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Software Firm Sees Fix To Emergency Communications

A project launched in Dallas links Southwest Airlines, the Department of Homeland Security, plus police, fire, and aviation communications--without needing to buy or install new radios, and regardless of whatever frequencies are used.

By Reuters , [InformationWeek](#)

Sept. 15, 2006

URL: <http://www.informationweek.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=193000954>



WASHINGTON - With the anniversaries of the Sept. 11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina still fresh, a software company says it has a solution for police, fire and other emergency workers to communicate without buying new radios.

Privately held CoCo Communications unveiled a project in Dallas Thursday linking Southwest Airlines, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, plus police, fire and aviation communications without new radios.

During the chaos of the Sept. 11 attacks five years ago, poor radio communications were blamed for the lack of coordination among rescue workers at the World Trade Center. When Katrina hit the Gulf Coast last year, officials in neighboring communities could not communicate.

The CoCo system enables first responders' existing two-way radios to communicate regardless of what frequencies are used. The technology also connects wireless phones, personal digital assistants and laptops, allows conference calls and supports video cameras at checkpoints.

"The core interoperability problem is solved, police can use their native radios, existing networks and talk to fire's native radios and native networks without swapping equipment," said Mark Tucker, CoCo chief executive officer, in a telephone interview.

CoCo said its system costs a fraction compared to the \$15 billion estimate by industry experts and lawmakers for the nationwide cost of replacing emergency workers' existing radios and equipment.

To cover where most Americans live, about 80 percent of the country, Tucker estimated the cost of CoCo technology would be approximately \$350 million plus up to \$50,000 annually per subscribing local authority, such as police or fire departments.

The Department of Homeland Security has already provided \$2.1 billion to states and local authorities, and Congress has set aside \$1 billion for additional grants. The Dallas project was funded with a \$979,000 grant from the federal government.

"This is not something the federal government is going to solve, nor should it solve, all by itself," said George Foresman, Undersecretary of Homeland Security for Preparedness.

CoCo hopes it can put companies like Motorola Inc. on the defensive because they often bid for the same contracts to help communities build communications that work together.

A Motorola spokesman said the company has also launched software to fulfill what he described as a short-term need to bridge communications networks until newer systems can be deployed.

"Long term, and to be able to provide the kind of robust, encrypted, reliable communications on private network, that's where you go with more sophisticated systems," Motorola spokesman Steve Gorecki said, noting the company has deployed systems in Michigan and Alaska.

Tucker said that CoCo was in discussions with five major cities for its system, and the company would fund the estimated \$50 million in costs to set up its system. He declined to identify the cities.

By: Jeremy Pelofsky

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