

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF
FEBRUARY 13, 2008

The meeting was called to order at 4:07 PM in the Novato Fire Protection District's Administrative Office.

IN ATTENDANCE: Dan Keen (Vice-Chair), Jean Bonander, Bob Doyle, Ken Nordhoff, Anne Montgomery, Richard Pearce, Marc Revere and Denis Walsh. Staff: Maureen Cassingham, Richard Chuck, Farhad Mansourian and Shelly Nelson.

- A. The notes from the December 3, 2007 meeting were approved.
- B. Executive Officer Cassingham reported the transfer of day-to-day administrative responsibilities from former Executive Officer Garvey has been smooth and is now complete. She reported being briefed on the MERA system by Mansourian, Chuck and Nelson; attending Operational Issues Work Group meetings; and, attending upcoming meetings of the Marin County Police and Fire Chiefs' Associations. Cassingham updated the Committee on contacts from the Grand Jury for information on MERA relative to the County schools participation in the system. Sheriff Doyle and Mansourian reported on being called before the Grand Jury Sub-Committee about operational issues, status of the schools current emergency communications system and the schools participation in MERA. The County schools, some years ago were invited, at no cost, to use the MERA system for emergency communications provided they purchase their own radios. Mansourian is not recommending any additional users until operational issues are addressed.
- C. Mansourian reported the MERA training manual is complete and thanked Chuck and Nelson for their hard work on it. By the end of February, over 2,000 users will have been trained. Mansourian introduced Chuck's presentation on the MERA system January 4, 2008 storm related operational issues. All channels were fully operational throughout the event but the system was overloaded for four hours primarily due to law and fire usage. Chuck reported that January 4, 2008 system activity was nearly double in calls over a typical day, including 80-call-hours and more than 19 busy hours. Public Works either was bumped out of the system due to their priority or could not finish their calls. The East and West systems along the 101 corridor experienced the highest number of busies. Factors contributing to system busies were the number of radio channels available, number of users wanting to talk, number of talk groups on the system, system priorities and hang-time.

Nordhoff asked about system design. Chuck said MERA was designed using day-to-day operating levels at peak hours and designated preferred systems. System trunking is based on the statistical probability not all users will need to talk at the same time.

Chuck and Nelson reported the system originally had 1,580 radios and 2,716 radios are currently on it, which is at the 20 year projected system capacity. The original cost share formula was based, in part, on the number of radios per agency. Chuck noted that radios “left on” versus “in use” also contributed to busies since traffic follows them. Montgomery and Nordhoff noted the need to address the number of radios on the system and system priorities.

Mansourian and Chuck stated the January 4 system overload raised a number of issues: namely, who has the official authority to designate system priorities, whether a “storm priority” could be assigned to Public Works, whether dispatchers or incidents can be assigned to other talk groups, lack of hang-time for Public Works and radio discipline.

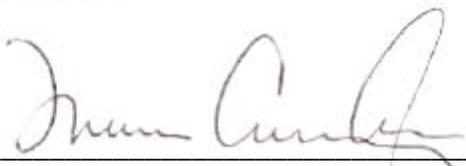
Mansourian said staff has presented event data to the Operational Issues Work Group and to a joint meeting of Police and Fire Chiefs and Public Works Directors for their information and input on short, medium and long-term solutions for system overload. Additional channels would take several years and ±\$6million even if MERA could get FCC approval. Mansourian said the Fire Chiefs’ Association will be approached on February 21 about using their high-band frequencies during anticipated overload events. Nordhoff inquired about assigning different priorities during disasters. Either the Executive Committee or Board should officially sanction user priorities, which, in the past, had been established by an informal tactical group. Bonander asked for the inclusion of other system users in developing overload solutions. She said protocols are needed for other radio systems to work with MERA during events. Another meeting of the Executive Committee will be needed to give staff direction or to take formal action on recommended solutions. Pearce stated MERA had zero surge capacity in this storm and relied on redundant systems to get through. Mansourian said Public Works could also move to high-band during an event. Other incremental actions that could help would be to cap the number of radios or limit the number of talk groups.

Bonander reiterated MERA is dealing with capacity issues, not system failure. She inquired how MERA performed on January 4 in comparison to other California systems. Chuck said San Francisco had many more problems with busies and Sacramento had to turn off talk groups. Keen said emergency training prepares you for likelihood of all systems being overloaded. The Board has given the Executive Committee the authority to act on solutions with all groups input. Nordhoff asked for a proposed policy on additional radios. Mansourian reported he is still working on coverage problems with the consultant who is soliciting input from jurisdictions in those areas. Bonander summarized MERA system is evolving including more activity, different uses and changing circumstances. This is an opportunity to take appropriate action to enhance it.

D. There were no comments during Open Time.

E. The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 PM.

Submitted: _____


Maureen Cassingham, Executive Officer

APPROVED May 27, 2008