

# What You Need to Know About the 2013 FCC Narrowbanding Mandate

By LEE COLE

Professional Wireless Communications

Today, most land mobile radio (LMR) systems in the VHF (150-174 MHz) and UHF (421-512 MHz) bands use channel bandwidths of 25 kHz. In an effort to free more communications spectrum, the FCC has mandated that all licensees using wideband 25 kHz channel bandwidths convert to narrowband 12.5 kHz channel bandwidths by January 1, 2013.

**Narrowbanding is not optional.** You cannot simply ignore the FCC's narrowbanding rules. If you are using the VHF and/or UHF land mobile frequencies and are not currently operating narrowband 12.5 kHz channel bandwidth, you will be affected. Your existing equipment may or may not be capable to operate at 12.5 kHz. Your existing wideband equipment will need to be modified or replaced by January 1, 2013, and organizations that do not meet the deadline face the loss of radio communications.

Legal or punitive actions might also

apply.

Many current model LMR radios are already "dual bandwidth" capable - meaning they are currently operating in 25 kHz wideband but can be reprogrammed to

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the 12.5 kHz narrowband frequency bandwidth. Therefore, meeting the FCC narrowband mandate does not necessarily mean buying new radios.

In some cases, radios operating narrowband will not exhibit the same "talk distance" as you are used to with wide-

band. Particularly if your radio communications is "mission critical," you should review your communications requirements and plan for needed changes before the January 1, 2013 deadline. Using mixed wideband and narrowband radios on the same frequency is not recommended. Voice communication from a wideband radio to a narrowband radio will sound loud, distorted and possibly inaudible.

**Organizations need to start planning now to migrate to narrowband systems** by assessing their current communications requirements and radio equipment and applying for new or modified FCC licenses.

(Editor's Note: Professional Wireless Communications can assist your organization to help you make informed decisions about how you can transition your communications system to meet the narrowbanding requirements. If you have further questions, please contact either Lee Cole at 952-746-2500 or your current radio communications provider.)

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LARRY THORNTON	612-804-1692
MATT SCHMID	612-366-4128
DOUG ZOBEL	952-201-9499