



Stimulus grant pays for new radio antennas

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Thanks to federal stimulus dollars, the Daviess County Sheriff's Department and Daviess County Fire Department will be able to expand handheld radio communications throughout the county.

Paul Nave, 911 director for Daviess County, said the \$129,000 grant will help improve coverage in a system used exclusively by first responders.

Currently, there is a single radio antenna site used to cover the entire county. Mobile radios in sheriff's department cruisers or on fire trucks have no problem staying in contact with this tower, but that's not the case for handheld or portable radios.

With the stimulus money, Nave said, the department will be installing towers at three sites -- Knottsville, Pleasant Ridge and West Louisville -- and each will have three antennas, giving coverage to the sheriff's department and volunteer fire departments throughout the county.

"The portable (radio) coverage right now is very limited," Nave said. "This will go from 60 percent coverage to 90 percent coverage for the sheriff's department and county fire department."

That kind of improvement in communications coverage, Nave said, is huge.

"That could save minutes (on response times)," Nave said. "We could save lives and property, to say nothing of officer safety. Communications is most important to us when we've got an officer out."

Capt. J.D. Marksberry, head of patrol at the Daviess County Sheriff's Department, said improved communication is always a good thing when he has deputies in the field.

"The deputies are cognizant of the times they're in a questionable area of coverage, and that does play into your mind," Marksberry said. "Next to officer safety practices, communication is everything."

Officers in the field have information to get out about what they're doing, and they're in need of information from dispatchers such as who they've pulled over and that person's criminal history. If a deputy is in some kind of trouble, they need to be able to tell dispatchers so help can be sent.

"There's information you need on demand through communications," Marksberry said.

In cases where trouble may be happening, Marksberry said, improved communications can keep other deputies not yet at the scene out of danger themselves.

"If we don't know the status of a deputy, often we'll assume the worst and we'll be driving (as if it is an) emergency," Marksberry said. "I'd hate to put our deputies in that kind of situation if it's just a matter of not having radio coverage. Emergency driving, driving with lights and sirens on, is dangerous."

Chief Duane Smeathers at the Daviess County Fire Department said improved coverage should also mean better fire coverage, especially in more remote areas of the county.

"It'll give us better coverage, especially for the volunteer departments," Smeathers said, noting that volunteer pagers will also benefit and get word more reliably to volunteers.

Nave said that he expects the new towers to be up and running by March 2010, thanks in large part

to cooperation from the east and west county water districts, which allowed the antennas be installed on water towers.

Nave said he's especially pleased that the grant money was awarded to them.

"This would not be possible without this grant because our budgets are lean," Nave said. "We're grateful to get this so we can improve communications for our county."

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