computer-aided dispatch) system to the firehouse, so that firefighters can literally go over to the printer and rip off the essential information and have it in their hands on the way out the door.”

“The data we’ll be able to rip and run will help us respond a little quicker,” predicts Chief Hobaugh.

The next step is to stream law enforcement data, such as on-scene times and dispatch times, from squad cars to the police departments. Then, says Brammell, “We’ll move toward a high-speed data system, bringing mobile data terminals into the police cars, the fire service and EMS.”

“We’re really looking forward to the next step,” says Chief Mastroianni. “Obviously it would be a whole lot faster and efficient to have an officer look up information himself.”

### Training is vital

“This is not your grandpa’s radio,” says Chief Mastroianni. “The system has so much capacity, and the capabilities are so great compared to what we’re used to. The training turned into a very important component. In the middle of a critical incident is not the time to learn how to use a radio.”

“Interoperability is really a two-part phenomenon,” explains Matason. “There’s technical interoperability, and then there’s operational interoperability, which is an educational and training issue. These radios require a significantly greater amount of training. We have read horror stories nationwide of emergency responders who were saying very negative things about the 800 MHz system, when in reality they should have been saying negative things about the training they received.”

We have mandated that no one is going on this system unless we have verification that they have been trained and that they understand how to use the radios.”

Chief Hobaugh says the required training is, “A big positive. The initial changes were difficult. When people talk on the radio, they have to wait for the click and a lot of people weren’t used to that. Change is tough; you can’t take somebody and expect them to roll over and change the very next day. The system in time will only grow better. The training helped.”

“It’s something as Chief of Police I worried about every day, my officers not being able to effectively communicate with one another.”

— CHIEF MICHAEL MASTROIANNI, PENN TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT



## SITUATION

Westmoreland County, PA, is home to nearly 370,000 residents and 4,000 emergency first responders. The diverse terrain and a patchwork of legacy radio systems made communication difficult.

Rich Matason, Director of Public Safety for the county explains, “A wide spectrum of radio usage doesn’t make for good inter-agency communications.” Bill Hobaugh, Volunteer Fire Chief in Penn Township, agrees. “The biggest communication challenge we have is to communicate with other agencies involved in a fire or disaster, and the big reason is they all operate on different frequencies.”

County Commissioner Tom Ceraso was among the officials who realized, “Our old radio system was not meeting the needs of the citizens of Westmoreland County. As a government, we’re charged with public safety. We can’t allow people to suffer – or God forbid die – because our infrastructure isn’t up to date.”

## SOLUTION

*One county-wide network.*

**System:** A 25-site, 800 MHz trunked digital radio system.

**Coverage area:** The entire county, over 1,000 square miles including mountains and river valleys where radio coverage was not previously available.

**Users:** “We dispatch 40 law enforcement and 40 EMS services,” says Mark Brammell, the county’s Deputy Director of Public Safety. “We have 117 fire departments along with multiple county agencies. Now we have one radio system. It doesn’t matter anymore where they are located: everybody can communicate directly with each other.”

## RESULT

“Using VHF, we probably had coverage in 40% of our county. With UHF, it was maybe 60%. With the new system it’s more like 95%,” says Matason.

“We’re going to eliminate a half-dozen different types of radio and we’re going to consolidate that into one system. It’s going to be a financial savings, plus simplicity savings. To the citizens, they’re just going to be happy to know that no matter where they live, an emergency responder will be able to talk from their location.”

Chief Mastroianni sees the benefits every day on the job. “It’s everything I had hoped for plus. The technology is so far flawless. I really do believe this was a giant step forward for public safety in the county.”

**“We’re very happy with Motorola’s commitment into making sure that first responders had an opportunity to view and evaluate the technology. I think that we have really made a wise investment of public money into an emergency radio communication system that will serve the needs of Westmoreland County for years to come.”**

**– County Board Chairman Tom Balya**

**“We needed technology that was proven in the field, and we needed it to be expandable as new technologies come along. Frankly, the only company that met that need was Motorola.”**

**– County Board member Tom Ceraso**

**Learn more about Motorola Mission Critical solutions.**

**We invite you to subscribe to the Motorola Mission Critical Solutions Series. You’ll receive in-depth white papers on important Public Safety topics including True Interoperability, Critical Networks, and Mission Critical Data. Simply visit [www.motorola.com/missioncritical](http://www.motorola.com/missioncritical) or call 1-800-367-2346.**

## **Over 65 years of understanding the needs of public safety**

In today’s world you need a partner who understands what Mission Critical is all about: the lives and well-being of your employees and the citizens they protect. That’s why Motorola is a leading provider of interoperable communications systems for public safety and first responders. Our experience in the public sector, along with our skills, people, partnerships and alliances, allow us to build innovative, fully integrated technologies that help organizations like yours share vital information with ease and confidence. We’ve been doing it for 65 years, and we’ll be standing by our customers for years to come.

We are committed to bringing all of our knowledge and technical expertise together so you can focus on what you do best... to serve and protect the public.



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