

# **Listening In On Sumter County's New Digital Radio System**

## **The New Scanning Reality In Sumter**

The Sumter County public safety communications systems has moved from a Motorola SmartNet analog trunking system to a Motorola SmartZone digital trunking using the APCO P25 protocol. That means our local police, sheriff, fire department, and EMS can now only be heard by using a digital-capable scanner. Older analog only scanners, even ones that feature trunked system scanning, will not decode this new system.

## **Why?**

The old system was over ten years old and spare parts were scarce for maintenance. Also, the system was not interoperable with other public safety systems, notably, the state-wide Palmetto 800 system. The new system is compatible with both analog and digital on the Palmetto 800 system, making for easy interoperation with other agencies. The Palmetto 800 system installed and will maintain the new system, further insuring compatibility. Digital is the future!

## **Why Scan Public Safety Systems?**

Scanning offers a way to listen to our local law enforcement in "real time" to know what's going on around us. You know it before it's on the nightly or morning news. Today was a good day to have one in Sumter with the casket company fire going on.

## **So, What Do I Now Need?**

Digital capable scanners are offered by Uniden (Bearcat), Radio Shack, and Whistler (the radar detector company). What you are looking for, specifically, is one that will decode APCO P25 Phase I trunking systems. If you are buying a brand new scanner, it may be wise to choose one that also decodes APCO P25 Phase II. Several of the manufacturers that currently have Phase II capable scanners are promising updates to these models later in the year that will also allow them to decode DMR systems, making them "future proof" for the foreseeable future. Also, this technology is not so new that you can't find a capable used scanner for a low price on Ebay.

## **Once I Have My New Digital Scanner, How Do I Program It?**

While all can be programmed manually, it can be a painful process. Because these systems can be complicated, scanners are best programmed by computer either with manufacturer supplied, or aftermarket software, some of that available as freeware. Most folks obtain the frequencies, talk-groups and other necessary system information for programming from the RadioReference.com website. Access to this information can be obtained for a small fee for a subscription. Also, don't forget, folks who are already doing this are willing to share too!

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## Resources:

[www.uniden.com](http://www.uniden.com) Manufacturer of the Bearcat and Homepatrol line of scanners

[www.radioshack.com](http://www.radioshack.com) Radio Shack branded scanners manufactured by Whistler

[www.whistlergroup.com](http://www.whistlergroup.com) Bought out GRE, who made RS scanners for decades

[www.radioreference.com](http://www.radioreference.com) Most up to date info available on scanners & frequencies

[www.scannermaster.com](http://www.scannermaster.com) Dealer of scanners, programming software, & accessories

[www.hamradio.com](http://www.hamradio.com) Ham Radio Outlet, ham store also sells scanners & accessories

[www.universal-radio.com](http://www.universal-radio.com) Universal Radio in Ohio also sells scanners & accessories

Many other ham radio and related dealers also sell scanners, so shop around!