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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — FirstNet officials presented on the telecommunications network to members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council Naabik’íyáti’ Committee in a work session Friday, March 29 at the Council Chamber.

FirstNet is a priority-based communications network offering mission critical services to first responders and other emergency personnel that will give them high-priority access to voice and data communications, especially during times of an emergency.

When the program is complete within the proposed five-year time frame even remote rural areas on the Navajo Nation will have emergency access to FirstNet, presenters told the committee.

Federal government representatives told lawmakers FirstNet was authorized by Congress in 2012 with a plan to build a nationwide broadband network to facilitate critical communications between first responders at times when commercial cellular systems could be bogged down with heavy call volumes.

Congress appropriated $7 billion to establish the network. The government took bids with existing cell carriers in 2012 and selected AT&T Inc. to build the network. It works by simply inserting a FirstNet-enabled SIM card, a small cellphone component that facilitates
communication with cell towers. With the inserted FirstNet SIM card, a cellphone is enabled to supercede other calls on the cell network.

Chris Becenti, Navajo Nation Telecommunication Regulatory Commission executive director, said AT&T will be working closely with the Navajo Nation to update where additional cell coverage is needed on the Nation.

FirstNet has mobile deployment units for first responders that can be utilized during mass events where cell service may be slowed or rendered unusable by the standard user. Becenti said he is working with company officials to have a mobile FirstNet unit active during the Navajo Nation Fair, providing first responders priority access during a time of congested network traffic.

FirstNet officials will be measuring cell signals in areas around the Nation and will meet with lawmakers again to give a preliminary report on their findings in June.

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