

Building a Safer America  
By: Vice President Joe Biden

During his trip to Michigan yesterday, the President announced the Wireless Innovation and Infrastructure Initiative. It will, for the first time, allow first responders to build a reliable communication network that takes advantage of the same technology that my grandkids use on their smartphones, while making high-speed wireless services available to millions of Americans in rural areas.

Here's how it will work: we will dedicate a portion of the airwaves (called "spectrum"), which are what smartphones and other high-speed mobile devices use to communicate, to public safety for a high-speed wireless network that will reach across the country. When we auction licenses to use the airwaves, we will dedicate a portion of that income to help public safety build this network. Another part of those auction proceeds will go for research and development that will benefit everyone who uses wireless technology – so that this country will not only have the fastest networks but also the best wireless technologies for public safety, education, health care, transportation and energy.

A nationwide high-speed wireless public safety network like this is long overdue.

This year is the 10th anniversary of one of the greatest tragedies that our nation has ever endured. We lost nearly 3,000 lives on September 11th. Among them were more than 400 firefighters and police officers who bravely ran into burning and collapsing buildings, sacrificing their own lives to save the lives of others.

The systems those brave men and women relied on to communicate with one another were simply not as advanced as they should have been. There have been improvements since, but emergency medical technicians, firefighters, police and other first responders still need a better wireless communications system – a network that allows them to communicate when they need it most, and works seamlessly with neighboring cities and counties when they are called to assist if tragedy strikes.

This initiative will give them a network that will be reliable. First responders need to communicate even when no one else can – their calls can't be dropped if they are in a basement or parking garage and they have to be able to get through in emergencies. They need to know that, as much as we're relying on them, they can rely on their communications systems.

Instead of the old radios they use now, first responders will communicate with devices that will also let them transmit video, images, and data. Firefighters will be able to download building schematics onto their devices to find the best routes to safety. A police officer will be able to quickly determine if the car in the traffic stop is stolen or if the driver has an outstanding warrant. EMTs will be able to transmit pictures from an accident scene ahead to doctors in the emergency room. Lives will, quite simply, be saved.

This is an unprecedented investment in the brave men and women who put themselves in danger so the rest of us can be safe. Giving them the tools they need to do their jobs

successfully is simply the least we can do for them, for our communities, and for an entire nation that depends on them so immensely.

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