

Newsletter

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Volume 5, Edition 12



Connecting first responders in the Heartland

Ford County, Kansas, is several hours from any large urban center. So, reliable communication is a must for its first responders. Hear how FirstNet is helping them fill this need. [WATCH VIDEO](#).

Using FirstNet to deal with “big city” problems in Dodge City, Kansas

By Elliot Linke

Director of Emergency Communications
Ford County, Kansas

Southwest Kansas is very, very isolated. *The Atlantic* called us the third-most isolated population of our size.

We're a rural community, primarily agriculture-based with two meat-packing plants within our county. Together with the packing plants in Liberal and Garden City, we produce over a third of the world's beef. We attract workforce from all over the world. And that leads to big city problems in a very, very rural environment.

So, we have to be self-supporting. We can't depend on other people to come rescue us. If we don't have it in place right now, the chances we'll get it during a disaster might be pretty slim because we'll be competing with other problems

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Helping connect first responders after devastating tornadoes

By Jason Porter

President, Public Sector
and FirstNet Program at AT&T

This past weekend, severe storms and deadly tornadoes devastated the Midwest, destroying homes and demolishing city centers. While every disaster is different, there is one constant: the brave women and men on the frontlines who respond and restore the communities they serve.

The ability to seamlessly talk with one another is critical – from firefighters, paramedics and law enforcement to the extended public safety community on the ground.

That's why America's first responders advocated for the creation of FirstNet® – the only network built with and for first responders, providing them *always-on* priority and true preemption capabilities.

And now, [FirstNet, Built with AT&T](#) is delivering connectivity for the first responders our communities count on the most. The resiliency of the

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RESPONDER HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Suicide prevention awareness is critical for public safety

By Jason Porter

President, Public Sector
and FirstNet Program at AT&T

Last year, our FirstNet® family lost one of our own to suicide. Since then, more public safety officers have continued to die by suicide.

This really brought home some of the struggles public safety faces. And it cemented our commitment to being part of the solution when it comes to responder safety, health, and wellness. About 85% of first responders have experienced symptoms attributed to mental health conditions. And first responders experience depression and PTSD at a rate of up to five times that of the general population.¹

I know several people who have taken their lives – including Army, public safety, and personal connections. I often ask myself, “Is there something I could have done to prevent this tragedy? Did I miss a sign?”

Even those closest to the individual who contemplates, or commits suicide, are unaware of the degree of suffering they are facing.

Increasing awareness

This is why suicide prevention awareness is critical.

As we move into the holiday season, stress levels increase, anxiety and depression get worse, and suicidal thoughts become more prevalent. You matter. We want you to reach out for help, just like you would tell someone else to call for help if they were in crisis.

One of our driving visions of FirstNet Health and Wellness is that caring is a critical component to building the FirstNet community. Caring for each other in our daily lives and with our customers, is just something we do as an organization. Caring is a part of how we interact with our communities. Caring is a part of how we think about our public safety partners.

It's not surprising that one of our core values as a company is to “Be There”



Reports show that about 85% of first responders have experienced symptoms attributed to mental health conditions.

for each other, our customers, and our communities.

Caring

Caring about why people struggle with mental illness is part of that commitment to being there. Caring enough to say something and do something when we are concerned about the mental wellness of those we work with, know and love. Caring goes hand in hand with all that we do. That's why I want you to know that I care about you, I care about public safety, and I want to address the issue of suicide prevention, together as a team.

From my Army experience, we believe in never leaving a soldier behind. Our effort with suicide prevention is to ensure that no one in our valued FirstNet family of customers is left behind.

There are some things we CAN do about suicide.

1. If you or a close loved one is struggling, please reach out. If you don't know where to start, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). They have a network of providers across the country who provide crisis

counseling. We include hotlines to help public safety as a part of [FirstNet.com](https://www.firstnet.com). Reach out to the COPLine, Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Crisis Text Line, or Safe Call Now to get the help you need. **No matter what, reach out and get help. Your life matters.**

2. If you are concerned about what to do or how to handle suicide-related issues, a great first step is gatekeeper training. The **QPR model** – which stands for Question, Persuade and Refer – is an easy, evidence-based and effective model for anyone to learn. For example:
 - a. **Question** – Don't be afraid to ask someone if they need help or if they are feeling suicidal
 - b. **Persuade** – Persuade the individual to get help. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness
 - c. **Refer** – Refer the person to resources. It's okay to give someone who needs help the Suicide Prevention Lifeline number, the number to a therapist or connect them to a member of the clergy.

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- d. The key is to help that individual actually connect with a resource to help them.
- e. You can learn more about QPR training [here](#).
- f. We are a proud sponsor of the [Blue Help](#) organization who first stood up to do something about first responder suicide. There are a number of training, helping, and professional resources available through their organization to help you make suicide prevention a part of your organization as well.

Dr. Stephen Trzeciak and Dr. Anthony Mazzealli present compelling evidence in their book [Compassionomics](#) that caring makes a difference.

