Ohio MARCS*IP* Upgrade Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions:

Q: In response to your letter dated April 2, 2014, our facility contacted the vendor that works on our MARCS radios to determine what we need to do to ensure we are ready for the migration. The vendor responded that we need to contact MARCS for assistance with a new contract. Do we need to re-do our MARCS contract to be able to use the MARCS*IP* system?

A: No. Any radios that you currently have operating on the 3.5 system should already be under contract. Any radios currently operating on the 3.5 system without a contract between MARCS and the subscribing agency will be addressed sometime prior to July 2015.

Q: Will our talk groups change and if so, will we need to obtain and provide updated talk group sharing MOUs?

A: Your current talk groups will be recreated for the new P25 system by MARCS. They will keep the same names as with the old system, with the exception of having an "X" in front of the talkgroup name. Some may be shortened by one letter also. There is no charge for this service by MARCS. Existing MOUs for the 3.5 system carry over to the P25 system. New MOUs would only be needed for additional talkgroup sharing.

Q: How soon can we upgrade our radios? And if we do go ahead and upgrade our radios, do we need to wait until all of the towers are upgraded for our radios to work properly?

A: You can have your radios programmed ahead of the transition with the new P25 talk groups, coexisting with your existing current talk groups. That way you would just switch to the new P25 talk groups when the transition occurs in your area. The only issue to moving now would be if everyone you currently need to have interoperability with has also moved, or aren't quite ready. In that case, you could have both systems in your radio simultaneously, and be ready to switch by just changing what zones you operate in.

Q: How do I know if our current radios need the flash upgrades?

A: You may contact your local radio vendor to make that determination, or contact the MARCS program office at DAS-MARCS.Admin@das.ohio.gov with information about your specific radios. The information that you will need to provide MARCS with is the serial number, model, and flash code (if possible) of the radios.

Q: Once towers are up and we are able to transition, is the transition completed by the State of Ohio or do we need to look for a private vendor?

A: That's your choice. If you typically work with a private vendor you may want to continue to do that throughout the transition. But if you typically have a MARCS staff programmer do your programming, they will be available to do your upgrade as well.

Remember you can have your radios programmed with the new talk groups, co-existing with the old, to make the transition easier.

Q: Can we potentially program in June even though the 240+ sites may or may not be upgraded as stated in the letter. If yes, will we experience 'non-coverage' areas? Should we wait to reprogram after July 1, 2014?

A: It is possible to program your radios with both the 3.5 talk groups that you currently use, as well as add the new 7.x (P-25, MARCS*IP*) talk groups. This way you will be able to switch over to the new system when available by simply selecting the new 7.x talk groups, without needing to have the radios re-programmed. The old 3.5 talk group can then be removed through programming at a later date.

Q: How much time do I have to work with?

A: We currently project the turn-off of the current platform (3.5) to occur in late March of 2015. This means your current radios will quit working unless you take steps to migrate to MARCS*IP*.

Q: I am just now adding new radios to MARCS. Should I have my radios programmed for 3.5 first and then 7.x (IP), or should I just start right out with 7.x (IP)?

A: That will depend on how soon you get your radios programmed and operational for you and whether the tower sites in your area are completely functioning on MARCS*IP* yet. It also depends on the extent to which you need coverage throughout the state. Currently new radios that MARCS programs will have both the 3.5 and 7.x (IP) talk groups programed in them.

Q: Our radios were recently re-banded. Did that process automatically include upgrading our radios to the new platform?

A: No. The MARCS*IP* upgrade and migration is a totally separate initiative and unrelated to the current "800 MHz re-banding" project.

Questions about specific radios:

Q: My department recently received Motorola XTS 2500s and XTL 2500s. Will these radios work with the new upgrade?

A: Both the Motorola XTS2500 and XTS5000 portable radios are compatible with the new MARCS*IP* system. This does however require that the radios have a "flash" that enables them to be IP compatible. Most all XTS2500 and XTS5000 radios already have this flash. The only way to know for sure if a radio has been flashed is to have a radio tech read the radio and check the flash.

Q: What about departments that are utilizing radios other than Motorola radios. What guidance is provided to those departments?

A: You will need to contact the vendor and/or Radio Service center that you acquired those radios from. They will provide you with the necessary guidance.

Q: We received the attached letter. Under your list of items, you list the Motorola XTS 3000 radio as one that will not be compatible with the MARCS*IP* System. Is this the only radio?

A: No, the Motorola XTL3000 mobile radio is also not compatible. Also other manufacturers' radios may not be compatible. They need to be reviewed on a per radio basis.

Q: Currently my department uses the Motorola XTS 2500 portables and XTL 2500 mobiles. I know that neither of these is listed as being obsolete however I believe they are later models so I just want to check if they will continue to work or if we will need to look at an upgrade.

A: The Motorola 2500 series radios will typically work with the P25 (7.x, IP) system, but sometimes require a flash. Your radio vendor or programmer should be able to verify if the correct flash features are in your radios when you begin the transition process.

Q: We currently have two hand held XTS-5000 units. We had the flash upgrade done to them last year, so I'm not sure what, if anything, I need to do.

A: The flash you had done to your radios may not have been the correct flash to make them work on P25. Since your flash upgrade was done last year, it is possible you received the flash for re-banding, which was provided by Sprint/Nextel during that process. You should be able to verify with your radio vendor or programmer whether you have all the necessary upgrades for your radios when you begin the transition process.

Questions about costs and funding:

Q: Is there any help available for funding to get us through this transition?

A: Funding may be available for your agency through local grants and initiatives. A current initiative is the Local Government Innovation Fund (LGIF) https://development.ohio.gov/cs/cs_localgovfund.htm, which offers financial assistance to Ohio communities. Should additional funding opportunities become available they will be announced on both the MARCS website (http://das.ohio.gov/MARCS) and the SIEC website (http://siec.ohio.gov/). For assistance or questions regarding possible funding opportunities you may contact MARCS Program Administrator Rebecca Vanest (rebecca.vanest@das.ohio.gov).

Q: Are we responsible for any costs incurred upgrading our radios or is the vendor reimbursed through the State?

A: Your agency would be responsible for the upgrade to make these radios work on the system.

Q: Is it true that the monthly user fee will be cheaper once the transition takes place?

A: Yes and no. It is true that a new radio coming onto MARCS*IP* for the first time that only has programming in it for the 7.x (IP) system will be billed at a reduced rate of $12.50 per month until July 1, 2015. But after that, all radios will be billed at the $20 per month per radio rate.

Q: We have some of the Motorola 3000 Astro Spectra mobile radios in our vehicles and you've already mentioned they simply will not work on MARCS*IP*. Is it possible to trade those in for the newer mobiles and help defray some of the cost of the replacements?

A: That's a question for your local radio dealer. You may also contact the MARCS Program office at DAS-MARCS.Admin@das.ohio.gov for assistance in finding replacement sources.

Questions about specific areas:

Q: When and how will I know if the MARCS*IP* platform has been completed for my area?

A: An updated MARCS*IP* tower site map is posted to the Ohio Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee website (http://siec.ohio.gov/) under the News and Information section. That map is replaced with the newest version as tower sites are turned up to MARCS*IP*.

Questions about specific agencies:

Q: What is the situation for hospitals and Health Departments?

A: For all ASPR funded radio questions, please contact Susan Brumm, Ohio Department of Health at (phone number) or (email address). For non ASPR funded radio questions, please contact Dick Miller, MARCS, at 614-419-2405 with specific questions.