

Civil security lacks broadband frequency

In a letter dated 30 June, law enforcement representatives call for a swift decision on the 700 MHz band

By Nathalie Steiwer • 03 July 2014 Last updated 09:42

What is more important to have near a football stadium that can hold 60,000 people: "enough frequency so that all the fans can send videos of the match to their friends on their smartphone or broadband so that emergency services can transmit images in the event of a problem?" asked Hans Borgonjen of the Dutch police and vice-president of the TETRA and Critical Communications Association (TCCA) at a recent conference on frequency management in Europe.

The answer seems obvious. Yet, representatives of civil protection and emergency services are having a hard time obtaining guaranteed access to the best frequencies. The share of frequencies in the 700 MHz band that they seek to obtain is avidly sought after by telecoms operators because of its propagation qualities. Civil security is already excluded from the distribution of the 800 MHz range and this time wants its piece of the pie. The aim is to be able to rapidly share images, videos and medical files, for example.

The Radio Communication Expert Group (RCEG) has already estimated that civil security needs 2x10 MHz for day-to-day operations and extra capacity for emergency situations. Civil security officials are concerned that the states may allocate all frequencies put up for auction to telecoms operators, with which they will have to share networks. But these networks are saturated in cases of major events or disasters.

According to a study by the London School of Economics, published at the request of TCCA, the allocation to civil security of 2x10 MHz in the 700 bandwidth would represent an annual "socio-economic value" of €20.9 billion in the ten European countries analysed. This calculation factors in, among other things, the reduction of mortality in ambulances, road traffic management and the operational effectiveness of emergency services.

The EU heads of state recognised the problem of civil protection back in 2009, but five years later have still not adopted an initiative, note representatives of law enforcement services in EU countries (the law enforcement group) in a 30 June letter to their colleagues in the Council's telecoms working group.

Time is short, they note: the 28 should agree on allocation of the 700 MHz band by the end of 2014 if the EU wants to meet the deadlines set for the World Radiocommunication Conference, to be held in Geneva in November 2015, WRC-15. That conference will have to reach a decision on transfer of the 700 MHz frequency to mobile broadband telephony. Harmonised allocation is essential for communications between security forces at borders, adds TCCA.