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October 15, 2015

To members of the EMS and fire community:

Bucks and Montgomery Counties continue to work both independently and collectively on public safety radio system improvement projects. Individually, each county is working diligently to address the operational needs of their resident first responders. Collectively, we continue to maintain a goal of cross-county interoperability between the two radio systems.

The radio system improvement projects maintain different design requirements and therefore, do not share common timelines. Bucks County is in the process of completing system coverage certification and planning a transition to their new system in the coming weeks. Montgomery County is completing the site acquisition phase and, although just as vital to the project success, suggests a transition timeline of approximately twelve (12) months. Even with such diverse project timelines, there is much discussion about future progress toward a practically viable interoperable radio solution.

Over the past few months, a number of regional meetings have been conducted among the southeast PA region; involving participants from Bucks and Montgomery Counties, in addition to Berks and Chester Counties. These meetings have been very productive and have helped to identify a number of issues that need to be resolved in order to pursue an interoperable system. A few significant discussion points we are working through follow:

- **System Keys:** Similar to a car, the system key provides full access to a radio system. For very good reasons, a system key is held under tight security and limited access. Because of a long-standing working relationship, the county agencies have agreed to share system key access. The process to allow this system sharing, while maintaining a high level of security, is currently under way.
- **Phase I/Phase II:** As with any technology, radio systems are available in different evolutions to allow customization based on an agency's needs and capabilities. EMS and fire agencies in Bucks County will immediately transition to a Phase II radio system this year. Montgomery County will initially transition EMS and fire agencies to a Phase I system; allowing these agencies to utilize radios that are currently in service but not capable of a Phase II transition. Since Phase

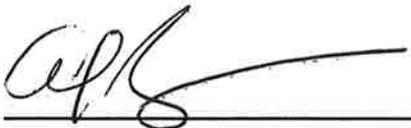
I radios cannot be programmed with Phase II data, the options for interoperable talk groups are very limited until both systems are Phase II compliant.

- **Programming Template Writing/Maintenance:** To ensure that a uniform and transferrable system is implemented, we will be coordinating a consistent and organized process of building radio programming templates, and maintaining clear lines of responsibility. Simply put, radios utilized primarily on the Bucks County system will be the responsibility of Bucks County, and radios utilized primarily on the Montgomery County system will be the responsibility of Montgomery County – regardless of what talk group is being requested.
- **Operational Parameters:** Parameters established regarding allowable sharing of law enforcement talk groups differ by county. Therefore, we will need to create a solution that is in compliance with all set standards.

In the interim period, as we continue to work toward solutions on these points and several others, Bucks and Montgomery are committed to establishing temporary solutions that will begin a movement toward a long-term interoperable outcome. First, each county has provided authorization for the other to begin programming the fire ground frequencies in current agency radios. A process for agencies along the county border to request radio programming will be available soon. Second, we will be leveraging a microwave system established in southeast Pennsylvania to create system-to-system patches for agencies working jointly on an incident. A widely available operational talk group will be established on both the Bucks County and Montgomery County radio system as the “patch” to the other county. If, for example, Huntingdon Valley Fire Company is dispatched to assist Southampton Fire Company, the Montgomery County agency will switch to Event 7 which will be patched to the Central Band talk group in Bucks County. This will allow for direct communication between two units prior to their arrival at the incident scene.

Neither of these short-term solutions should be perceived as a contentment regarding the current disparities on neighboring radio systems. The leadership teams of Bucks County and Montgomery County continue to press forward together on long-term resolutions that are both operationally beneficial and technically attainable.

United in community service,



Audrey R. Kenny
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