

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 1271

C 18 L 03

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Enhancing interoperability of emergency communications.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Technology, Telecommunications & Energy (originally sponsored by Representatives Anderson, Morris and Wood).

House Committee on Technology, Telecommunications & Energy

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Technology & Communications

Background:

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has required states to study their emergency communications systems. The Washington State Information Services Board (Board) established the State Interoperability Executive Committee (Committee) to conduct a preliminary review. This review found that a wide variety of agencies at all levels of government have responsibilities for providing public safety and emergency services. The Committee found that the ability of emergency personnel to communicate with each other and with emergency services officials is key to providing emergency services and that emergency communications systems are essential to the life, health, safety, and welfare of both the citizens of Washington and emergency personnel.

Agencies at all levels are responsible for operating their own communications systems. There are numerous different types of communications systems available and in use. These systems range from technology dating from the 1960s to cutting-edge digital voice and data systems. The systems in use represent an estimated statewide investment of \$90 million.

Agencies often purchase dissimilar emergency communications equipment which may impede communication between neighboring agencies. A diversity of equipment and an increase in the number of agencies needing emergency communications systems has also created a need for a larger number of radio frequencies.

The FCC is the federal agency responsible for allocating radio frequencies. The FCC ensures that communications systems have discrete frequencies so as not to interfere with each other. In 2006 the FCC will be re-organizing and allocating new public safety radio frequencies to accommodate the increase in communications systems and new technology.

The Military Department is the state agency charged with planning and coordinating

emergency responses and emergency communications. The Adjutant General is the Director of the Military Department.

Summary:

The Committee is established as a committee of the Board. Committee members will be appointed by the Board from: the Military Department, the State Patrol, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Information Services, the Department of Natural Resources, state and local fire chiefs, police chiefs, sheriffs, and state and local emergency management directors. The chair and legislative members of the Board are non-voting members.

The Committee will develop policies, procedures, and recommendations to ensure the interoperability of emergency communications systems across the state to allow emergency services personnel and agencies to communicate freely across jurisdictional lines.

The Committee will serve as the point of contact with the FCC for issues relating to the allocation, use, and licensing of the radio spectrum for public safety and emergency communications systems.

By July 31, 2004, the Committee will conduct an inventory of all state and local government owned emergency services communication systems. Based upon the inventory and future needs, the Committee will develop a plan to ensure the interoperability of emergency communications systems. The Committee will consult with the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee on the inventory and planning process.

The inventory and plan will be presented to the Board and the Legislature according to a schedule. By December 31, 2003, the Committee will report on the inventory of all state government-owned public safety communications systems and by July 31, 2004, the Committee will report on the inventory of all public safety communications systems within the state. By March 31, 2004, the Committee will issue an interim report on a statewide public safety communications plan and deliver a final report by December 31, 2004.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 97 0
Senate 47 0

Effective: July 1, 2003