



FirstNet helps Hyannis Fire Department extinguish communication delays

**Agency/organization needs**

The Hyannis Fire Department chose FirstNet to provide its first responders with reliable communication tools

**Networking solution**

Connected smartphones, tablets, mobile data terminals in fire trucks and other vehicles, cells on light trucks (COLTs), and cells on wheels (COWs)

**Agency value**

Priority and preemption across the LTE Band 14 spectrum and all of AT&T's commercial LTE spectrum bands

**Industry focus**

Public safety

**Size**

70 uniformed officers protecting Hyannis residents and summer visitors

FirstNet solutions help Hyannis Fire Department blaze new trails

Founded in 1896, the Hyannis Fire Department is a small but mighty squad. The oldest of 5 fire districts in the town of Barnstable, Massachusetts serves Cape Cod, Lewis Bay, and Hyannis Harbor, and responds to around 8,000 incidents per year.

The fire district includes the harbor and ferries that bring in more than 1 million people per year, the largest hospital on the Cape, the state's third busiest airport, the transportation center, four high schools, a large shopping mall, numerous social service agencies, and a bustling downtown.

The department's 70 firefighters provide fire response, Advanced Life Support in EMS, and technical rescue services. They also maintain two fire boats on the water year-round, a dive team, and a robust fire prevention division that does public outreach in addition to fire prevention activities.

Like other modern rescue operations, the Hyannis Fire Department needed to evolve to meet the needs of its community and its personnel. That's why they became early adopters of FirstNet®, Built with AT&T.

"We're always trying to stay on top of what's coming down the road to be prepared to respond, whether it's additional training or additional equipment," said Fire Chief Peter Burke. "And we're consistently adopting new technologies, whether it's computer-aided dispatch, more robust station alerting systems, or new records management systems."

Reliable communication

Forged in history, dedicated to safety

Created to address the communications challenges of 9/11, FirstNet, Built with AT&T is the nationwide, high-speed wireless network designed to provide first responders with secure, reliable communications. It's the only provider mandated to never throttle speeds for first responders. First responders get always-on priority and preemption for calls, texts, and data—not just in declared emergencies.

"When FirstNet became available, we felt it was important to take advantage of that system," Burke said.

Firefighting was already challenging, but new technology sparked the need for better communication and additional training.

"The problems we deal with now are often a bit more complicated, and we're always finding new challenges," he said. "Post 9/11, it was terrorism, but recently the challenge has been more about energy storage systems and batteries." Lithium-ion batteries, for example, which power electric vehicles and other modern devices, present unique fire hazards. They can re-ignite even after initial extinguishment, requiring specialized knowledge and protocols for safe response.

Burke can rely on FirstNet for reliable communication during emergencies and training. One example is the department's mock disaster training event. "Every 3 years we do a full-scale exercise with firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics responding to a mock aircraft collision," he said.

The exercise involves several dozen students who act as mass casualty victims. "We run the gamut from fire attack, to search and rescue, to extricating victims, to triage and treating and transporting them," Burke said. "The value of that is that we're able to test our systems, our skills, and our equipment. More importantly, those are transferable skills, whether it's a plane crash, a vehicle accident, or some other type of event. The skills that we use there are likely to help us in other places as well."

Seamless communication sharing

During an emergency, Burke and other first responders need to share accurate information. FirstNet connects Hyannis firefighters across all the devices they use. This includes cell phones, modems, routers, and other vehicle-mounted equipment.

"It's a single system that allows us to share information across all of our systems seamlessly," he said. "We're able to make sure that all decision makers and all the fire companies have access to timely information."

Even when commercial networks are congested, FirstNet connections help ensure reliable communications during emergencies. Two FirstNet features, always-on priority and preemption, play an important role. Always-on priority gives first responders' data and communications preferred network access, while preemption allows them to expand network resources if necessary.

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Peter Burke
Chief, Hyannis Fire Department

Population swings and changing workloads

The year-round population of the Hyannis Fire District is 18,000, a figure that swells to 100,000 in the summer. Managing a department with significant population swings between summer and the rest of the year can be challenging, but the firefighters adapt to the changing workloads.

The freedom to scale the network is especially helpful during the summer season. The population swells in the tourist-friendly town, which hosts many well-attended events. With extra demand on the network, Burke can fully trust the speed of communication when using FirstNet.

"We know that our FirstNet devices are always going to work without suffering from the lag time that other devices may suffer from," he said.

Mission-critical tools

Help in hazardous situations

Burke noted that FirstNet was vital when Hyannis firefighters dealt with an incident involving hazardous materials inside a building. “We were able to stream video from within the building across all the FirstNet devices on the scene so we could see what was happening in real time before we made entry into the building,” he said.

“We were able to track the progress of the entry teams, which obviously relies on a robust network that can share that information and can share that video stream. And we were able to do that effectively.”

The department also uses FirstNet on its two fireboats. “We use FirstNet across all operational fronts, whether it’s a rescue in the field or mobile data terminals on the firetrucks and ambulances. We use FirstNet on our vessels to chart locations and communicate offshore,” he said. “The network works wherever we need it to.”

Special assets for disasters

Firefighters have always relied on hardware tools such as hoses, axes, and ladders to save lives. Now they can rely on FirstNet tools to help save lives and improve operations. FirstNet has a cache of 180+ compact deployable assets it can use to boost FirstNet coverage and help ensure dedicated connectivity during disasters.

“We know it’s a system that’s built for us and by us, and if we have any problems, we can immediately reach out to our contacts at FirstNet,” he said. When the department recently needed temporary, specialized cellular coverage and capacity, FirstNet responded quickly with compact deployable assets such as cells on light trucks (COLTs) and cells on wheels (COWs).

“We’ve been able to get deployables here for a variety of different reasons, including once after a fairly substantial storm,” Burke said. “And we know we’re taking advantage of the priority and preemption every day. FirstNet is working as designed for us, and it works well.”

Burke and his crew have also used FirstNet to work with new kinds of systems.

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Peter Burke

Chief, Hyannis Fire Department

“Whether it’s mission-critical push-to-talk or even using some of the apps within the FirstNet ecosystem, we’ve really been able to leverage those into improving our operations,” he said. “And FirstNet also helps to drive where we think new technology should go and how it’s going to best serve public safety and our citizens.”

Unmatched support and reliability

FirstNet technology is robust, and so is its customer service.

“The service is always excellent; they’re always responsive, they’re always able to get the answers we need, and they’re always able to help us solve any problem, whatever it may be.”

Burke is so impressed with the FirstNet team that he’s taken time to recommend FirstNet to other first responders.

“Based on our continued success with FirstNet, we recommend it to all public safety agencies and users,” he said. “It’s important that we adopt it and use it to ensure that when the time comes to have that connectivity, we know it’s in place; we know it works.”