

Public Safety Committee
August 21, 2003
2 p.m.
Scott Heyman Conference Room

Approved 9-4-03

Present: B. Blanchard, M. Robertson, L. McBean, K. Herrera, G. Totman
Staff: S. Whicher, W. Skinner, P. Meskill, L. Shurtleff
Guests: M. Raffee, American Red Cross; A. Tutino, Ithaca Journal

Called to Order

Ms. Blanchard called the meeting to order at 2 p.m.

Changes to the Agenda

There were no changes to the agenda.

Department of Emergency Response

Prior to providing the Committee with an overview of the Department, Mr. Shurtleff stated the Tompkins County Department of Emergency Response has been extremely busy during the last week since the blackout situation. He stated that situation resulted in a partial activation of the emergency operations center and network in Tompkins County. Mr. Shurtleff said the situation was intense as personnel worked to identify the scope of the problem and then to anticipate the length of time there would be problems in the community. Mr. Shurtleff said during the situation, his primary concern was with the County's emergency communication system. He reported that system functioned adequately throughout the emergency.

Mr. Shurtleff said over the last week much of his time has been spent testifying at a murder trial that is taking place in County Court. He was called to testify whether the 911 emergency response system was activated at any level for the injured parties in that case.

Other activities that have taken place during the last week included a meeting over the course of two days this week and two days last week with engineers and a project manager from Motorola. They are working on finalizing the scope of work for phase I of the radio system upgrade. Mr. Shurtleff said this is in anticipation of signing a \$1 million contract that includes the installation, purchasing, and software setup for the radio console to control the voice radio system. It also includes the control and electronics that will tie those consoles and dispatchers into the existing 2 GHz analog microwave system. Until that tie-in can take place, they are attempting to use a lot of used and loaned equipment to make that work. They have also spent considerable time trying to determine how they can relocate the legacy equipment from the old dispatch center to the new center without going off the air, which means moving a lot of base stations and computers.

Mr. Shurtleff said the Department is also working on finalizing plans for the structure located at Brown Road which will link them into the microwave system and also performing the appropriate upgrade at a site on Connecticut Hill. He said the upcoming three months will likely be the most intense time the Department will ever face.

Department Overview - Department of Emergency Response

Approximately a year and a half ago the Fire, Disaster, and EMS Department was renamed to become the Department of Emergency Response. This name change was done to better-reflect the overall scope of responsibilities the Department has. The Department was created as the Fire Coordinator's Office in the 1950's and included a part-time position to coordinate mutual aid and to start the radio system. The County's first radio system consisted of a single radio in each department and evolved to become more of a communications office. He said much of the structure that they work with today is a descendent of the days of civil defense and planning for emergencies related to the Cold War era. Through the 1970's and 80's that emphasis moved away from the Cold War into more of a response to natural hazards, and in the last two years a large portion of the Department's focus has been directed towards a response to terrorism and human emergencies.

In 1972, the Communications system became a large priority of the Department and evolved in 1997 to become the Enhanced 911 system. That program continues to grow and change, given the continual changes in technology and use of wireless phones.

Emergency Medical Services was a function that every fire department in Tompkins County took on in the mid to late 1970's. In 1977, the advanced emergency medical service was initiated and a regional system was established that involved Tompkins County's communications. It overlapped with other counties and established formal medical control with the hospitals throughout Central New York. This continues to be maintained today.

Mr. Shurtleff said in the Department's reorganization a couple of years ago he felt that being a Fire Coordinator's Office didn't accurately reflect the functions of the Department. The Department provides services to the entire emergency response community and it is the point of contact that initiates an emergency response. By far the heaviest workload of the Department is the processing and handling of emergency calls and the coordination of services. There are 18 fire departments, 7 police agencies, 5 ambulances services (4 of which are attached to fire departments), that are directly dispatched by the Department. Last year there were approximately 15,000 police-related calls and 15,000 fire and EMS-related calls that were handled by the Department and spread amongst those 20 agencies. The phone system handled 130,000 calls and additionally monitored over 50,000 alarms that arrived by means other than the telephone. There are hundreds of alarms that come into the Dispatch Center from telephone callers, radio system transmitters, and the Personal Emergency Response alarms that are placed in the homes of senior citizens and disabled persons.

