

DHS eyes FirstNet to expand mobile capabilities

FCW By Mark Rockwell

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Officials at the Department of Homeland Security believe the forthcoming national broadband network for emergencies and public safety could be a way to expand mission capabilities across its component agencies.

"We're looking to leverage FirstNet [the First Responder Network Authority] and looking at what it could do," said Wolf Tombe, chief technology officer at Customs and Border Protection, during an AFCEA DC panel discussion on DHS procurement and mobile capabilities. "It has huge capability. It could open up communications at the border," where cellular communications can be spotty.

[FirstNet](#), overseen by the Commerce Department, will use 700 MHz wireless spectrum and high-speed Long Term Evolution (LTE) services to provide interoperable wireless communications for emergency responders nationwide. The project is in the process of developing a business plan and expanding its staff.

"We're invested in FirstNet," said DHS Deputy CIO Margie Graves.

Graves and Tombe said FirstNet is just one of the emerging mobile communications technologies DHS is seeking to exploit.

They both said DHS wants to create mobile apps more effectively and efficiently. Tombe cited the success of a CBP app made available to cargo inspectors at U.S. ports that cut approval times substantially, allowing shippers to implement just-in-time delivery for goods entering the country.

Graves said apps that helped agents sift through mobile phone images submitted by the public after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 were crucial in the investigation. The apps "didn't

replace gumshoe detective work," but they sped up the job considerably, she added.

Those experiences have spurred DHS officials to look for ways to develop mobile apps more quickly. Tombe said he would like to hire talented college and even high school students as interns to write apps for the department.

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