We believe that at the heart of our program is the commitment to live the AT&T value of #BeThere for each other,



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for our communities, and for our customers.

We believe that if we care about people committing suicide, we can help prevent suicide. This holiday season, your life is the greatest gift to others, please take care of it.

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<https://business.kaiserpermanente.org/insights/mental-health-workplace/first-responder-support>

First Responders

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KANSAS

Using FirstNet to deal with “big city” problems in Dodge City, Kansas

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across the state. So we tend to be very, very self-sufficient here.

And we need reliable communications that allow us to communicate seamlessly.

That's where FirstNet came in and made a huge difference in the way we do things, because it's reliable and we can extend a network into whatever the application is.

Basic needs, big challenges

We provide mission-critical push-to-talk services, we provide voice service, we provide data service. And the biggest thing we provide is transfer of information. But we have a very limited staff. So, our goal is to leverage technology to the dispatchers' or the public safety officials' advantage – and integrate that data into their operation to make sure they get the right data at the right time.

The challenge in the rural environment is resources. How many cell sites are there? How much bandwidth is going into those cell sites? The pandemic really laid bare those bottlenecks. And it drove our decision to move to FirstNet.

A year before the pandemic, we had been through a test phase with FirstNet that was a failure. They had already deployed some Band 14 in Garden City. But the Band 14 deployment hadn't happened in Ford County.

So we worked with the FirstNet Authority and they essentially said, "Go ahead and test it and then give us feedback, because we really can't do anything for you if you're not on the network. But if you are in the network, we can."

Testing FirstNet

So we became that proverbial squeaky wheel. And FirstNet accelerated its deployment of Band 14. They had already deployed some Band 14 in Garden City. But the Band 14 deployment hadn't happened in Ford County.

Once that Band 14 deployment



Livestreaming situational awareness for firefighters in rural Kansas

Situational awareness is critical for first responders in rural areas. Hear how Ford County, KS, is using FirstNet to help firefighters do their jobs and track their most valuable assets. [WATCH VIDEO](#)

occurred, it was like they flipped a switch. All the promises of FirstNet came true. We discovered our bandwidth and our speeds and our coverage had grown exponentially overnight.

We purchased a PodRunner that had a Cradlepoint modem in it. And we dropped a SIM from a commercial carrier and a FirstNet SIM into that modem. We were expecting to use the commercial SIM, with FirstNet as a back-up.

What we found when we dropped that FirstNet SIM in is, we had phenomenal coverage and phenomenal bandwidth and all of the magic that FirstNet is. So we turned on our other devices and started doing some testing.

Challenges of a pandemic

Within a few months, the pandemic hit. At first, we didn't think much of it. And then they sent all the kids home from school. And the kids did what kids do. They began gaming, watching video and streaming. And our network connectivity just dumped.

I had to use GETS and WPS to call my dispatch center. That stunning failure in the network connectivity shifted our paradigm, because

immediately we needed priority. We needed preemption.

In less than 24 hours (more like eight hours), I had a FirstNet SIM in my phone. And I immediately ordered more devices. Our emergency manager had the National Guard on the way to set up COVID-19 testing locations. And they showed up with no communications support.

So we went from having the novelty of FirstNet to a massive deployment of FirstNet within a month. Once that floodgate opened, we went to almost 80 devices in the span of six weeks.

We provided our health department with FirstNet devices, including FirstNet Push-to-Talk. We supported the National Guard with data and voice services. And we coordinated all of that through emergency management. There was a state-level FirstNet response. And when the state deployed Push-to-Talk and voice devices, our Push-to-Talk and voice devices worked seamlessly with those devices.

Network insight

During the pandemic, when the networks were overloaded, we couldn't get any of the commercial

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providers to give us any insight into the health of the network. FirstNet was the only one that through the FirstNet Central web portal gave us insight into the health and status of the system.

We had full confidence in FirstNet because we had full insight into FirstNet. We knew if sites were down in our area. We knew if there was any impact on services. We knew what the problems were on the network, if any. We didn't have insight into any of the fiber carriers, any of the telco providers. We didn't have that problem with FirstNet.

When we began deploying modems, we immediately went into three-month uplift on all those devices. We knew exactly what was happening. We knew we had priority on our data.

When we needed a fixed IP address, we had that within an hour. We had devices within 24 hours, which is stunning out here. We had FirstNet devices that we could order and have deployed within 24 hours, which was a tremendous success for us.

Overnight, we went from never using video – or just as a novelty during meetings – to using it for every single meeting. So our bandwidth concerns grew exponentially. And our mobility concerns grew exponentially.

We had people working at remote sites. We had people working in austere environments. We had people who were working remotely, doing contact tracing, doing testing that we now needed to support. And we were able to do that very, very rapidly and implement those systems very, very rapidly with FirstNet.