From a facilities standpoint, the Department's offices are located on Brown Road and the Dispatch Center is currently located on Green Street at Central Fire Station located in the City of Ithaca. Mr. Shurtleff stated backup capabilities have existed at the Public Safety Building for several years. There are 14 sites where they transmit the radio system from and those sites are tied to the microwave backbone.

There are 300 Personal Emergency Response units that are built, programmed, tested, and repaired by the Department. Those units result in approximately 500 calls per year.

Mr. Shurtleff spoke of the County's communication network and stated there is County radio equipment in 110 fire and EMS units throughout the County and equipment that is installed and maintained in another 20 to 80 police units. The Department provides support services for radio installation and repair to the County Highway, Health, Airport, and Probation Departments. In recent years the Department has done a significant amount of work in the area of emergency planning. Efforts were first focussed at Y2K and reinforced later through the events of September 11. An Emergency

Planning Committee was created in 2000, and work began on a Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. This Plan is built on functional annexes that assign specific responsibilities to different providers. Mr. Shurtleff said the Department has received grant funds from the State Emergency management Office and the Plan should be complete by the end of 2003 and accepted by the State. There are also a number of other plans that incorporate that Plan, including the Fire and Mutual Aid Plan, and County Hazardous Materials Response Plan.

Another component of the Department's overall work is public education and informing the public how to access the system. The Tompkins County Department of Emergency Response coordinates the State fire training program for 18+ agencies and also coordinates training through SEMO (State Emergency Management Office) program and FEMO (Federal Emergency Management Office). A partnership exists with Tompkins Cortland Community College to provide all levels of training to emergency medical technicians up to the paramedic level.

Mr. Shurtleff explained the County's relationship to the fire training center in downtown Ithaca. He said the County has had a City training facility for several years and they have begun a number of upgrades for the last few years. The Joint Operations Committee was formed in 1997, and includes a partnership with the City for maintenance of the facility and in return the City provides training for all responders in the County.

The 911 system includes switching equipment that receives the Enhanced 911 calls that come into the Dispatch Center and provides the Center with callbacks; it also brings up the address where the call was originated. Mr. Shurtleff said that switch ties into the County's database and now needs to be upgraded to accommodate cellular phone calls; this is being incorporated into the Scope of Work for Motorola. The State Board is developing a strategy for training requirements for local governments. As of last January, the State created a 911 Board and Mr. Shurtleff is one of the Governor's appointments to that Board. That Board is developing standards for training requirements for local governments and has been put in charge of the pool of wireless surcharge monies that are becoming available for reimbursement to counties to help them invest in technology for operations. These monies will assist counties in implementing phase one and two of wireless information systems.

Staffing at the Department of Emergency Response includes 20 full-time employees, six part-time employees; 14 of those are full-time dispatchers, one employee who oversees the Dispatcher Center, one full-time employee who performs the radio installation work, one employee who oversees computer networks, a full-time Data Clerk, a full-time Administrative Assistant, and one full-time Director.

County's Response to Blackout

Mr. Shurtleff reported on the County's response to the recent blackout situation. He said when the situation began it was quickly apparent that the problem existed well-beyond Tompkins County. His first priority was to make sure the County's emergency systems were operational. Overall, the radio system stayed on-line and worked as it was supposed to. The Dispatch Center received approximately 350 to 400 calls in addition to the normal traffic; this was approximately double the normal amount of calls received at that time of day. Mr. Shurtleff said a group of emergency response leaders from the County met at a designated location and coordinated efforts. A major effort that took place was traffic control because many traffic lights in the City of Ithaca were not working. Mr. Shurtleff concluded that the public was very calm and that there were no major incidents in the County as a result of the blackout.

