

Congress has approved an allocation of \$7 billion and 20 megahertz of spectrum airwaves to help first responders improve their communication with one another. This comes over 10 years after September 11, 2001 when the first responders reported having poor communication with each other when they were trying to effectively coordinate the rescue of the many who were seriously injured in the tragedy.

The goal of the project is to create national public safety network. The proposed network would give first responders the ability to send video, voice, data and picture messages to one another.

Many Changes Lie Ahead

Many hurdles will arise with the implementation of the new system. The National Governor's Association will meet in June to discuss the options states will have with the new system and assist the states in understanding the new program.

FirstNet, a new agency, will be created by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, a division of the Department of Commerce. FirstNet will come to being on August 20. FirstNet will be in charge of the nationwide network and will also choose an operator from the private sector to help with the process. States will have the opportunity to opt out of having FirstNet put their system together and design one of their own.

Opt Out Procedures

States that decide to opt out will have a host of requirements to live up to. The states must meet very specific technical requirements and will not have as much funding to work with as those states that go with FirstNet. The opt-out states will receive funding for creating the network but will not receive any funding for maintaining or operating the network.

The national network may be expensive, but officials believe that it is necessary and will save many lives.

Source: Stateline, "States, Feds Poised to Write New Chapter in Public Safety Communications," Melissa Maynard, May 30, 2012