FirstNet solutions

We use multiple FirstNet solutions in the PSAP and out in the field. We provide all of the field support for all the county agencies. We're a heavy user of Cradlepoint products offered by FirstNet. Those Cradlepoints are extraordinarily flexible. We have set up entire remote field offices.



“It's not a magic public safety system. It really is a magic public safety carrier. And we can take all of these applications and data-intensive things we're doing in public safety now and roll them onto a network that's actually designed for it..”

Recently, when we took dispatching for Edwards County, we were instantly able to set up data connection with that PSAP securely, quickly, and without impacting any of their current infrastructure. We use Radio Over IP (RoIP) links on FirstNet. We use FirstNet for data collection from our radio sites.

We use FirstNet Push-to-Talk, which has been extraordinarily helpful from an administrative perspective. So we're not tying up critical radio channels. We also depend on those as backup phone lines.

The state of Kansas, the 9-1-1 Coordinating Council, uses FirstNet as a backup 9-1-1 router, so we have fiber connections back in; and we have FirstNet on our PSAP backup. FirstNet essentially backs up our 9-1-1 calls.

People get confused with FirstNet and say, "Okay, it's a magic public safety system."

Trusted carrier and support

Well, it's not a magic public safety system. It really is a magic public safety carrier. And we can take all of these applications and data-intensive things we're doing in public safety now and roll them onto a network that's actually designed for it.

They can prioritize and, for first responders, preempt, data when it's critical. They can call on resources that will create a sustainable network. If we need to set up a site, we can call and they're going to trust our judgment as to whether we need deployables. Those are big things.

One of the biggest things that has worked for us is the relationship we have with the FirstNet staff and the FirstNet Authority. We can communicate our needs and have them listen.

It doesn't matter if it's a billing question or a technical question or a dream that I have of putting together some bizarre piece of equipment that integrates FirstNet. Our account executive and the state executive are absolutely some of the most responsive people I've seen in telecommunications. That has not been my experience with other vendors and other carriers.

When other counties are making the decision on whether to move to FirstNet, I challenge them to evaluate their situation as we did.

We were very, very loyal to another commercial carrier for many, many years and had no intention of moving. But we accepted the challenges the

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SUPPORTING FIRST RESPONDERS

Helping connect first responders after devastating tornado outbreak

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FirstNet network kept it operational at more than 91% of normal in Kentucky immediately following the storm's impact.

In the pockets most heavily impacted, FirstNet has supported 30 requests from federal, state and local agencies, providing solutions such as dedicated deployable network assets, in-building solutions, FirstNet Ready® devices and other [innovative capabilities](#) to help keep them mission-ready. In Kentucky, our FirstNet Response Operations Group is on the ground helping keep public safety connected:

- **Dawson Springs:** Sunday morning, first responders were without power and had limited communications with their radio systems. The FirstNet Response Operations Group immediately set up a FirstNet Micro SatCOLT and within minutes had city officials connected with voice, text and data to continue their life-saving operations. When a Satellite Cell on Light Truck arrived onsite, it provided connectivity to support the first responders in the area and to ensure anyone in the community needing assistance could communicate.
- **Mayfield:** We deployed multiple FirstNet assets to provide connectivity to support public safety's missions. We've also installed an in-building solution to support first responders at a



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command center and have deployed a dedicated FirstNet SatCOLT to provide essential coverage to first responders at the devastated candle factory near town. And we're embedded with FEMA Urban Search & Rescue and activating one of our new Micro SatCOLTs as they search the wreckage, buildings and nearby areas.

- **Benton:** At the request of public safety agencies, we deployed several assets at local agency offices and at a local church where responders have been distributing supplies to those impacted by these storms. FirstNet Response Operations set up Micro SatCOLTS to provide

connectivity until dedicated FirstNet SatCOLTs arrived on-scene.

With FirstNet, we make public safety's mission the priority. We believe FirstNet is the most important wireless network in the country because it is specifically designed to serve America's first responders.

More than 18,500 public safety agencies and supporting organizations, representing over [2.8 million connections](#)¹, enjoy full, seamless operability with one another on FirstNet.

And we'll continue to *Be There* for this vital community, no matter where the mission takes them. That's what it means to be public safety's partner.

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FirstNet Authority and the sales team threw at us to give it a shot.

I'm not a fanboy. But I have followed the development of the Public Safety Broadband Network, all the way from the Public Safety Broadband Trust and Harlin McEwen's involvement in that process, when it was just a chunk of

spectrum, through today.

I had the unique opportunity to ask him his thoughts now that the network's built out, and he said, "If it works for you, then the promise was delivered on. If you can use it and it is usable for you, then the promise has been delivered on."

FirstNet has delivered on the promise

and it does work for us.

Elliot Linke has been Director of Emergency Communications for Ford County for the last six years. As director, Linke is in charge of the strategic vision and management of the county's processes when it comes to emergency communications, overseeing the technical, operational and training and career development divisions for the agency.