There was a brief discussion about public information with a comment being made that only one radio station had a generator and stayed on the air. Mr. Shurtleff said work is underway on a number of fronts to improve the public information emergency alert process. The City received a grant for the

National Weather Service transmitter which has been installed and there is a generator that is being placed at that site as well. There are also efforts taking place to work with Time Warner Cable to make sure the cable stays on with local capability to scroll messages across the screen. A system is also being set up through the State Emergency Management Office which would give the local Emergency Management Office the capability to perform emergency broadcasting over a network. A transmitter would be given that would radiate at a certain frequency and trip all local radio system signals. Mr. Shurtleff said it has always been a challenge to find ways to get information out to the public and they will continue to work on this.

A question was raised as to whether the County has a designated radio station to deliver emergency information. In the past, WVBR was designated; however, they no longer have the resources to accept this responsibility. There is another local radio station, WICB, that will soon have resources to accept this responsibility and although the County is not required to designate one particular station, it would be wise to publicize which station the public should tune to in emergency situations. It was noted that the FCC does not require stations to have back-up power.

There was a brief discussion by the Committee about which radio stations, fire departments, and other operations throughout the County have generators. Mr. Raffee spoke of the blackout situation and presented the following issues that surround generators:

1. Maintenance of the system;
2. Operational;
3. Fuel and where to obtain it in crisis situation; and
4. Activation of system

He expressed concern for vulnerable populations and stated it is critical that leaders from emergency response agencies meet from time-to-time and get to know, train, and trust one another. He also stated people on survival machines need to be reminded to make sure they are included on critical care lists so that emergency personnel can check on them. There also needs to be an established set of protocols so that each agency clearly knows the steps that need to be taken. Mr. Raffee said the County should be proud of its responders and all of the people who came out to help during the blackout.

**RESOLUTION NO. AUTHORIZATION TO INCREASE BACKGROUND CHECK FEES -
TOMPKINS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

MOVED by Mr. Totman, seconded by Ms. McBean. Mr. Whicher said he feels the \$10 fee is too low. The Sheriff will oversee this fee during the next year to see what the actual cost is to the Department to conduct these checks. If warranted, the Committee will be presented with a greater fee next year. A voice vote resulted as follows: Ayes - 5, Noes - 0. MOTION CARRIED.

WHEREAS, the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office provides a public service in the form of background criminal and incident records checks for employers, agencies, and individuals, and

WHEREAS, the Records Division on average completes 2,000 requests per year, and

WHEREAS, the \$5.00 fee for the service that is charged to other than not-for-profit agencies has not increased in over ten (10) years, and

WHEREAS, the current cost of conducting the research exceeds the fee currently charged, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, on recommendation of the Public Safety and Budget and Capital Committees, That the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office Records Division fee be increased to \$10.00 per individual request, effective immediately.

SEQR ACTION: TYPE II-20

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Grant Application - Equipment

The Committee granted the Sheriff permission to apply for a grant to support an ongoing project and to purchase equipment for the mobile command bus.

Budget Review Schedule

The Committee established the following schedule for budget reviews:

September 4	2:00-4:30 (regular meeting and budget reviews - District Attorney and Assigned Counsel)
September 12	10:00-12:00 (budget reviews - Sheriff and EMS)
September 17	10:00-1:00 (budget reviews - Probation)

All departments will be asked to contact Ms. Blanchard to set up a meeting prior to the review.

Approval of Minutes of July 3, 2003

It was MOVED by Mr. Totman, seconded by Ms. Herrera, and unanimously adopted by voice vote, to approve the minutes of July 3, 2003 with the changes submitted by Ms. Robertson. MINUTES APPROVED. Ms. Robertson said she has proposed changes to the June 19 minutes. These minutes were withdrawn from the agenda and will be included in the next agenda along with Ms. Robertson's suggested changes.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

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Respectfully submitted by Michelle Pottorff, Tompkins County Legislature Office