

23 August 2023

Vince - FYI
fyi-request-23541-c30418c1@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe Vince

I am writing in response to your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) to Prime Minister Chris Hipkins dated 19 July 2023, in which you requested:

I am writing to request more information about the digital encrypted system that is being implemented, specifically regarding its impact on volunteers or staff who are at home

I am aware that there are individuals who use their own radio equipment in their personal vehicles when responding to emergencies. It is crucial that we do not exclude these dedicated individuals solely because of the introduction of digital encryption. A first responder never switches off, and it is important to maintain the ability to communicate effectively.

I am concerned that the implementation of this system will greatly impact off-duty staff who listen to radio communications, and it may reduce rural assistance if they are only permitted to use radio gear at work or in department-issued vehicles or apps. This issue pertains to the police, fire and emergency services, as well as St. John Ambulance.

I kindly request a detailed explanation of how this digital encrypted system will affect volunteers and staff who are not at work as well as what measures are being taken to address the potential reduction in rural assistance and the ability of off-duty staff to stay informed.

And if the data is kept about off-duty staff attending incidences and their importance for applying first aid and securing the scene

On 31 July 2023, your query was transferred to Next Generation Critical Communications (NGCC), an independent unit within New Zealand Police delivering the new Public Safety Network. This response has been prepared in working with Hato Hone St John, Wellington Free Ambulance, and Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ).

The Public Safety Network Te Kupenga Marutau (PSN) is a \$1.4 billion strategic investment to improve New Zealand emergency services' communications infrastructure. Under the PSN:

- Digital land mobile radio network (LMR) will replace the current analogue systems with a reliable and secure technology that lets responders talk instantly and privately, featuring encryption and location services.
- Cellular Roaming (launched in July 2023) will enable devices to move seamlessly between mobile networks if one is down or coverage is poor, while Cellular Priority will ensure devices have priority access to cellular networks
- A stable paging network for FENZ, Wellington Free Ambulance and Hato Hone St John will support rural emergency responses (for which they often depend on volunteers).

NGCC will manage the PSN on behalf of the New Zealand Police, Hato Hone St John, Wellington Free Ambulance, and FENZ.

You have asked how rural assistance will be ensured, how off-duty staff attending emergencies will be informed, and what data agencies gather about off-duty staff attending incidents and their importance.

I would like to clarify that Hato Hone St John, Wellington Free Ambulance, and New Zealand Police do not expect off-duty staff or volunteers, or their families, to monitor radio communications to support incidents.

Each agency has provided the following information on current processes:


- Police does not expect off-duty staff to be available unless they are rostered on-call.
- FENZ uses a personal alerting system to notify volunteers when they are required to respond to an incident, and this will continue. FENZ keeps records of which staff attend incidents using an incident reporting process in their Station Management System. This captures both career and volunteer personnel, whether on or off-duty.
- Hato Hone St John has the processes and ability to notify relevant managers of significant events, resourcing or delays in rural areas and they oversee deployment of on duty staff and activate off-duty staff as required.

The PSN is a multi-year project and the rollout of digital LMR is expected to begin in mid-2024. NGCC is in the early stages of designing the LMR solution, and it is too soon to say how digital encryption will affect volunteers, or what measures will be taken to address any risk to services.

However, as part of their rollout, the agencies will analyse the impact of the change and develop a change management plan. This will determine who has access to the LMR network (including staff and volunteers) and what level of access they need.

I appreciate your concern that the PSN should not undermine the ability of emergency services staff to respond effectively in an emergency. I would like to assure you we are committed to ensuring the new communications capability meets emergency services' operational needs, is resilient and keeps all emergency services staff and volunteers safe. Indeed, one of the key advantages of shifting to encrypted communications on a digital network is it removes the risk of information being intercepted which would compromise privacy and responder safety.

Nāku iti noa, nā,



Steve Ferguson
NGCC Lead Entity Director

