

## Shooter exercise at American University proves interoperability is a must for campus security

In May, the American University Department of Public Safety (AUDPS) and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) conducted a joint shooter simulation drill - modeled in part after the Virginia Tech massacre - to test the effectiveness of communications during multiple agency response.

During the drill, American University police tested Raytheon's ACU-M, which allows various departments to connect their various land mobile radio and Sprint Nextel direct connect systems together, and found a significant improvement to their communications during normal and joint operations.

"Many universities have limited resources and funding to establish interoperability. The low cost and versatility of the ACU-M provides a viable solution to this problem," said Michael McNair, chief of police and director of public safety for American University. "Public safety organizations can use their existing radio and communications technology to achieve interoperability now. With scarce resource dollars already stretched too thin, it is a refreshing change to have a solution available which does not break the bank."

Dozens of American University and MPD officers took part in the simulated drill that consisted of a shooter who was actively shooting students in a high rise dormitory at American University. The shooter was situated on an upper floor in the dormitory while people playing students scattered throughout the dorm.

Over the course of the exercise, officers entered the dorm, securing floors and exits while removing students

and searching for the gunman.

Since police officers at American University are unarmed, any incident that occurs at the school means that officers from the MPD are called in.

Prior to the simulated drill, the AUDPS used a relay system to communicate with the MPD and with the local fire department since the departments operated on different communications platforms.

AUDPS units would call into dispatch, dispatch would then relay the message via telephone to the police and fire dispatch, and then the message would be relayed again via radio to their respective units in the field. This approach was extremely time consuming and a lot of information was being lost in the relay.

During the staged drill, the campuses UHF and Sprint Nextel systems and the Metropolitan DC Police Department's UHF trunked system were patched together using the

ACU-M to coordinate the incident.

The ACU-M was located in the AUDPS dispatch center with disparate systems hooked to ports on the device.

With the two systems patched together, officers from multiple agencies that came on scene were able to talk directly to each other without the previous relay requirement from dispatch, which in turn eliminated the delay and translation mistakes.

The ACU-M also allowed all of the transmissions to be recorded.



**Multiple agencies arrived on scene during the simulated shooter drill to test communications capabilities.**

"The exercise proved that joint communications is a significant benefit to multiple agency operations," said McNair. "A key element in the success of this operation was the ability of the MPD search teams to get updated information directly from the AUDPS officers while still being able to actively search the building."

As with other universities, American University police officials interface daily with other departments on campus such as housing and dining, facilities management, special events planning, shuttle bus drivers, etc. There is a strong need for campus police and security to not only interface with those departments but also with local fire and police departments and a communications system must be in place to allow for this.

With the ACU-M, additional radio resources can be added by simply connecting a portable radio to the device.

For their requirement, AU chose the ACU-M because of its lower price and its RF-based design which created easy implementation at the campus.

The ACU-M was also chosen by American University since its portability, weighing less than 3 pounds on its own, is ideal in the event that a dispatch center needs to be relocated, for example.

"AUDPS now has a cost effective and easy way to link radio communications with other agencies on demand and in real time," added McNair. "I am very pleased with the Raytheon solution. Their staff has always been available to answer questions, solve problems and provide technical support."

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