

An Interview with the NCC Chairman



The FCC recently appointed Kathleen Wallman, president and chief executive officer of Wallman Strategic Consulting and a past FCC staffer, to head the National Coordination Committee (NCC). Last year, the FCC made NCC an integral part of its report and order and further notice of proposed rulemaking creating service and licensing rules for the reallocated 700 MHz public-safety spectrum. The committee is charged with advising the FCC on a variety of issues relating to use of the spectrum and providing a national structure to govern coordinated spectrum use, particularly for interoperability purposes.

"I'm delighted that Kathy accepted this important position," commented FCC Chairman William Kennard in a press statement. "Licensing this spectrum is a major step in ensuring that our nation's public-safety agencies have the spectrum resources they need to protect the safety of life, health and property in this country."

The 700 MHz spectrum includes a nationwide grouping of interoperability channels. NCC is tasked with developing a plan using the spectrum to solve current interoperability problems. More specifically, the NCC will recommend interoperability digital modulation, trunking and receiver standards; offer voluntary assistance in developing coordinated regional plans; and recommend on other technical matters common to the public-safety community. The committee will also facilitate intergovernmental communications among local, state and federal public-safety agencies with expertise in planning and designing telecommunications networks.

Radio Resource Magazine interviewed Wallman regarding her new position and plans for the committee. Following are her responses.

RRM: Please provide a brief synopsis of your career.

Wallman: I began my governmental service in 1994 at the FCC as deputy chief of the Cable Services Bureau. From that position, I was promoted to chief of the Common Carrier Bureau and served from 1994-1995. From 1995-1997, I was deputy counsel to the president in the office of the White House Counsel. In 1997, I became deputy assistant to the president for economic policy and counselor and chief of staff of the National Economic Council. In that position, I was responsible for mass media and domestic and international telecommunications issues. I started Wallman Strategic Consulting in November 1997 to provide advice in the areas of video, voice and data communications, information technology and other infrastructure issues.

RRM: What is your experience with public-safety spectrum issues?

Wallman: I am new to this issue, so I come to this project with a fresh perspective, a lot of questions and a desire to hear from all affected communities about what direction the NCC should head.



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RRM: *What is your first order of business as NCC chair?*

Wallman: My first order of business is to build a committee that sturdily and broadly comprises the interests of all affected communities and reaches beyond those traditionally thought of as core constituencies to include people with fresh ideas on the issue.

RRM: *What do you anticipate will be your biggest challenge in your new position?*

Wallman: The issue of interoperability has been around, unsolved, for a long time. Already, a lot of great people with great minds and tremendous energy have tackled the problem. Gaining consensus on any set of proposals and coordinating such proposals with work that already has been done and is under way will be a great challenge. But the problem to be solved is important, so I'm glad the chairman asked me to try.

RRM: *What is the time frame for developing a national interoperability plan?*

Wallman: We will try to work through the issues in a year.

RRM: *As you know, APCO filed a petition for reconsideration to allow use of a current digital standard—Project 25—or analog equipment within the 700 MHz public-safety spectrum. APCO officials noted that without either of the two options, the result will be “indefinite and harmful delay in public-safety use of the new spectrum.” What is your response?*

Wallman: I've talked with Bob Gurss, legal counsel for APCO, about the

petition and with Motorola about its similar concerns. I'm open to ideas that will accelerate the progress to interoperability, but the NCC has a direction from the commission to move forward within the framework of the commission's order.

RRM: *Have any members been named to the NCC?*

Wallman: No one has been named yet. The call for nominations closed at the end of February. I expect there are some must-have members of the NCC, such as APCO and local government officials. Equipment manufacturers are also essential. I plan to work closely with the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau and commission to develop a slate of members. The commission will make actual appointments, via the chairman. We will also develop a structure of working groups to keep NCC work moving forward between meetings.

RRM: *Last year, the National Institute of Justice released results from a survey of law-enforcement agencies across the country regarding interoperability. The survey found little support from local agencies for state or national interoperability planning. How will NCC work through this issue?*

Wallman: I can't comment on the study, because I haven't seen it. But in general, the idea behind NCC is letting the market work in the sense of putting ourselves to the challenge of building a process that will be sufficiently attractive to law-enforcement agencies, with respect to the new spectrum, that they will want to participate.

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