



Excellent News for Public Safety Agencies on the Northern Border: Agreement Improves Cross Border Communications between the U.S. and Canada

Cross border public safety communications is a complex issue that affects all first responder organizations which operate near the U.S. and Canadian border. Fire departments and EMS organizations are frequently asked to cross the national border to render aid. They may be the primary agency assigned to respond to an emergency across the border or they may be supporting a local agency that needs additional assistance.

On June 30, 2016, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Canada's Innovation Science and Economic Development (ISED) jointly released documents that enhance cross border communications. The FCC [Public Notice](#) provides guidance to U.S. public safety licensees seeking to: (1) roam into Canada; (2) communicate from the U.S. through base station repeaters in Canada; or (3) host Canadian licensees seeking to communicate through base station repeaters in the U.S.

The FCC Public Notice also provides a path for U.S. public safety agencies to seek authorization to operate on frequencies used by Canadian first responders, even if those frequencies fall outside Public Safety Pool.

This is excellent news for first responders on both sides of the border. The continuing efforts of NPSTC and CITIG [Canadian Interoperability Technology Interest Group] supported by DHS's Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) and the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) will enhance public safety interoperability in a very tangible manner. "We also want to thank the hard work of the officials with the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau who have worked with Canadian officials for many years to create workable solutions for first responders," said Marilyn Ward, NPSTC Executive Director. Additionally, last year, the FCC and ISED provided regulatory guidance that allows the use of mobile and portable radios at, and across, the international border.



2010 Joint U.S./Canada Meetings Identify Top Interoperability Priorities. In 2010 OEC and Public Safety Canada (PSC) assembled first responders from the U.S. and Canada for a 2-day meeting with the goal of creating a list of priorities for cross border interoperability. Three scenarios were identified which needed immediate action.

1. Operation of mobile and/or portable radio transceivers on the other side of the border in the "direct" mode. For example, a firefighter at the scene of a wildland fire needs to communicate directly with a

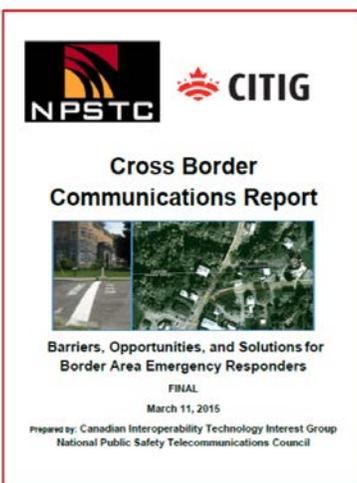
firefighter across the border. The message may be critical to life and safety, including an alert that the wind direction has shifted and the other firefighter is in extreme danger.

2. Use of base station repeaters on the other side of the border to interoperate with public safety officials *in the other country*. Mission critical communications need to occur from distances greater than are available using direct mode/simplex communications described in Scenario #1. This may require the installation of a mutual aid repeater to allow extended interoperable communications. An ambulance responding from the U.S. into Canada could communicate with the Canadian fire truck already on scene.

3. Use of base station repeaters on the other side of the border to communicate with public safety officials *in their own country*. There are many instances in which the mountainous geography will block radio systems from providing coverage. One solution is the installation of a base station repeater in a location that can reach the response area of the local agency. In some cases, the only location for the repeater may be across the border.

The recent FCC and ISED actions have provided regulatory solutions for all three of these cross border radio scenarios.

What Else Has Been Done? Last year NPSTC and CITIG published the [Cross Border Communications Report: Barriers, Opportunities, and Solutions for Border First Responders](#), a comprehensive study of cross border public safety



communications at the local first responder level. The report is designed to clarify legal and regulatory policies, identify best practices and examples of interoperability excellence, and advance specific recommendations to enhance public safety communications at the national border. It includes 31 recommendations broken down by lanes of the SAFECOM continuum: Governance, Standard Operating Procedures, Technology (voice and data), Training and Exercises, and Usage.

CAUSE IV - Lessons Learned from the U.S. Canadian Cross-Border Experiment

. DHS's Science and Technology Directorate (DHS-S&T) and the Defence Research and Development Canada's Centre for Security Science (DRDC CSS) have been strong advocates championing the identification, testing, and implementation of various radio, data, and technology platforms to enhance cross border emergency communications. In this year's CAUSE IV, a fictional tornado has devastated a community on the border between the United States and Canada. Paramedics were engaged in a successful test which verified that voice, video, and data communications could continue uninterrupted as ambulances crossed from one country into another and transitioned from one public safety radio network to another. This test was designed to examine cross border data interoperability between the U.S. FirstNet system and Canada's public safety broadband network.