



# PEHSC

Pennsylvania Emergency Health Services Council

## Key Points About The FCC Narrowbanding Requirements

Most current public safety radio systems use “wideband” channels.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has mandated that public safety licensees using wideband radio systems within the VHF-High Band (150mHz) and UHF (450mHz) migrate to narrowband channels by January 1, 2013.

- Agencies that do not meet the deadline face the loss of communication capabilities.
- Agencies need to start planning now to migrate to narrowband systems by assessing their current radio equipment and applying for new or modified licenses.
- Agencies will need to certify to the FCC by 1/1/2013 they have made the conversion. Licensees who do not will likely be automatically terminated on the deadline date. Relicensing cancelled systems will not be a easy process, and the FCC has indicated it will not easily grant waivers for continued wideband operation after the deadline.

## Planning for the Move to Narrowband

Public safety agencies generally, and emergency medical services particularly, need to aggressively develop a strategy to meet Federal Communications Commission narrowband requirements and deadlines to avoid losing their critical communications capabilities. Although the migration deadline may seem far off, the long lead time and interim deadlines make it necessary for agencies to plan well in advance.

**Assess current equipment and start planning.** To prepare for the migration, agencies should start assessing their radio systems and planning for replacements or upgrades. They should inventory their current equipment to ascertain what can be converted to narrowband and what will need to be replaced before January 1, 2013. Most new equipment has the capability for continued use because any VHF/UHF radio equipment accepted by the FCC after February 14, 1997, had to have narrowband capability. Narrowband equipment is available in both conventional analog FM (currently the most common format) and digital formats (such as Project 25), so narrowband conventional FM systems will be compliant. Both system owners (counties, local governments, etc.) and end users (EMS providers) should develop contingency plans to accommodate system changes for both public safety and nonpublic safety systems.

**Obtain new or modified licenses.** To move to narrowband operations, agencies must apply for new frequencies or modify existing licenses. Consideration of applications for new narrowband licenses will follow the same process as a new license application; existing FCC licenses will not automatically be modified to reflect permission to operate on narrowband channels.

## Deadlines

To phase in the migration deadline of January 1, 2013, the FCC has established interim deadlines. The first important deadline is January 1, 2011, after which:

- The FCC will not grant applications for new voice operations or applications to expand the authorized contour of existing stations that use existing "wideband" channels. Only narrowband authorizations will be granted.
- The FCC will prohibit manufacture or importation of new equipment that operates on wideband channels. This will reduce the availability of new equipment for legacy radio systems and will affect how agencies maintain and upgrade older systems.

### Basic Questions & Answers

*Q - Are we forced to move to 700 or 800 MHz?*

A - No. Narrowbanding does not require moving to another frequency band.

*Q - Will we have to buy new radios?*

A - Depends. Generally, most radios purchased in the last 6-8 years are already narrowband capable. They only need to be re-tuned. However, some may need costly modification. Also, while some radios are narrowband capable there may be changes to the current performance in the wideband operation. Mostly a slight decrease in available volume from the radio.

*Q - How do I determine which of my radios will need to be replaced or re-tuned?*

A - You should consult with the many communications resources available to your organization. A good start would be with your local Emergency Management Agency and your current radio service shop.

*Q - Will we need to change frequencies?*

A - No. You merely reduce the bandwidth of the channel(s) you are now using. (In time, additional radio channels will become available, and may become an asset you may wish to pursue to improve your communications system.)

*Q - Will that reduce our coverage?*

A - Little if any. You may have to survey your system and area of operation. Only a thorough analysis of your coverage requirements can tell for sure, however.

*Q - Will we have to convert to digital communications?*

A - No. However, many agencies are using this opportunity to upgrade to digital technology. Most digital radios are dual mode capable and can operate in wide band analog as well as narrowband analog and digital. Digital is also more immune from adjacent channel interference along with features unavailable in analog.

*Q - We do not have the money to move to narrowband. Isn't this an unfunded mandate?*

A - Not really. The dates are extended enough to ensure most agencies have fully amortized the value of their current equipment by the time the mandates kick in. **Plan, budget and act! Do not wait!**

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR REGIONAL EMS COUNCIL OFFICE  
OR  
PEHSC WITH ANY QUESTIONS - 800-243-2EMS or 717-795-0740