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Mississippi Officials Take Steps to Improve Public Safety Communications

Officials Meet to Extend Agency Coordination and Cooperation

Jackson, MS (March 11, 2003)—Government and public safety officials from across Mississippi will meet today in Jackson to address a critical public safety and homeland security issue—the ability of public safety officials to communicate by radio, also known as communications “interoperability.” Studies show that across the Nation, public safety officials have trouble talking to one another in operational situations *one-third* of the time. The Public Safety Wireless Network (PSWN) Program, the Mississippi Department of Public Safety, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, and the Mississippi Department of Transportation are jointly sponsoring the conference.

“The state of Mississippi immediately recognized the need to develop and implement a seamless communications system that enhances public safety response for its citizens,” said Robert E. Lee, Jr., PSWN Program Manager, Department of Justice. “Interoperability is a challenge that Mississippi is turning into an opportunity through coordination with PSWN and the unified collaboration among all levels of government.”

The conference represents a transition for Mississippi as the PSWN Program culminates its assistance efforts and the state continues communications and interoperability planning efforts through the newly formed State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC). Over the past year, the PSWN Program has assisted the state in examining existing interoperability issues and formalizing a statewide committee of representatives from local, state, and federal agencies to address these critical issues going forward. Recently created by Mississippi Governor Ronnie Musgrove by executive order, the SIEC is charged with fostering continued coordination across state agencies and between the state and other governmental agencies within Mississippi. The SIEC will provide recommendations for both immediate and longer term improvement of wireless communications and shared system development.

“The ability for first responders, local, state and federal officials to share crucial information during times of emergency is vital to our state’s homeland security,” said Governor Ronnie Musgrove. “Interoperability is a critical component of a unified incident command system which I established immediately following the attacks upon America. Our collaboration with

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local governments and PSWN will ensure critical information is shared instantly to all responders to minimize any potential threat to public safety.”

The conference will include presentations and panel discussions addressing the current state of public safety interoperability in Mississippi, the role of the new SIEC, and presentations from other areas of the country delineating best practices and lessons learned.

The PSWN Program is a joint initiative of the Department of Justice and the Department of the Treasury. The PSWN Program’s effort in Mississippi is just one of the many assistance projects it has undertaken across the country in support of its mission: to plan for and foster interoperability among local, state, federal, and tribal public safety wireless networks so that no life is lost because public safety responders cannot communicate with one another. For more information, visit the PSWN Program Web site at www.pswn.gov.

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