

Motorola wins again: county piggybacks off state contract

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As the FCC's narrowbanding mandate approaches, states and localities are scrambling to raise funds to upgrade their outdated radio systems. The FCC sent warning letters earlier this month to those localities not yet in compliance with the mandate. Many counties and municipalities have not only been pooling together to share resources, but have also decided to piggyback off their current provider to avoid the bid process altogether. Recently, Westcom Emergency Communications decided to save time and money in this process by purchasing a \$14 million contract directly from Motorola, the current statewide provider.

There has been much criticism surrounding Westcom's decision, since many feel that municipalities should be bidding out these projects. Similar arguments arose after the Illinois state contract for the STARCOM21 public safety radio system was sole sourced to Motorola for \$114 million. WestCom's argument is that it should not waste time and valuable resources soliciting bids for a project that the state has already accomplished for similar services. However, objectors have pointed the finger to favoritism and believe fair competition has been abandoned.

Analyst's Take

Is all this fuss simply a result of another multimillion dollar contract going to Motorola, or can we step back and look at the bigger picture? Although Westcom has a valid point in implementing cost-saving measures, avoiding the bid process is not an unfamiliar tactic. As budgetary constraints plague many localities, we may see an increased trend in skipping the bid process, especially with deadlines looming overhead. In the event that a contract is believed to be unfair and is disputed, it is advisable that vendors learn various protest procedures on how to appeal an award and become familiar with protest regulations and procurement best practices.