



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KEEPING OUR COMMUNITY SAFE: FIRE CHIEF, SHERIFF EXPRESS NEED FOR COUNTY'S NEW EMERGENCY RADIO COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO - The severe tornado and flooding this summer brought the need for St. Charles County's new Emergency Radio Communications System home for local first responders. In an update about the new system given during the St. Charles County Council Work Session on Aug. 26, Cottleville Fire Protection District Chief Rob Wylie and St. Charles County Sheriff Tom Neer spoke about the challenges their departments faced after the May 31 tornado, and how the new system will improve daily communications.

Wylie, who served as incident commander, said that the first challenge on May 31 was understanding the enormity of the storm. "Almost immediately with the existing system, communications became a real challenge," he said.

The overwhelming volume of calls to dispatch and lack of cell phone service were just part of the difficulties first responders encountered. "Everyone was on different (radio) frequencies and it was hard to coordinate activities," said Wylie. "With the new radio system, it (response) will come together faster and in a way that is more coordinated."

The County's new system is part of a larger system being implemented concurrently in both St. Louis and Jefferson counties, increasing the capability of the entire metropolitan St. Louis area in responding to major disasters. For the first time ever, first responders across different departments and municipalities will be able to communicate with each other and the system will provide better coverage, improving the level of service to residents. Today, each municipality in the county operates their own systems which have coverage gaps, are becoming obsolete, and are incapable of being modified, or are cost prohibitive to modify, to meet Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandates that went into effect at the beginning of this year. The County's contracted vendor for the system, Motorola Solutions, engineered a 12-site tower design.

The new system will allow first responders to communicate with one another directly through a task or work group assigned for an incident. "(Currently) EMS, fire and the State Highway Patrol, we can't talk to each other. This will be beneficial on an everyday basis," said Wylie. "If we work an accident and have to shut down a lane of traffic, I have to call my dispatcher, who gets on the phone to call the Highway Patrol's dispatcher, who gets on the radio to call a State Trooper...It's too late."

"It's been a long time coming," said Neer of the new system. "The most difficult facet of public service and public safety in this county is the inability of first responders from different agencies to be able to communicate with each other."

Testing at Motorola's headquarters from June 24-26 of the computer equipment and software that operate the Emergency Radio Communications System was successful. Currently, towers at four County-owned properties are under construction:

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- St. Charles County's Sheriff Office at 101 Sheriff Dierker Court, O'Fallon
- St. Charles County's Highway Shed at 2480 St. Peters Howell Road, St. Peters
- St. Charles County's Indian Camp Creek Park, 1594 Dietrich Road, Foristell
- St. Charles County's future Barnard Park at 3785 S. Point Prairie Road, Wentzville

For future updates and more information about the system, click on the "Emergency Radio Communications System" button on the homepage of the County's website, www.sccmo.org.

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