Pikes Peak Regional Communications Network Agency

Information Bulletin for Public Release

DATE: April 17, 2000

SUBJECT: Monitoring and the use of scanners to monitor Pikes Peak Regional Communications Network talkgroups or channels.

PURPOSE: To disseminate information to the public and others interested in monitoring public safety (PPRCN) radio traffic.

SCOPE: The public and news media

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Listening to fire and police radio traffic on scanners and other means of monitoring radio channels has been of interest to the public and others including the news media almost from the beginning of the first police radio transmission. The very first crystal controlled scanners gave way to sophisticated programmable scanners capable of scanning across multi-bands of frequencies, and hundreds of channels. With each change in radio technology a scanner has rapidly been introduced to allow listeners to monitor the service desired. It has sometimes been expressed that the public, and the criminals, knew about an occurrence almost before the police.

The introduction of Digital Trunked Radio has posed a formidable obstacle to the scanner industry. Because of the requirement to decode the now digital voice channel requiring the inclusion of a proprietary "vocoder" in the scanner, at the present time no commercial scanner is being manufactured. In discussion with the largest manufacturer of scanners, there are no current plans to produce one.

To place this discussion into context, as agencies in El Paso County and the City of Colorado Springs begin the cutover to the new 800 MHz digital Trunked Radio System, scanners in use throughout the area will grow increasingly silent. This will be the cause of some consternation among citizens, who listen to scanners because they are interested in the calls that their police and fire agencies are responding to, and the news agencies who often respond to incidents and report them to the public. Also impacted will be the thieves, burglars, and others who have relied on information regarding the whereabouts of the police officers.

Because of the complexity of monitoring a multisite digital trunked radio system, resolutions to the problem are few.

PPRCN Approved Monitoring

Each radio placed on a DTR System is required too be assigned a specific designation or "ID". Each DTR system has a limitation of 64,000 ID's. The advantages gained by the associated DTR functionality are numerous; the disadvantages are that each radio placed on the system occupies system resources. DTR radios operate much like a digital cellular telephone. Each radio when it is turned on checks into, and is then tracked by the system. If someone desires to monitor a talkgroup that is operating on a site remote from the listener; the listener will then bring up another repeater located at his location, requiring the resources of two repeaters for the monitoring activity. With the overall limitation of system radio channels, and further limitations of repeater channels available at some radio sites, monitoring activities combined with normal system operations could strain system resources.

Regardless of whether a radio is placed on the system for the purpose of monitoring only, it can consume the same resources as a radio, which is used by one of the member agencies.

It is not the desire of the PPRCN or its member agencies to restrict monitoring of PPRCN or agency talkgroups. However, the system resource priority must be maintained for the use of member agencies. Since the radio system has only a finite amount of resources, the use of these resources must monitored very carefully.

News and other approved agencies may be granted access to authorized talkgroups following the purchase of approved digital radio equipment. The procedure to be followed for the application process is outlined in PPRCN Policy 01-00.

PPRCN sincerely apologies for the situation created for public safety listeners by the move of member agencies to the new technology, however, we feel the improved communications capabilities, clarity of transmissions, and interoperability achieved far out weigh the disadvantages.