

Oregon OEM relies on FirstNet for mission-critical push-to-talk solutions

**Agency/organization needs**

OEM needs reliable communication between agencies during an event or emergency

**Networking solution**

FirstNet Rapid Response FirstNet Response Operations Group™ (ROG) and the FirstNet Fleet

**Agency value**

Always-on priority and preemption across Band 14 spectrum, plus all of AT&T's commercial 5G and LTE spectrum bands

**Industry focus**

Public safety

**Size**

140 staff across 50 emergency management offices

FirstNet has proven a reliable partner in public safety and readiness

As Public Safety Communications Specialist for the Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Jeff Perkins collaborates with staff across 50 statewide offices that assist 18 emergency support functions, including transportation, communications, public works, and firefighting.

“We partner with all the counties and serve as the liaison between the federal government and the local agencies that handle emergency management,” he said. “We also work with all nine federally recognized Native American tribes in Oregon to help them keep their people and lands prepared.”

With more than a decade of experience in public safety, dispatch, and law enforcement, Perkins has seen technology come and go. What remains consistent, he's learned, is the requirement for mission-critical reliability and the importance of collaboration. “Suddenly, you lose access to the internet, or there's something big going on and no one can get access to the network,” he said. “And you're left wondering, ‘How do we do this without these tools?’ That's the change that I've seen.”

In a previous role, Perkins was charged with finding reliable communications after an emergency revealed the existing 9-1-1 system didn't meet their needs. He chose FirstNet, and he's been an advocate ever since.

Stable. Secure. Interoperable. Critical communications for life-saving work.

Vital help during emergencies

Perkins is impressed by the customer care and knowledge of the FirstNet team. “The relationship with FirstNet is great. We see them as part of our team. We speak the same language and work together in a true partnership,” he said.

The bond between OEM and FirstNet became apparent recently when a wildfire destroyed a fiber optic line and a rural county in southern Oregon lost all connectivity. The fire disrupted communication between the dispatch center and firefighters, EMTs, and police officers. “The public had no way to call 9-1-1. Even if they were able to get through, there was no way for dispatch to tell the first responders where to go,” Perkins said.

“My first call was to FirstNet. Their response was automatic. ‘Your solution’s on the way,’ they said.” The FirstNet Response Operations Group™ (ROG) deployed a dedicated Satellite Cell on Light Truck (SatCOLT). It’s a mobile cell site used to provide wireless connectivity in disaster areas and remote locations.

The SatCOLT provided cell coverage for the county seat, allowing dispatchers to communicate with first responders. “Once the information was relayed via the FirstNet phones, we were able to cover the third-largest county in the United States,” he said. FirstNet can also deliver connectivity by drone. These Flying COWs (cells on wings) are ideal for wildfires, mountain rescues, and other missions where terrain makes connecting difficult.

Cost, creativity, and innovation

Perkins said OEM appreciates the affordability of FirstNet solutions. “Price is a huge thing, especially when you want to be a good steward of the taxpayer dollar and not be wasteful. We want to ensure that what we’re spending equates to a good solution.”

“Plus, FirstNet is built for first responders. I appreciate the fact that you have to meet a certain standard to be a customer,” he said. “We don’t need to compete with the public when we’re trying to help them, so it is a huge benefit to have a communication platform dedicated to public safety.”

“Technology evolves, and FirstNet evolves with it. The cost, the constant creativity and innovation, and having that public safety-only network—I think truly there’s nothing else out there like it,” he said.



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Seamless coordination using a single secure platform

Fast, coordinated response

One technology FirstNet has improved over time is push-to-talk (PTT). Perkins recalled an incident several years ago when a driver broke through a parade route barricade. Some staff assigned to the barricades had to use their personal cell phones to dial 9-1-1 and had trouble connecting with first responders. But a few who were already using a FirstNet PTT solution had no trouble. “We were able to expand PTT to more of the barricade staff so they could reach the emergency operations center and report what they were seeing,” he recalls.

The organization also deployed a FirstNet radio over Internet Protocol (VoIP), which integrates many communication networks into a single interoperable connection. Traditional radio users and broadband users can communicate seamlessly. Plus, VoIP enhances reliability, bandwidth, and overall coverage for public safety operations.

The FirstNet solution proved priceless when, at a later event, a child with special needs got lost. FirstNet enabled responders using different networks to connect quickly over one dedicated channel. “We shared his information with 115 people who had these devices in their hands, and within five minutes, he was reunited with his family,” Perkins said. “The increased situational awareness and being able to get everybody singing off the same sheet of music, so to speak, was huge for that event.”

Always-on mission-critical priority

Today at OEM, Perkins relies on FirstNet Rapid Response. It’s a push-to-talk solution that provides mission-critical, priority-access voice, data, video, and location services on public safety’s nationwide FirstNet network. Its enhanced capabilities go beyond traditional two-way radios. Users have priority communications during emergencies. They can stream live video, share images and documents, and provide precise location information.

“Looking at the FirstNet network, the technology, and the standards for mission-critical push-to-talk, it was an easy decision. There was nothing else that existed that met the standard that we were looking for,” he said.

OEM issues FirstNet Ready® work phones to employees and keeps extra devices on hand. “This way we’re always able to deploy FirstNet equipment to incidents,” Perkins said.



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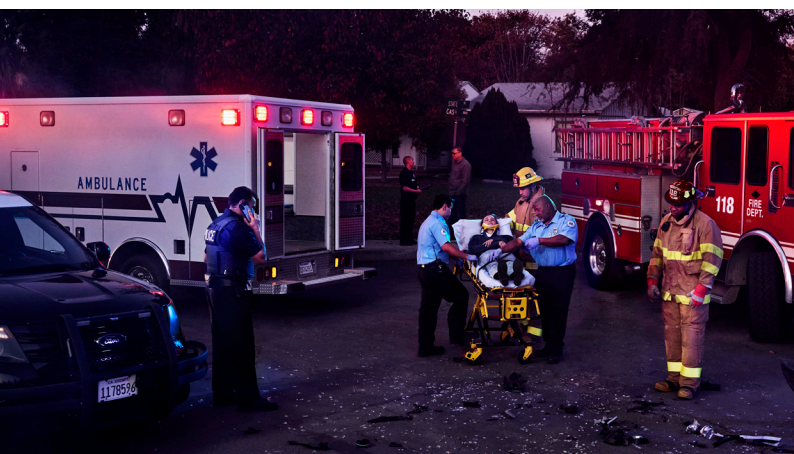
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Purpose-built for public safety and essential workers

Exceptional service for the community

Perkins strives to provide exceptional service to his community. “To me, it’s everything. My job is to make sure the people who run toward the gunfire or the flames can communicate, do their jobs, and get home safe.”

“FirstNet is part of our team,” he said. “They’re right there with us, working to restore. I see that relationship continuing to strengthen, and I see our use of FirstNet continuing to grow.”



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