

# Why NYPD needs handheld wireless communication devices

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A wanted felon is apprehended during a routine traffic stop. A child is found within hours of being reported missing. A commuter is informed of a possible terrorist attack on the subway.

No, these scenarios are not fantasy but across the nation are very much a reality.

As our security landscape is modernizing, law enforcement agencies from Boston to Indiana are integrating wireless devices into their communication systems.

Recently, The Department of Homeland Security announced that New York and northern New Jersey would receive more than \$50 million in federal anti-terror grants to protect mass transit systems and ports. It is in my opinion that a significant portion of these funds should be allocated to introducing wireless devices to New York City law enforcement.

Living in a post 9/11 world, officers of The New York City Police Department (NYPD) have consistently been on the frontline of the domestic war on terrorism. In fact, nearly six years after the attacks our NYC officers answer calls on countless threats of suspicious activity at transportation ports, airports and commercial office buildings.

In September 2006, New York City announced plans to implement a \$500 million, high-speed wireless data



network to provide police officers, fire-fighters and other first responders with critical information in an emergency.

The Citywide Mobile Wireless Network (CMWN) for public safety personnel is viewed

as the most aggressive commitment by any municipality to provide a next-generation public safety network.

Specifically designed to inform first responders with high-speed data access to support large file transfers, including federal and state anti-crime and anti-terrorism databases, the CMWN is a big step in the right direction for our city. However, the NYC patrol officers are still out in the field protecting our great city without the most up to date handheld wireless technology.

So, as millions of American own cell phones and send more than 18 billion text messages a month, one has to ask themselves: why is the New York City Police Department, the largest police force in the country, not utilizing discreet and confidential wireless communication as an effective crime-fighting tool?

The use of handheld technological devices provides the technology needed for officers to communicate in an instantaneous fashion. The use of wireless net-

working can actually help get these tools into the hands of police officers without having to take much needed personnel out of the field. It enables officers to share essential data such as criminal background checks, drivers' licenses, vehicle registrations and emergency situation updates.

They can also access and transmit photos, geographical data such as aerial images and real-time video. Pictures are extremely beneficial to police officers responding to a call with a fleeing perpetrator because they are an image of a real person as opposed to descriptions provided by witnesses. Pictures and video taken at a crime scene can also be helpful in managing the appropriate response units and as a result can accelerate the entire investigation process.

No longer just for teenagers, text messaging provides both the police and public with the ability to anonymously talk to each other in the event of an emergency or an unfolding crisis situation. To receive a text message, the person does not ever have to pick up the phone. While in the field, an officer can be nonchalant while receiving, transmitting or accessing vital crime-fighting information from police databases. Text messaging can also reduce errors caused by garbled or missed voice dispatch messages.

The public can use text messaging to contact police when they feel that they are in a serious situation such as a

kidnapping, a robbery on the subway or threat of a terrorist attack. In fact, this form of two-way communication has proven itself to be reliable in past incidents. ABC news recently reported on the story of 2 teens abducted outside of

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## City starts text testing

On September 20, 2007, city officials announced that they would begin testing rapid-alert programs as an early-alert system programs to send text messages to New Yorkers' cellphones.

The brief text-messages would be limited to 60 characters and as text messaging is low priority to mobile phone companies the carriers have yet to commit that the text messages would be delivered in an hour.

The pilot program is expected to be launched by the end of this year. However, due to the unreliability of the communications infrastructure, city officials are slightly skeptical of the program.

The city is also working on implementing an email alert program that is scheduled to be tested in Lower Manhattan by the Office of Emergency Management. ■