

Emergency Services Communication Systems Alignment

Thank you!

We would like to thank the Province of Ontario for its considerations over the years for several of our projects and look forward to a stronger relationship moving forward.

Proposal

We are seeking financial support from the Government of Ontario to improve first responder interoperability, access and reliability of the public safety radio systems in the County of Renfrew. An updated system was recently installed at the Renfrew Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC) at a cost of \$360,140.

Background

The County of Renfrew, as part of its commitment to 9-1-1 in 2001, purchased communications equipment situated in several locations, necessary for fire dispatch.

The equipment for fire dispatch was purchased by the County of Renfrew to support the municipal partners' fire services. Originally, the equipment was the County of Renfrew consoles (Roads Department) and was supported on the Ministry of Health's (MOH) radio network, inclusive of UHF and VHF repeaters located in Foymount. In 2009, the radio, tower and equipment were all switched over to the County of Renfrew and they had the full contract with Christie and Walther, now BearCom to maintain the equipment. A service contract for equipment was supported through the County of Renfrew and the Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC) was the operator only. A Break and Fix contract was supported by CACC in reporting the issues directly to the vendor and ensuring the County of Renfrew was informed of any repairs for their equipment. Reprogramming of paging functions for the fire departments or changes in operational protocols would be billed back to the CACC/MOH.

The dispatch component of the Fire Communications Radio system is owned by the County and provides the fire radio and notification system that serves the 16 local municipalities, the City of Pembroke and the Algonquins of Pikwakangan. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care provides the service while the County of Renfrew Emergency Services department owns and manages it.

the DETAILS

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As public safety critical infrastructure, we believe that the fire radio and notification systems should be financially supported by the Province and from a policy and practice perspective future design of Provincial Government radio communication systems, the Province should fully integrate fire service radio systems with police, paramedic and the Ontario Fire Marshal and Ministry of Natural Resources communications systems.

At the centre of Fire Communications is the County's Emergency Services dispatching provided under contracts with the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care – Renfrew Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC) which was installed in the late 1990s. This covers multiple area Fire Services dispatching supported by communications over an analog two-way radio system. The current communications system has been identified as not well suited to support interoperational communications between the various emergency services. This weakness was identified as a significant risk factor for the provision of optimal emergency response services (especially Fire Services) to the citizens of the County.

The primary function of CACC is to dispatch Ambulance incidents, and, in addition, it supports Fire Department dispatch as well. The four-console position solution does not have a back-up console position independent of the main consoles in the event of failure or natural disaster. There is a phone patch used in the event of failure. However, console functionality is lost in those cases.

This system is an old analog-based radio communications system. It operates by the transmitting an analog signal through three towers: Foymont, Arnprior, and Bisset Creek. The system is about 25 years old and has never been updated with regards to equipment or system architecture. Maintenance is becoming difficult and operational performance will continue to decline. The system is meeting the basic operational needs; however, it is not up to current accepted norms for Emergency Radio Systems or the 'best practices' of peer Fire Services Radio Systems in Ontario.