

**RICHMOND DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS  
NEWS RELEASE:**

**Richmond among first in nation to use new public safety wireless network**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Richmond among first in nation to use new public safety wireless network**

RICHMOND, Virginia – Richmond’s public safety officials are among the first in the country to begin using a new wireless broadband network built exclusively for their use to save lives and protect communities.

Richmond’s Department of Emergency Communications recently began testing this new network, called FirstNet, and expects to have it in use throughout the city by the end of 2018.

Created by an independent authority within the U.S. Department of Commerce in partnership with AT&T, FirstNet will allow Richmond’s public safety officials, including fire, police, 911, and the ambulance authority, to share data without being vulnerable to delays and outages, especially during times of high-usage, such as major events and disasters.

“The decision to go with FirstNet was a no-brainer for us,” said Stephen Willoughby, director and chief of Richmond’s Department of Emergency Communications. “Here we had a federally subsidized program offering us an efficient, reliable system for our first responders to share mobile data with priority and pre-emption.”

Virginia was the first state in the country to opt-in to FirstNet when Gov. Terry McAuliffe signed a letter accepting the FirstNet and AT&T plan on July 10, 2017. Since then, all 50 states, two territories and the District of Columbia have joined.

Richmond and Fairfax County are the first localities in Virginia to begin using the network. Richmond police officers and Department of Emergency Communications executive team members are testing FirstNet during day-to-day operations with phone and mobile data devices, according to Jackie Crotts, the deputy director of technology for Richmond’s Department of Emergency Communications.

“We must have a robust, reliable system that has to be up all the time,” Crotts said. “During the 2011 earthquake, all cell phone service went down because the system was saturated. That won’t happen with FirstNet. There was no up-front cost for the city, because we were able to use our existing mobile data devices. The transition is very smooth,” he said.

FirstNet and AT&T will build, operate and maintain the wireless broadband communications network for Virginia's public safety community at no cost to the state for the next 25 years, according to FirstNet.

According to its website, FirstNet and AT&T will:

- Connect first responder subscribers to the critical information they need in a highly secure manner when handling day-to-day operations and responding to emergencies.
- Create an efficient communications experience for public safety personnel in agencies and jurisdictions across the state during natural disasters.
- Enhance network coverage in rural areas.
- Drive infrastructure investments and create jobs across the state.
- Usher in a new wave of innovation that first responders can depend on. This will create an ever-evolving set of life-saving tools for public safety, including public safety apps, specialized devices and Internet of Things technologies.

For more information on FirstNet, please visit [FirstNet.gov/mediakit](http://FirstNet.gov/mediakit) and [att.com/FirstResponderNews](http://att.com/FirstResponderNews).

For more about the value FirstNet will bring to public safety, please visit [FirstNet.com](http://FirstNet.com).

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*The city of Richmond's Department of Emergency Communications answers and dispatches all 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls as well as provides and supports public safety infrastructures for citizens and other stakeholders of Richmond, internal city departments and other external partners in order to ensure safety by linking the public with first responders and other non-emergency services. For emergencies, call 911. For non-emergency information, call 804-646-5100. Visit [www.richmondgov.com/EmergencyCommunications/index.aspx](http://www.richmondgov.com/EmergencyCommunications/index.aspx)*