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County emergency systems linking up with other central Ohio communities

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By Andrew Tobias
Staff Writer



As part of a trend favored by the federal government following the events of Sept. 11, Delaware County's top-of-the-line emergency communications center will soon be the central hub of a three-county regional law enforcement radio network.

The Delaware County Commissioners Monday voted unanimously to accept a \$1.5 million federal grant from the Department of Homeland Security that would help fund the multimillion dollar communications integration project.

This will mean communication between the Delaware County, Worthington and Dublin emergency services will be streamlined. It will also be cheaper than it would be if the three government bodies were to each install their own individual systems.

"It makes sense to not have to build three separate radio systems in this case," said Jay Somerville, director of technical services for the Dublin Police Division. "We're just going to expand into one large one."

The City of Dublin will pay for the cost of the remainder of the \$3.3 million project.

Commissioner Glenn Evans said the project would help keep Delaware County safe and on the cutting edge.

"It will help us be able to keep ahead and put us on an even higher level," Evans said.

In a manner similar to adding new users to a computer network, Dublin police and Worthington police will be added as a subgroup to the Delaware County emergency digital radio system.

Police departments from Perry Township, Washington Township and Sharon Township police, as well as the

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Washington Township Fire Department, all in Franklin County, will also come on board.

"They're going to use the infrastructure backbone we have in place already," said Patrick Brandt, public safety systems administrator for Delaware County.

Delaware County emergency vehicles will get radio coverage further south in Franklin County than before. The county will also be backed up by the other dispatch centers in the event that the 9-1-1 center would need to be evacuated in an emergency situation, said Brandt.

Currently county plans dictate incoming 9-1-1 calls would be transferred to evacuating emergency workers' cell phones and personal radios while they move operations to the mobile 9-1-1 "bus."

"It will eliminate that situation where people are running out of the dispatch center with portables in their hand," said Brandt. "If you have a bunch of fires or whatever going on, it will give us some breathing room while we set things up."

The increased integration will also allow the different agencies to communicate more seamlessly, Brandt said.

Dublin has been looking to upgrade their now-obsolete radio system for awhile, said Somerville. When the opportunity came to jump on the Homeland Security grant proposal, Dublin and Delaware County began hashing out the details.

Barriers to communication between different emergency service agencies are gradually being broken down as officials move to address criticism law enforcement received following the events of Sept. 11.

"Post 9/11, we learned that everyone building their own radio system creates that 'stovepipe effect,' where I can talk to my people but I may not be able to talk to the next community or two communities over," Somerville said.

As radio communication technology has become more advanced, offering features such as in-car GPS, it has also become more expensive. In situations like this one, multiple agencies can spread out the cost, said Somerville.

Worthington is contributing additional radio channels, which Somerville said were a precious commodity, Delaware is offering its existing system and Dublin will foot the remainder of the bill out of its general budget.

"It seemed to be a win-win situation for everybody," said Somerville.

Dublin and the other law enforcement groups plan to have their radio systems integrated by the end of 2009.

The Delaware County group was one of eight applicants statewide that was approved for the grant, Brandt said. The grant required that applications involve more than one city or township and be filed through a county emergency management agency.

The county's application was approved in part because Delaware County already had the advanced radio system recommended by the federal government in place, he said.

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