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ith licensees across the country applying to the FCC for narrowband modifications, the turnaround time for new radio licenses has dramatically increased. With no increase in staffing, the workloads of both the frequency coordinators and the FCC processing operation in Gettysburg, Pa., have ballooned.

Within NSP, we are seeing initial frequency coordination turnaround times of approximately four weeks. Typically, multiple back-and-forth e-mail exchanges, submission of additional paperwork, and phone calls are required to reach an agreement on new channels (or modifications to permit repeater operation). The entire process can take months.

Often, we need to obtain the consent of other licensees on the same channels some distance away. These are referred to as “letters of concurrence,” and are quite time-consuming to process. We have to determine the correct person to send the request to (which may be different than the licensee name and address). We have to allow 10 business days after their receipt of our request, and we have to respond to any objections the existing licensee may raise. This process may be repeated up to three times per desired letter, if there is no response. Everything must be documented via Certified Mail.

We’re finding that public safety channels are becoming more and more congested. It’s becoming more difficult to find “clear” channels (even though the FCC rules require that all frequencies are shared), or even shared channels not requiring letters of concurrence.

How do these tales of woe impact ski patrols? NOW is the time to apply for a radio license. If your patrol is unlicensed, if your patrol is operating under the authority of a division-wide license, if you want to convert to repeater operation, or if your patrol wants to move off a shared management channel, NOW is the time to apply. The longer you wait, the harder it will be to find a channel or channel pair. It’s really incredible how difficult it often is to find public safety channels for ski patrols, even if the ski area is in “the middle of nowhere.”

National Interoperability Channels

The FCC has designated five VHF channels, four UHF channel pairs, and five 800 MHz channel pairs as “National Interoperability Channels.” The intent of these channels is to provide for interagency communications during emergencies.

Existing public safety licensees (including ski patrols) can use these channels to communicate with other first responders during disasters, MCIs, or “national emergencies.” These channels may be used in either analog or digital mode, although it is more likely that analog will be used for interagency communication.

It is important to remember that these channels are not authorized for routine, day-to-day communications. A ski patrol must arrange its interoperability frequency selection with those other agencies that will respond to the ski area in the event of a large-scale emergency.

Questions regarding the above topics may be directed to telecom@nsp.org. +



Radio Licensing Hurdles

NSP Telecom fights never-ending battle for truth, justice, and clear channels

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