

Opening Statement
The Honorable Adrian Smith (R-NE), Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation
Interoperability in Public Safety Communications Equipment
U.S. House of Representatives
May 27, 2010

Thank you, Chairman Wu, for calling today's hearing on the interoperability of public safety communications equipment - specifically Project 25, or P25, standards.

In nearly every public safety emergency - from national scale disasters such as the 9-11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina down to localized storm events such as the baseball-sized hail and high winds we experienced earlier this week in western Nebraska - we are reminded of the need our first responders have for interoperable communications, across both jurisdiction and lines of duty.

Although the P25 standard was initiated in the late 1980's, it was the terrorist attacks on September 11 which prompted government and industry to actively implement these standards, with action continuing to this day.

All parties clearly understand it is in their interest to ensure emergency communications tools advertised as P25 compliant meet that standard. At the federal level we have a responsibility to ensure local jurisdictions are able to work together and taxpayer dollars are spent only on equipment which works as promised. Equipment manufacturers know sales will go elsewhere if competitors' products achieve higher levels of operability and interoperability. And our first responders clearly understand the importance of interoperable equipment in protecting the lives of themselves and those they serve.

At the same time, we must keep in mind interoperability is inconsequential if outside forces such as power outages knock out equipment, and advances in technology and increased availability of bandwidth may move us to technologies above and beyond P25 standards.

I expect the primary questions addressed in this hearing will be "What has been achieved so far?" "Where is it going?" and "Is it progressing quickly enough?" while also touching on where emergency communications may go in the future.

With that, thank you again Chairman Wu, and welcome to our panelists. I look forward to a constructive hearing and I yield back the balance of my time.