

STATEMENT OF RUSS SVEDA
MANAGER OF THE RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICE CENTER
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HEARING ON
PROGRESS ON P25: FURTHERING INTEROPERABILITY AND COMPETITION FOR
PUBLIC SAFETY RADIO EQUIPMENT
SEPTEMBER 23, 2010

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of the Interior's testing program for Project 25. My name is Russ Sveda. I am the Manager of the Radio Technical Service Center for the Department of the Interior (Department), where we provide land mobile radio systems engineering and product testing for the Department. I have almost 30 years of military and civilian Government experience in radio communications and look forward to sharing my experiences with the Subcommittee.

To provide a little background, because of the Department's broad land management portfolio, the Department has land mobile radios and systems in use across nearly all of the 50 states and U.S. territories. Our operations, particularly in law enforcement and wildland fire fighting, require a high degree of interoperability with other Federal, Tribal, State and local agencies. Our law enforcement officers and fire fighters work in remote locations across the country supporting various incidents, whether at a wildland fire in Alaska, a joint operation with the Border Patrol in the Southwest, or a hurricane relief effort in the Southeast. A clear and concise standard for land mobile radio, and confidence in the products' adherence to those standards, are extremely important to us.

The Department of the Interior adopted the Project 25 Standards in 1996 and has been buying and using products that purport to adhere to this standard since then. Unlike many of the other organizations who contract the design and implementation of a turnkey system, we typically design and install our own land mobile radio systems with components purchased from multiple vendors in order to minimize costs.

Our interest in the Project 25 standards and interoperability goes beyond whether vendor “A’s” radio works with vendor “B’s” radio and into the land mobile radio “system.” Our mission demands that not only must Radio “A”, “B” and “C” interoperate on our local system, but our users’ handheld and mobile radios must also work effectively on any system in the country. With our in-house system design and implementation, we must further ensure that system equipment from vendor “A” works with equipment from vendor “B” and vendor “C”.

The slow pace of the development of the Project 25 Standards has created some frustration in the radio user community. While I applaud the industry for the success in establishing a solid Common Air Interface so that different radios can talk to each other, most of the standards are still in development. We have invested 14 years into this technology and today, we are still not able to design and install a Project 25 compliant “system” without significant engineering and customization.

The Department started testing Project 25 products in 2002 as part of a Department-wide contract. We found this necessary because of the experiences we and our users had with what I would call the “first generation” Project 25 products. Since that time, we have evolved our testing along with the evolution of the standards. Today, we test the Project 25 products offered under yet another contract that supports both the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture.

Our current testing is based on the Project 25 Standards and specifically targets performance, conformance, and interoperability. To use resources efficiently, we select specific tests based on the risk and impact to our users.

Since 2002, we have seen a drastic improvement in the Project 25 products and a significant increase in the number of vendors that can provide those products. There is still a long road ahead.

We envision continuing to test Project 25 products until all the standards are published and the industry has matured in complying with those standards.

The Department is committed to supporting the Project 25 Standards, and we welcome your support and attention to this topic. It is in the best interest of the government and in particular of those who place themselves in harms' way to continue the standards development and independent testing of Project 25.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions that you or the members of the Subcommittee may have.