
**Technology, Telecommunications
& Energy Committee**

HB 1271

Brief Description: Enhancing interoperability of emergency communications.

Sponsors: Representatives Anderson, Morris and Wood.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes an executive committee within the Military Department that is responsible for assessing the state's emergency communications systems and developing a coordinated plan to ensure that emergency communications systems can communicate with each other.

Hearing Date: 2/4/03

Staff: Matt Cooper (786-7106).

Background:

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has required states to study their emergency communications systems. The Washington State Information Services Board established the State Interoperability Executive 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 currently in use. These systems range from technology dating from the 1960s to cutting-edge digital voice and data systems. The systems currently 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 Federal Communications Commission 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 of Bill:

An executive committee is established within the Military Department. The committee is co-chaired by the Adjutant General and the director of the Department of Information Services. The committee is responsible for planning and developing a process to acquire and allocate public safety radio frequencies.

The Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program (LEAP) will inventory all existing state and local emergency communications systems.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) and the Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program will research and develop a state-wide communications plan. This plan will be presented to the Legislature in two parts. An interim plan must be presented by January 31, 2004, and the final plan must be presented by January 31, 2005. Both plans must include a short-term component to ensure inter-agency communications in the immediate future and a long-term component to ensure inter-agency communications after the FCC allocation of new public safety radio frequencies.

During the 2003-2005 biennium, the LEAP and JLARC review will be funded by transfers from the Enhanced 911 (E911) account into a new Strategic Interoperability Emergency Communications Account. The new account will also receive any available funds for homeland security communications systems and any new or current state funding for emergency communications systems.

Appropriation: This bill establishes the Strategic Interoperability Emergency Communications Account, funded by transfers from the E911 account, any federal homeland security funding for communications systems, and any new or current state emergency communications systems funding.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 3, 2003.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.